

WHITEHEAD ON MORAL VALUE AND ETHICAL CODES

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS:

To show that Whitehead's metaphysics offers a means of understanding the human situation and the all-important role of moral decision. Chapter 1 is an attempt to present his view of things, an essential feature of which is his use of the word "aesthetic" in the widest sense, to indicate experience in general. Chapter 2 sets out the place of value in the scheme and how it may be analysed and assessed, with particular reference to moral value. Chapter 3 discusses ethical codes and their application, and presents Whitehead's insistence that codes for use in a living process cannot be rigid, but do, nevertheless, express ultimate principles.

PREFACE

The subject of morals is of great concern today. There are some who claim that standards are absolute and eternal and mean exactly what they say. Others go to the other extreme and claim that it does not matter what you do.

The absolutists overlook the dynamism of the world. Their view cannot accommodate the change that is a fact of human experience. Neither does it take into account the uniqueness of each individual human situation.

The permissive people conclude that without that outside reference in Heaven man is free to do what he likes. He is just an accidental happening in the universe, anyway, and of little significance.

The controversy leads to despair. Those who incline to the first view are appalled at the actions of the other group. They fear that violence and destruction, even the annihilation of all life, may be the result. On the other hand, the people who believe that man lives in an uncaring universe develop the feeling that life has no meaning or purpose.

Whitehead's philosophy provides a way of integrating the opposing views. It allows for the novelty that is a feature of the process of life; and it indicates that ethical codes are relevant to time and place and need interpreting in individual instances. At the same time it shows that the individual instances are parts of the one

system of existence, and their values contribute to the experience of the whole vast community. Because the moral obligation is to increase, not lessen, the intensity of satisfaction of all the entities, the guiding principles have an ultimate persuasion, God's aim for the process.

This thesis is offered as a contribution to the discussion.

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WHITEHEAD'S SPECULATIVE PHILOSOPHY

Section 1. Its Aesthetic Basis

If we can find a way to visualize the entire situation so that we can grasp our interrelationships with other people and with the rest of our environment, which extends to the totality of existence, we will be better able to understand our subject. I think that we can find the required total view in Whitehead's Philosophy of Organism. He called it a "Speculative Philosophy", "the endeavour to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted".¹ This is a large order, and the resulting philosophy is not easy to grasp. Whitehead's terms and the concepts they represent become clearer as they are used and interrelated.

Life is exceedingly complex and bewildering. It stretches infinitely behind and before, and in all directions around; and every part is inextricably linked with all. Life is never still; it pulses, and flashes, and quivers, in every part. The psychedelic form of art represents this, with its flashing glimpses of bits of people and things, accompanied by noises and lights and tactile impressions of varying intensity and duration which assail the spectator from all directions and in which his mind tries frantically, and often vainly,

¹PR, p.4. (For key to abbreviations see pp. 54-55).

to find some thread of structure that will provide a clue to meaning. In a similar fashion the philosopher tries to find some order in the welter of life. Traditional Western philosophers have developed systems that are useful but which give limited, rather static, views, and are by no means completely satisfying. Whitehead's philosophy takes account of the living, pulsing, inter-involved, character of existence that could not be so well accommodated by the others. This does not mean that their work is thrown aside. It seems to me that Whitehead's contribution could not be made until the intensive, limited, views had been examined. Then, these are pushed to the background - but still kept in mind - and Whitehead provides a comprehensive view within which all aspects of experience can be fitted. The result is an extremely difficult philosophy that keeps unfolding before one who seeks to understand it.

He founds his system on the actual, aesthetic, human experience, which is really all we have as a basis for any investigation. This use of the word "aesthetic" requires some identification. Usually it is reserved for reference to the experience of profound depths of reality that can be expressed only through the Fine Arts - music, poetry, painting, etc. Whitehead uses it almost always in the very widest sense to include all experience, of which the Fine Arts would provide, perhaps, the most sophisticated kind. He writes of Beauty and defines it as "the internal conformation of the various items of experience with each other, for the production of maximum effectiveness"; and he adds: "The teleology of the Universe is directed to the pro-

duction of Beauty".¹ Again: "The basis of experience is emotional. Stated more generally, the basic fact is the rise of an effective tone originating from things whose relevance is given".² It is to this he refers when he uses the words "aesthetic", "feeling", and "intuition"; and it is a unity of fundamental feeling of which the experiencer is the centre. "Feelings are variously specialized operations, effecting a transition into subjectivity".³ For purposes of study, divisions into physical, mental, and spiritual are made, and sometimes the basic oneness is forgotten. For instance, Whitehead repudiates the dualism of Descartes. As Elliott comments: "One never has knowledge or experience of any kind that is wholly confined to either side of such a dichotomy".⁴ Every situation arises from "the vague compulsions and derivations which form the main stuff of experience".⁵

Lowe comments: 'One implication of his [Whitehead's] work is that instead of separating ethics and aesthetics we should bring them together in such notions as "harmony", "feeling", "adventure", and, of course, "value". But these terms are first aesthetic terms; they are moral terms in a derivative sense'.⁶

Charles Malik writes that, of course, Whitehead's ethics flows from his metaphysics, because

¹AI, p. 264.

²Ibid., p. 178.

³PR, p. 65.

⁴R. F. Elliott, Jr., M.A. Thesis, 59.

⁵AI, p. 227.

⁶Victor Lowe, Understanding Whitehead (Baltimore, 1966), p. 111.

everything in the end depends upon your attitude towards being, towards reality. This reality, to Professor Whitehead, is process, an esthetic / sic / grasping together of many concrete elements in a single unity. Therefore ethics is derivative from esthetics and also from sociology. For since the many concrete elements grasped by you include, among other things, your society, your final worth can not be independent of your social relationships. The laws of ethics, therefore, are ultimately socio-esthetic laws, namely, laws of balance and compatibility and harmony. Thus the good is the highest attainable good under the circumstances. And by "highest" is meant strength and harmony and beauty of feeling.¹

Malik comments that he is unable to follow Whitehead "when he subordinates ethics to esthetics". He writes: "The ethical situation is original and ultimate, even if it should upset the esthetic balance. Far from morality being a function of beauty, beauty itself is unseemly unless it is good".² Here Malik is giving "aesthetic" a limited meaning which is not Whitehead's use of the word. The criticism is answered in the section on Truth and Beauty in AI (particularly 266f), as outlined in Chapter Two of this thesis (pp. 19-20).

Whitehead writes that he accepts the "axiom of empiricism" that "all knowledge is derived from, and verified by, direct intuitive observation".³ But he goes on to add something new to the old "unquestioned" doctrines of the empiricists. Observation is accomplished not by perception, through the sense-organs, of clear "base sensa", but by an active selection from the vast otherness within which the individual finds himself. Our experience of life consists of a "flux

¹Charles Malik, "An Appreciation of Professor Whitehead", Journal of Philosophy. XLV (1948), 578-579; my italics.

²Ibid., 579-580.

³AI, p. 179.

of perceptions, sensations, and emotions". It is usually forgotten how important are the "more inchoate sensible feelings".¹

"The deliverances of clear and distinct consciousness require criticism by reference to elements in experience which are neither clear nor distinct. On the contrary, they are dim, massive, and important".² Again Whitehead writes of "a force of already harmonized feelings which no surface show of sensa can produce. It is not a question of intellectual interpretation. There is a real conflation of fundamental feeling".³ The human aesthetic experience of being in the world is very complex and made up of unconscious as well as conscious feelings.

Section 2. The Process and the Entities that Constitute It

Whitehead says that his Philosophy develops elements of the philosophic thinking of the period from Descartes to Hume (especially the later works of Locke, Cf. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Bk. IV, Ch. VI, Sect. 11) that were neglected by "subsequent systematizers".⁴ Its roots go deeper, of course, to Plato and Aristotle, and even back beyond the Greek Heraclitus who wrote about the continuous flux of all things. Whitehead says: "That 'all things flow' is the first vague generalization which the unsystematized, barely analysed, intuition of men has produced".⁵ It is "one ultimate generalization

¹V. Lowe, Op. Cit., p. 184.

²AI, p. 269.

³Ibid., p. 281.

⁴PR, p. v.

⁵Ibid., p. 317.

around which we must weave our philosophical system".¹ Key concepts had been suggested by other, more contemporary philosophers, e.g. William James and Bergson.

Whitehead sees existence as a vast "creative advance", a never-ceasing, infinitely-complex, active process, pulsing in every part from innumerable centres of activity, all intrinsically entwined. Each pulse has its own individual inheritance from the past and its own individual potentialities. It is where it is in time and space, and it is the kind it is; but, as it achieves its bit of experience, it is something completely new in existence, a new actual fact, a fact that can never be different.

He calls these pulses of creativity "actual entities" or "actual occasions", and they "are the final real things of which the world is made up".² Some actual entities are microcosmic. Each of them is an activity of becoming and perishes as it becomes. It does not endure through time. The objects of our world are what Whitehead calls "societies" or "nexus" (singular "nexus") of actual entities. A nexus is any particular fact of togetherness among actual entities, the result of their prehensions of each other. Stones, trees, houses, animals, people, etc., are four-dimensional nexus made up of generations of actual entities reproducing almost the same patterns. The "enduring objects" that we know, are these strands of inheritance. The nexus which is a stone is an unspecialized society made up of similar actual

¹Loc. cit.

²Ibid., p. 27.

entities, and the nexus which is a human being is a complex structured society made up of many different kinds of subsidiary societies.

It is a little confusing at first that Whitehead uses the term "actual entity" to mean a centre of experience no matter how complex it is, but one comes to realize that this is appropriate. He writes:

"'Actual entities' - also termed 'actual occasions' - are the final real things of which the world is made up. There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real. They differ among themselves: God is an actual entity, and so is the most trivial puff of existence in far-off empty space . . . and these actual entities are drops of experience [William James' term], complex and interdependent".¹

This kind of entity can be called a "subject" or "self",² and Whitehead uses personal experience as the model for elucidating the experience of all.

He writes: "I find myself as essentially a unity of emotions" ³ I am a continuation of the antecedent world and I have my environment active in my nature. I react with the data from my environment, that is, using Whitehead's term, I "prehend" the world in which I find myself, so as to achieve a feeling of satisfaction according to some subjective feeling of rightness. Thus, I become what I am at that instant. I create myself. Every actual entity, according to its own nature, does the same thing.

In this activity new actual entities emerge. The world is continually being created. Whitehead writes: "The creative process

¹ Ibid., pp. 27-28.

² Ibid., pp. 337f.

³ MT. p. 228.

is rhythmic: it swings from the publicity of many things to the individual privacy; and it swings back from the private individual to the publicity of the objectified individual".¹

An actual entity has a physical pole and a mental pole. If an actual entity prehends another actual entity, it is physical prehension; if it prehends an eternal object (a pure potential), it is conceptual prehension. Physical prehensions make up the physical pole and conceptual prehensions make up the mental pole. Whitehead says that "Consciousness is not necessarily involved in the subjective forms of either type of prehension".² From a commonsense view it is difficult to find a conceptual pole in some actual entities, e.g. a stone, but, in Whitehead's metaphysics, this pole functions in such an entity in maintaining sameness of pattern by its prehensions of its past. In more complex entities more complex features allow for the introduction of novelty.

The materials prehended are called "data" or "potentialities". They are presented to be accepted or rejected by the actual entity as it builds itself up in the process called "concrecence",³ until "satisfaction" has been reached.⁴ Whitehead writes: "Thus the 'production of novel togetherness' is the ultimate notion embodied in the term 'concrecence'".⁵ The actual process becomes a little easier to identify when we remember that Whitehead uses the word "feelings" to

¹PR, p. 229.

²Ibid., p. 35.

³Ibid., 38, 321.

⁴Ibid., 38, 129.

⁵Ibid., 32.

indicate positive prehensions.¹ He writes:

The word 'object' thus means an entity which is a potentiality for being a component in feeling; and the word 'subject' means the entity constituted by the process of feeling, and including this process. The feeler is the unity emergent from its own feelings; and feelings are the details of the process intermediary between this unity and its many data. The data are the potentials for feeling; that is to say, they are objects. The process is the elimination of indeterminateness of feeling from the unity of one subjective experience".²

The elimination of indeterminateness of feeling, the attainment of satisfaction, depends on the subjective aim of the actual entity.

Its prehensions are governed by this aim and, accordingly, involve "emotion, and purpose, and valuation, and causation".³

The degree of control that an actual entity can exercise over the creation of itself depends on the mental pole. Where this is weak or apparently non-existent, as at the inorganic level, the entity, in process of becoming, merely receives and synthesizes as its predecessor has done. Such entities become ". . . vehicles for receiving, for storing in a napkin, and for restoring without loss or gain".⁴ For example, the actual entities that constitute a stone seem to remain the same for thousands of years, each entity merely duplicating its predecessor. Living organisms, on the contrary, exercise some degree of direction, the degree depending on the ability to envisage possibilities. Of course, the physical and mental poles are not the same as the traditional matter-mind duality, for they are dynamically related in the one entity.

¹Ibid., 35, 337.

²Ibid., 136.

³Ibid., 28.

⁴Ibid., p. 269.

The human entity, which is the concern of this thesis, is a complex, structured society made up of inorganic nexus (the area of study for "Physical Physiology") and entirely living nexus (the area of study for "Psychological Physiology"). For present purposes we do not need to follow Whitehead in his analysis of this situation¹ in which millions upon millions of actual occasions are interacting, receiving impulses, dealing with them according to subjective aim, achieving concrescence, and thus becoming data to be dealt with, in turn, by the subsequent actual entities in their own personal routes as well as in their environment. The presiding occasion (the human mind) "is the final node, or intersection, of a complex structure of many enduring objects".² The human mind is, thus, seen to be part of a "delicate organization" from which, and to which, influences flow. He ends this chapter thus: "But central personal dominance is only partial, and in pathological cases is apt to vanish".³ Whitehead's analysis makes us realize that the whole person, not just the rational element, is involved in directing the activity. Again he writes: "Men are driven by their thoughts as well as by the molecules in their bodies, by intelligence and by senseless forces. . . . Mankind is the animal at the head of the Primates, and cannot escape habits of mind which cling closely to habits of body".⁴ This human situation forms a background for any discussion of moral values and codes.

¹Ibid., p. 155f.

²Ibid., pp. 166-167.

³Ibid., p. 167.

⁴AI, p. 53.

Section 3. The Superjective Aspect

An important point for this thesis is that the entity that is a subject prehending its environment, on reaching its satisfaction of concrecence becomes immediately an object to be prehended by others. Thus, an actual entity is not only "a subject presiding over its own immediacy of becoming" but, also, "a superject which is the atomic creature exercising its function of objective immortality".¹ This superjective aspect introduces the future into the present concrecing activity as the actual entity anticipates the probable result in the future and acts accordingly. We can see this superjective feature in the action of a plant that gropes toward the light from its position on a shaded shelf, in the insect trap of the pitcher-plant, in the animal's forage for food, in our own purposive actions; and we can extend our insight to cover the concrecing of all actual entities, by analogy, according to their particular natures.

Thus, all the creative activity going on constantly might be seen as purposive, but the idea of morality cannot always be applied to it. If the wind causes a tree to fall and kill a child we do not blame the wind and the tree in the same way we would blame a man who brought about the same result. Only when the conceptual pole is capable of functioning deliberately, and consciously, does morality enter into the situation.

Section 4. God

Whereas Kant saw the necessity for God in the moral order, Whitehead's metaphysics requires an ordering entity for the whole

¹PR, p. 71.

experience of the actual world, moral order being merely a certain aspect of the general order. God is omnipresent in three ways (another Trinity): he is the foundation of all order and, thus, of all actuality, because without order in nature there would be no actual world; he is the lure leading to novelty, by means of which there is living advance; and he is the unity of all the resulting actualities.

Like all actual entities he has two natures or poles. In his "primordial nature" he includes all possible conceptual feelings "including among their data all eternal objects".¹ He is "the unlimited conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of potentiality".² The eternal objects are arranged in order relevant to all realizable conditions. From this potentiality arises God's superjective function in the scheme of things. He acts as a lure for every concreting actual entity. God's consequent nature, or physical pole, is the result of his prehensions of all the other actual entities. ". . . . he is not before all creation, but with all creation".³

Primordially God provides the possibilities for the individual actual entity; and these individual possibilities are situated in graded cross-reference to the possibilities for all else. The point for our topic is that no individual entity in the universe ever acts in isolation. This means: "The self-sufficing independent man, with his peculiar property which concerns no one else, is a concept without any validity for modern civilization".⁴ There are as many possible

¹Ibid., p. 134.

²Ibid., p. 521.

³Loc. cit.

⁴AI, p. 34.

goods as there are individual actual entities. Each has its own God-given possibilities graded in reference to some ideal; but all are held in the ordered unity of God's primordial nature. The outcome is the physical unity of civilization.

The fact that there is a unique individuality for each actual entity sheds a little light on the difficulties men have experienced because of rigid moral codes. Rigid conformity is not a characteristic of the living universe. Values are as many as the actualities; but the individual values are not unlimited, for each is related to all the others. This does not mean only all the other human entities (a humanistic view), for it includes all the entities of the environment, as the developing pollution problem is forcing us to realize. There is even more than this to be considered. The mind in its search for understanding finds always mystery that lures but seems to be unfathomable. Human life is restricted to a minute portion of the universe, but human instinct, reinforced by reason, and by the testimony of experience, relates this life to something that abides, that is always there, the reality that lies behind and within all things.

From God as primordial, the mental pole, come all the possibilities for order in the world. God as superjective, lures the creating entities. God as consequent, the physical pole, is the receiver of the objectifications of all the other actual entities of the world. God is interwoven with the world: he provides all the possibilities for the world, provides motivation for each centre of activity, and receives all the actualities.

He does not create the world, he saves it: or, more accurately, he is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness.¹

He does this by "the patient operation of the over-powering rationality of his conceptual harmonization".²

The selectiveness of individual experience is moral so far as it conforms to the balance of importance disclosed in the rational vision; and conversely the conversion of the intellectual insight into an emotional force corrects the sensitive experience in the direction of morality. The correction is in proportion to the rationality of the insight.³

It might be rewarding to examine some of the differing views men have had about what is rational, but for our purpose it is enough to realize that the meaning varies with human experience and that we can expect to find no simple, universal agreement. The meaning evolves as understanding develops.

Section 5. Human Obligation

In this thesis we are interested in how the actual entity that is a human organism achieves its concrescence. This complex, structured society of actual occasions is ruled by a "presiding occasion"⁴ produced by the coordination of the brain. At the first stage of a concrescence, influences stream in from the world around. The numberless physical actual entities and nexus duplicate closely their immediate predecessors, but the ruling psychical society can imagine alternatives andprehend positively (grasp as a component of itself) or negatively (reject as a

¹Pr, p. 526.

²Loc. cit.

³Ibid., pp. 22-23.

⁴Ibid., p. 166.

component of itself) according to wish. From all its prehensions the human organism achieves its satisfaction, completing its concrescence and becoming an everlasting, stubborn, fact in the universe, a datum.

Because of the interrelatedness of actual entities, the human entity has become immediately an object of which other entities must take account. It has, in Whitehead's words, "'objective immortality' whereby what is divested of its own living immediacy becomes a real component in other living immediacies of becoming".¹ It is forever there. It can never be anything different. The process cannot be reversed, and what follows in that process must inescapably take account of it. "The stubborn reality of the absolute self-attainment of each individual is bound up with a relativity which it issues from and issues into".² An actual entity is not only a living subject creating its own moment of existence, it is also an everlasting object available for prehension by future actual entities. What they can become depends on what it has become.

The point for this thesis is that it always matters what you do. Inescapably you are creating yourself and the environment with which your future self and the others must interact. That environment includes all else that exists; it stretches on all sides in space and time, from adjacent entities that touch you to those that are dimly-sensed or unknown in the past and in the future that stretches on forever. An individual decision and action sets in motion a ripple

¹Ibid., p. ix.

²AI, p. 290.

that spreads in all directions, and the whole seething complex of existence quivers and changes. This is well-expressed by modern physics "in terms of energy, activity, and the vibratory differentiations of space-time. Any local agitation shakes the whole universe. The distant effects are minute, but they are there".¹

¹MT, p. 188.

II

THEORY OF VALUE

Section 1. The Essential Nature of Value

Whitehead has not given a detailed examination of moral value in itself, but what he has written about value in general provides a way through which we can focus on our subject. The discussion is based, as is his whole philosophical scheme, on the fundamental aesthetic human experience, discussed in the previous chapter. It is the feeling of being-in-the-world, of which the existentialists speak, and it involves evaluation and choice in every aspect. To feel anything, to think about anything, to know anything, to be aware of anything in any way, requires that certain features take, or are given, more importance, that is, a higher place on a scale of value, and thus rise out of the amorphous environment. This is the experience of the lowliest actual entity as it recognizes and reacts with a certain other "puff of existence" while by-passing all else; and this, in appropriate manner, is the experience of each and every occasion in the process.

The very act of becoming actual is the attainment of value. Every actual entity on achieving concrescence attains its final value and, at the same time, becomes a condition for value for what follows in the process.

But each occasion, in its character of being a finished creature, is a value of some definite specific sort. Thus a mind must be a route whose various occasions exhibit some community of type of value. Similarly a bit of matter -

or an electron - must be a route whose various occasions exhibit some community of type of value.¹

Each occasion becomes itself as it achieves a satisfying concrecence from the strands of prehension (feelings) that have importance for it; and it immediately becomes available for prehension by subsequent occasions. Evaluation is basic in the process.

We shall never elaborate an explanatory metaphysics unless we abolish this notion of valueless, vacuous existence. Vacuity is the character of an abstraction Its [an actuality's] very existence is the presentation of its many components to itself, for the sake of its own ends An actuality . . . can be analysed as a process of feeling its own components. . . . each actuality is an occasion of experience, the outcome of its own purposes.

Moreover, "The generic aim of process is the attainment of importance",³ that is to say, of increase of value. Whitehead says that this ultimate value has been broken up into "guardianship of mores, or of rules of thought, or of mystic sentiment, or of aesthetic enjoyment",⁴ but each of these is only part of the unity of purpose of "the process of nature". The point for this thesis is that "guardianship of mores" cannot be blown up to such proportions that it obscures or puts limits on the ultimate aim. Indeed, sometimes moral considerations may not be relevant. For example, Whitehead relates how he attended a performance of the opera Carmen with two children, and how he had difficulty in answering their questions about the moral behaviour of the smugglers and the heroine. He remarks: "But the retreat of morals in the presence of music, and of dancing, and the general gaiety

¹RM, pp. 105-106.

²FR, p. 25.

³MT, p. 16.

⁴Loc. cit.

of the theatre, is a fact very interesting to philosophers and very puzzling to the official censors".¹

Beside this quotation we should place another: "The charge of immorality is not refuted by pointing to the perfection of art".² Art has to do with appearance and its aims are twofold: Beauty in that Appearance, and Truth in its portrayal of Reality (I here copy Whitehead's use of capitals). There can be Beauty without portrayal of Reality. The arrangement of the "qualitative objects" that make up the Appearance can be such that "the whole heightens the feelings for the parts, and the parts heighten the feelings for the whole, and for each other"³ and the experience is beautiful but not necessarily expressive of Truth about the real world. This is Beauty in Appearance. Supreme Beauty is attained only when the Appearance bears a truth-relation to Reality. In such case it expresses Truth that "lies beyond the dictionary meanings of words".⁴

Section 2. Moral Value

Morality is concerned not with appearance but with the constitution of Reality. "Good and evil lie in depths and distances below and beyond appearance. They solely concern inter-relations within the real world".⁵ Some instance of the perfection of art may possibly lessen the good in the larger view and can even be a positive evil. Whitehead's analysis of the situation has relevance at the present time

¹Ibid., p. 18.

²AI, p. 268.

³Ibid., p. 267.

⁴Ibid., p. 266.

⁵Ibid., p. 267.

when, to use his words, "lovers of art who are most insistent on the doctrine of 'art for art's sake' are apt to be indignant at the banning of art for the sake of other interests".¹ The perfection of art must give place to the unity of purpose of the whole process.

"Thus God's purpose in the creative advance is the evocation of intensities".² What is valuable or "good" is heightened experience of the whole process, which is, of course, the sum of the experience of all the entities. The proper aim of each concrescence is to attain the most intense satisfaction possible to it, which is another way of saying "its greatest intrinsic value". Morality is the maximizing of all experience, that of the human self and of other human beings and, indeed, of all the actual occasions in the whole process.

We recall (from pages 7-8) that an individual, personal occasion is a "unity of emotions" or "subjective reactions to the environment as active in my nature".³ From the countless supply of possibilities the new occasion chooses to preserve as many qualities as possible with as much intensity of enjoyment as possible, and the anticipation of the result brings the future into the constitution of the present. Thus the concrescing occasion is concerned beyond itself, indeed with the universe past and present, as it weaves all the chosen strands into its own nature. Morality has to do with preserving as many values as possible and with introducing new structures to enhance experience.

¹Ibid., pp. 267-268.

²PR, p. 161.

³MT, p. 228.

God in his primordial nature provides all the conceptual possibilities arranged in "a unified structure of possible good in any situation".¹ This is the source of the absolute obligation that, as Kant said, is implied in human freedom. There is an obligation to become acquainted with as many as possible of the strands of the concrete situation and to allow God's aim - "the actualization of the wider, more complete creative order of good"² - to be the guide in their unification into the maximum experience possible in that occasion.

Section 3. Analysis of the Degree of Value

Is there some way of analyzing such a situation with the hope of finding rules for guidance? Whitehead's analysis of the aesthetic experience produced by great painting shows principles of composition that may be applied to all value-experience.³ In the words of George Morgan, Jr.: "The individual beauty of that moment, its intrinsic worth, is ineffable, but something may be said about the qualities which make it beautiful".⁴ Whitehead writes:

The canons of art are merely the expression, in specialized forms, of the requisites for depth of experience. The principles of morality are allied to the canons of art, in that they also express, in another connection, the same requisites.⁵

¹D. D. Williams, "Moral Obligation in Process Philosophy", Alfred North Whitehead, ed. G. Kline, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963), p. 190.

²Loc. cit.

³AI, pp. 251f.

⁴George Morgan, Jr., "Whitehead's Theory of Value", International Journal of Ethics, XLVII (1937), 312-313.

⁵PR, p. 483.

The chief of these requisites is Harmony, which means that the components "do not inhibit one another in the final unity of feeling";¹ but Harmony alone may be trivial, for example, a perfectly spherical ball. There must also be Strength, which is the result of two factors which Whitehead calls "Massiveness" and "Intensity". Massiveness refers to "variety of detail with effective contrast".² Intensity is produced by the introduction of components that elicit the feeling of aesthetic destruction which Whitehead calls a "discordant feeling", but which serve to intensify the positive feelings or to introduce new possibilities of experience.

He explains that there are degrees of perfection, "that always there are imperfect occasions better than occasions which realize some given type of perfection".³ In fact, progress is possible only because of this situation. The social value of human freedom lies in its production of discords. Indefinite repetition of one type of perfection leads to staleness and the stifling of genius. Whitehead says that something of this sort happened to the Byzantine Empire and to the Chinese Empire. Mediterranean civilization escaped a similar fate by means of the incursions of the Barbarians and the rise of two religions, Christianity and Islam.⁴ New possibilities were introduced, new ideas of perfection to be progressively realized.

Adventure is essential because the process is made up of individual self-creating entities or occasions. Thus, in personal

¹George Morgan, Jr., Op. cit., 313.

²AI, p. 252.

³Ibid., p. 256.

⁴Ibid., p. 257.

organisms the conceptual pole introduces ideas that contrast with the realities inherited from the physical pole. Life can be thought of as "a bid for freedom". "We require both the advantages of social preservation, and the contrary stimulus of the heterogeneity derived from freedom".¹ "Contrast elicits depth, and only shallow experience is possible when there is a lack of patterned contrast".² The harmony needed to bring about a unity of experience out of all the factors is achieved by an adjustment of the relative intensities of incompatible feelings, or by the introduction of a novel system of feelings to link the incompatible ones.³ Evil is produced when a feeling of discord or destruction dispels the feeling of harmony.

The skill of the artist lies in his ability to introduce a wide range of variety and contrast, even discord, within the unifying harmony at which he aims. In moral value most, if not all, of these factors are already present as ingredients in the complex personalities and events that constitute the situation, and the skill lies in recognizing them and bringing them within a unifying harmony while allowing them the maximum individual intensity possible.

Section 4. The Moral Situation

When we speak of morals we have in mind a situation in which there is the pull of the individual's desires, the pull of the desires and rights of others, and the pull of the wider, general good.

The individual is important. Every actual entity has intrinsic

¹S, p. 65.

²PR, p. 175

³AI, p. 260.

value as a centre of creativity related to God's aim for it. "'Value' is the word I use for the intrinsic reality of an event".¹ By the individual creativity the world is being created, that actuality which God receives into his own consequent nature. As is necessary for an ordered world, instead of formless chaos, the individual must act within God's aim for it. For example, a human creature cannot step off a high window-sill as a bird can, not without devising some suitable appendages. "Thus an originality in the temporal world is conditioned, though not determined, by an initial subjective aim supplied by the ground of all order and of all originality".²

Life pulses through all the individual actual entities each of which clutches at its own "vivid immediacy",³ but all are part of the one process in which they are enmeshed and on which they are dependent. The experience of each is part of the experience of all, and the experience of all is part of the experience of each.

The importance of the individuals and the importance of the general good require harmonizing so that the maximum experience possible can be reached. This is not easy to work out, for it means neither an average level of attainment nor the good of the majority. Each strives for maximum experience within its own conditions and, because the whole community is constantly in process and adjustments are continually being made, the whole can attain higher experience from the vivid experience of a few or even of one.

¹SMW, p. 89.

²PR, p. 164.

³Ibid., p. 160.

On the same point Whitehead writes that "life is robbery" for all living entities require food which is taken in from the environment in the form of other entities. These may be of a lower type, or of a higher type which have to be broken down for use. "It is at this point that with life morals become acute. The robber requires justification".¹ Of course most of the robbery is more subtle than the taking of food but the principle is the same. The living entity must take from its environment in order to realize its potentialities. It must also support that environment for it is part of it and cannot exist without it. The relationship is a kind of interplay and, as Whitehead elaborates,² there is no exact boundary line between the entity and its environment. An organism is merely a centre of intense localized activity in the process of existence.

The human entity can base its action on a purely local, personal, selfish, horizon; but the more it can widen its viewpoint and understand the total situation, the more its action will approximate the increase in value-experience, "the evocation of intensities",³ which is God's ultimate purpose. Altruism is a necessity; all are in it together and all have potentialities to be realized as much as possible within the community. There are too, communities beyond community to which all belong, until, if one's vision would allow, there is community of the total ongoing process. In Whitehead's philosophy God in his consequent nature deals with that, and all he has to work with is what the entities of the process have created.

¹Loc. cit.

²MT, pp. 29f.

³PR, p. 161.

Value-experience constitutes "the essential nature of each pulsation of actuality. Everything has some value for itself, for others, and for the whole".¹ The conception of morals arises from the realization that "We have no right to deface the value-experience which is the very essence of the universe".² It follows then that to make a good moral decision the widest view should be taken. There are values in lines of inheritance of contemporary persons, things, and communities, to be considered, along with the effect the decision will have on the future of all. From the primordial nature of God come the ideals and possibilities which reason suggests. If the view can be farsighted enough the ideal for the whole process will enter into the decision.

Section 5. Some of the Perplexities

In such a complexity, in which it is not possible to know all the relevant factors, the moral decision can only be more or less good. The person making the decision cannot know even his own complicated makeup, let alone that of other persons, and cannot be entirely objective no matter how hard he tries. This is not a reason for despair; it is just a feature of the human situation to be remembered. The scientist, too, has to cope with it. Williams suggests: "When one who wields power submits his judgments to a wider criticism, he may be acknowledging that his own bias needs such a corrective".³ This is what the scientist does. There was a time when both scientist

¹MT, p. 151.

²Loc. cit.

³D. D. Williams, Op. cit., p. 193.

and moralist thought that a few simple rules would cover everything, but now both find that their materials are extremely complex and that each revelation only opens a window to more complexity.

It is hard enough to ferret out the factors on which the moral decision must be based, but a greater difficulty lies in the fact that everything exists in a state of ongoing process. There is always the risk that some actual entities, of high or low degree, will not act as they usually do. In a living situation this is unavoidable. Life entails the ability to break out in new directions. Whitehead writes: "Life refuses to be embalmed alive".¹

Also, entities belong to many different groups and sometimes as members of a group they do not act in the same fashion as they do individually or in other groups. This is as true of people as it is of oxygen. In some combinations both are lethal, though by itself oxygen supports life and so does the normal individual person. There are psychological factors that come into play within a personality depending on whether he is acting as a Canadian citizen, an English-speaking Canadian, a Protestant, a parent, a part of a mob, etc. Such factors can be recognized and compensated for to a degree, though, for instance, persons who have been part of a mob are unable to account for the power that gripped them and pulled them along in the group action. The ability to act together is necessary for human progress, even survival, but it has fearful possibilities.

When factors are affective only subconsciously morality is not a consideration, there being no way of deliberating on such ingredients.

¹PR, p. 515.

We can see that there is always risk in any decision, moral or otherwise. There is always the chance that evil may result from even the best decision, a thought that sometimes crosses my mind when I offer a ride in my car to help someone and then look ahead to the uncertainties of the flow of traffic. Faith of appropriate kind is a factor in all of life, though we usually reserve the word for man's religious confidence in the rightness of things and of his natural place therein. A "leap of faith" must be taken before anyone can do anything. This, in appropriate degree, is the experience of all actual entities in the process.

It is possible that the only choice may involve the doing of what is, from some viewpoints, a positive evil. Consider the use of guns by the police. The very fact that men are required to take training in how to shoot their fellowmen is evil, but to many people it is a necessity for the maintenance of a peaceful community. They forget that some policemen, for example, in England, manage well without guns. Indeed, there is evidence to show that the very presence of the policeman's gun incites opposition and his use of it may even start the riot, as some witnesses claim happened in the Chicago riot of 1968. In this situation no matter which viewpoint prevails, the other will see it as evil. This provides a challenge to reason to devise a resolution agreeable to both, perhaps by introducing "a novel system", as suggested above (p. 23), for example, a chemical bullet such as is used in studying wild animals, that will halt but not maim or kill, thus providing time for working out a constructive course of action. Another example of choosing between evils is provided by the

conflict of interests between individuals and community over the building of a high-rise apartment in a neighbourhood of single-family homes. It is hard to decide just where the rights of individuals take precedence over the needs of the community.

Section 6. Mathematics and Morals

Whitehead introduces interesting possibilities when he writes:

At first sight, the notion of any important connection between the multiplication table and the moral beauty of the Sermon on the Mount is fantastic. And yet, consideration of the development of human clarity of experience from its foundation of confused animal satisfactions discloses mathematical understanding as the primary example of insight into the nature of the Good.¹

In "Mathematics and the Good" he reminds us of Plato's lecture on the topic and elucidates further. An actual entity is made up of prehensions which it has integrated according to its own pattern. ". . . activity means the origination of patterns of assemblage, and mathematics is the study of pattern".² This is the "clue which relates mathematics to the study of the good, and the study of the bad".³

Whitehead notes the great change in the understanding of mathematics, in which he himself played a significant part, and of which everyone is becoming aware as our technological society develops. He notes "an immense extension of algebra" and the transformation of mathematics "into the intellectual analysis of types of pattern".⁴

¹MT, p. 104.

²SP, p. 114.

³Loc. cit.

⁴Ibid., p. 117.

Patterns can be studied by means of mathematics and applied in particular circumstances where they are relevant. Whitehead makes a forecast:

Having regard to the immensity of its subject-matter mathematics, even modern mathematics, is a science in its babyhood. If civilization continues to advance, in the next two thousand years the overwhelming novelty in human thought will be the dominance of mathematical understanding.¹

The idea is that events in the personal and social life of mankind are available for the attention of mathematicians even as are those that form the subject-matter of physics. Whitehead's philosophy enables us to see that all events are part of the one complex assemblage and that it should be possible to use mathematics in understanding and directing any part and all of it. The Good will be realized progressively as patterns of activity are established and modified toward that end. I suppose that even now IBM machines are programmed to make some decisions of a very general nature that could be called moral ones, for example, concerning housing; but it seems to me that the moral decision may lie with the programmers who gather and process the data. They have an obligation to miss nothing that has a bearing on the subject.

The data relevant to a moral decision, in which powerful emotions play a large part, would seem to be much more difficult to abstract than are the data of physics. How to recognize and communicate such information and make it available in suitable form for mathematical handling constitutes a basic problem. The task should

¹Loc. cit.

be easier now than a few years ago, for the younger generation seems bent on exposing all the dark corners of the human person, and psychiatrists are available for probing for the unconscious data. In spite of this, it seems to be enormously difficult to get the relevant particulars and to devise a way of evaluating them.

The value of an actual occasion, that is, its degree of satisfaction on attaining concrescence, depends on the intensity of that experience.¹ The intensity varies as the structure. We recall (p. 22) that "Intensity Proper" is bound up with "Massiveness" and depends on "variety of detail with effective contrast".² The inclusion of the maximum number and intensity of elements and contrasts within the harmony of the moral decision should produce the best solution possible in the circumstances.

As Pizante points out, this "requires knowledge of the conditions regulating the conjoint realization of various eternal objects in respect to various possible grades of realization".³ This, he finds, means that the elements turn out to be the relations between simple eternal objects. Mathematics can deal with relations in all their complexity. Perhaps, for our purposes, this discussion is sufficient to indicate that mathematics may be expected to play an increasingly important role in the development of moral theory. Once the problem is expressed mathematically "the manipulation of the algebraical symbols does your reasoning for you, provided that you keep to the algebraic rules".⁴

¹This is discussed in Chapter 9 of Pizante's Thesis.

²AI, p. 252.

³Op. cit., p. 360.

⁴S, p. 2.

III

ETHICAL CODES

Section 1. Their Character

"The Moral Code is the behaviour-patterns which in the environment for which it is designed will promote the evolution of that environment towards its proper perfection".¹ It prescribes for the interaction of individuals and the community. It embodies what the society takes to be the ultimate purposes for which it exists,² and it contains a view of the worth and status of the individual members and of their duty to each other and to the community. We need such codes to "carry us beyond our own direct immediate insights".³

Although he has not gone into this subject extensively, Whitehead makes one point very clear: no moral code can be absolute and unchanging.

Moral codes have suffered from the exaggerated claims made for them. The dogmatic fallacy has here done its worst. Each such code has been put out by a God on a mountain top, or by a Saint in a cave, or by a divine Despot on a throne, or, at the lowest, by ancestors with a wisdom beyond later question. In any case, each code is incapable of improvement; and unfortunately in details they fail to agree with each other or with our existing moral intuitions. The result is that the world is shocked,

¹AI, p. 291.

²S, p. 88.

³MT, p. 19.

or amused, by the sight of saintly old people hindering in the name of morality the removal of obvious brutalities from a legal system.¹

. . . the defence of morals is the battle-cry which best rallies stupidity against change. Perhaps countless ages ago respectable amoebae refused to migrate from ocean to dry land -refusing in defence of morals.²

Morals consists in the aim at the ideal, and at its lowest it concerns the prevention of relapse to lower levels. Thus stagnation is the deadly foe of morality. Yet in human society the champions of morality are on the whole the fierce opponents of new ideals. Mankind has been afflicted with low-toned moralists, objecting to expulsion from some Garden of Eden.³

Those societies which cannot combine reverence to their symbols with freedom of revision, must ultimately decay⁴

This is only to be expected when "the very essence of real actuality - that is, of the completely real - is process"⁵ "Advance or Decadence are the only choices offered to mankind. The pure conservative is fighting against the essence of the universe".⁶

Section 2. Their Evolution

Whitehead speculates⁷ about the probable history of the dawn of the notion of duty and the formulation of primitive moral codes.

¹AI, p. 289.

²Ibid., p. 268.

³Loc. cit.

⁴S, p. 88.

⁵AI, pp. 273-274.

⁶Ibid., p. 273.

⁷Ibid., pp. 17f.

With growing intellectual awareness, the more distinctly human experiences of the conscious enjoyment of beauty and of intellectual fineness were added to the basic animal appetites and satisfactions. A sense of criticism emerged, based on some general notions of the nature of the universe, the nature of man, and the possibilities of society. This human ability to stand back and assess a situation and criticize it, is a tool in the slow, upward climb of civilization.

From their intuitions of the nature of things, men derive the general principles which they try to exemplify in their actions. From the principles come the practical rules which necessarily are pertinent to the actual horizons and practices of the people involved. "Thus the codes of all religions also embody the particular temperaments and stages of civilization of their adherents".¹ Intuitions of the grandeur of things become interfused "with lower practices and emotions which in fact pervade existing society".² Some type of behaviour may be praised by one individual or community and condemned by another. Some type may promote the good in these circumstances but prohibit the good in other circumstances. Human nature and its environment are infinitely complex and have, apparently, infinite possibilities. Reason always has to struggle to understand and control, so that it can bring to realization its conceptual intuitions. Religion shares the task.

Whitehead writes:

Religion lends a driving force to philosophy. But in its turn, Speculative philosophy guards our higher intuitions

¹Ibid., p. 25.

²Ibid., p. 32.

from base alliances by its suggestions of ultimate meanings, disengaged from the facts of current modes of behaviour.¹

And

Successful progress creeps from point to point, testing each step.²

A comparatively recent emergent in the history of ideas - Whitehead traces it back to the "speculations of the philosophical Greeks upon functions of the human soul, and its status in the world of flux"³ - is the notion that human nature has essential rights. This idea is based upon the insight that man is "the supreme example of a living organism"⁴ and on the vision of his potential intellectual and moral grandeur.

In the more than two thousand years since Plato gave it expression, this idea has been activating thought and action, and diffusing little by little throughout the world.

If a person has autonomy as a human being it seems to follow that he cannot be owned by another person. It is ironic to reflect that Plato had time for philosophizing because he was wealthy and, like all wealthy Athenians, must have owned slaves who looked after his needs. It has taken the human adventure a long time to become pretty generally free of this compulsory degradation of mankind. There are still small pockets where slavery is accepted, and there are insidious, thoughtless, remnants in all societies, for example, in attitudes towards children, towards women, towards employees, towards negroes, etc.

¹Loc. cit.

²Ibid., p. 28.

³Ibid., p. 31.

⁴Ibid., p. 32.

Controversy and dialogue about human freedom are very much a part of the modern "scene". People may agree about the general idea but there is still great difficulty in introducing its practical consequences. The problem is to allow freedom while maintaining order rather than chaos, that is, to allow for maximum intensity of experience of the individual actualities while maintaining the community of actualities.

Section 3. Their Relevancy

Because moral codes are devised to fit particular situations and particular ideas of the nature of things, they need to be reinterpreted as civilization progresses. But a slightly different difficulty is uncovered when we realize that the meanings of words change. "Language itself is a symbolism",¹ and it is always a problem to understand exactly what is being symbolized. As Whitehead explains,² a word is supposed to evoke the same feelings in the hearer as it does in the speaker. These feelings are acquired through experience and are never exactly the same for any two people. A little introspective experiment will demonstrate this: just present any common word to your mind and then look behind it for all the feelings associated with it, some of them unique to your own mental activity. In conversation we have to select a field of meanings which we suppose to be appropriate to the persons and the setting. We are uneasy in a new situation until we make some assessment and, if this proves to be wrong, we are brought up short and make adjustments of meanings to provide for better

¹S, p. 62.

²PR, pp. 274f.

communication. This happens even with family and close friends. When separation in space and time is added the difficulty increases.

To use the Ten Commandments as an illustration: I cannot decide what is meant by "Thou shalt not commit adultery" in the society from which it came, where a man was permitted to have as many wives as he could support; and, in addition, he could have children by the maidservants, sometimes at the suggestion of the wives. The long years of experience since the days of that primitive Hebrew society have enabled the inspired insight of Moses to be interpreted in a way more in accord with human worth and potentiality, and, of course, the development never stops. Another illustration is provided by "Thou shalt not kill", which meant something different in a setting that approved the hacking to pieces of Agag by the judge-priest Samuel (Whitehead mentions the incident¹). Our own society has its own particular interpretation of that word "kill"; and at the moment we are taking a critical look at it, in relation to capital punishment, to war, to the other animals, and, in fact, to the total environment.

Whitehead writes:

There is no one behaviour-system belonging to the essential character of the universe, as the universal moral ideal.²

and:

Thus the notion that there are certain regulative notions, sufficiently precise to prescribe details of conduct, for all reasonable beings on Earth, in every planet, and in every star-system, is at once to be put aside.³

¹AI, p. 56.

²MT, p. 20

³AI, p. 289.

It seems to me that there are very general rules stated in those Ten Commandments which any behaviour-system for a human society must exemplify, but they need to be interpreted in the light of the latest insights of the community where they are to be applied. I should remind myself, though, that Whitehead warns that the belief "that mankind has consciously entertained all the fundamental ideas which are applicable to its existence"¹ sterilizes thought. If even very general rules must be open to revision, how much more so must this be allowed for specific prescriptions (moral codes). For one thing, our more enlightened ideas about the human, individual worth and responsibility must be expressed in our codes.

Section 4. Difficulties

Whitehead's philosophy also makes clear that difficulties arise because choices are made within processes. A situation never stops so that it can be examined carefully. It is composed of an infinite number of active processes. The moral decision is itself a process related to the becoming of all the other processes. The more that can be learned about the total situation, about the histories of the entities that compose it, and about their composition and possibilities, the better will the decision be, but not one of the ingredients is at any time in a completely static condition. Human choice is genuinely creative. When one course of action is chosen, then some other course is ruled out. The action is designed to bring about a desired future, but there can be no guarantee about the effects, especially the long-range effects, in this living, complex, process. As Williams writes:

¹MT, p. 235.

Moral decision is a response to the concrete working of God in a situation riddled with the ambiguities of historical good and evil, and with the mysteries of as yet unapprehended qualities and possibilities.¹

Sometimes, as mentioned previously (p. 28), it seems that the only choice is between possibly destructive courses of action. Then the aim of "maximizing importance" from a wider viewpoint would be a guide. In such a situation the fact that choices are made within a living process can be an advantage, because the factors change in themselves with time and the problem is modified or even disappears. A friend who has to make difficult decisions in his work with people once told me that he does not hurry and often nothing needs to be done. On the other hand, if the delay is too long the damage may be irreparable.

"Insistence on birth at the wrong season is the trick of evil".² Some word or deed at the right time, neither too early nor too late, is required. Williams suggests that commitment to a principle to be realized as conditions permit may be all that needs to be done. This moral principle would dominate the situation as it worked itself out. He writes: "Moral obligation means present identification with a line of creative advance, or resistance to an evil tendency".³ If the authority of home or of society can be wise enough to recognize trends and anticipate possible detrimental actions, the counter and constructive tendencies can be emphasized. For example, a murder is committed within a development that includes human interrelationships,

¹D. D. Williams, Op. Cit., pp. 190-191.

²PR, p. 341.

³D. D. Williams, Op. cit., p. 195.

the availability of a gun, the TV example, etc. It seems that a whole complex, not just one individual, is the murderer. Possibilities can be imagined, and "Thou shalt not kill" can start to be affective far back along the process.

Section 5. Their Ultimate Reference

Because the moral element is derived from the other factors in experience and the codes are necessarily related to the particular temperaments and stages of civilization, the rules symbolize the purposes for which the particular society thinks it exists. It could not exist as a society without them.

No elaborate community of elaborate organisms could exist unless its systems of symbolism were in general successful. Codes, rules of behaviour, canons of art, are attempts to impose systematic action which on the whole will promote favourable symbolic interconnections. As a community changes, all such rules and canons require revision in the light of reason.¹

Free men and women have the obligation to express in their codes and rules their most up-to-date concepts of the nature of the individuals and of their community. This is easy to write but extremely difficult to accomplish; and, of necessity, the time-lag between the thought and the expression is very great. And, "Free men obey the rules which they themselves have made".²

The ethical principle is "a parable illuminating the superior generality on which it depends".³ Because it is taken to refer to the ultimate nature of things, religious intuitions are intertwined

¹S, pp. 87-88.

²Ibid., p. 88.

³AI, p. 25.

and moral energy is generated.¹ For this reason Christianity has been a decisive influence in the development of Western civilization. It was inferred that God's wish was for people to work hard and everybody got busy. The resulting prosperity seemed to confirm the inference. Along with this went "the impracticable ethics of Christianity", mankind's "most precious instrument of progress", which serves as "a gauge by which to test the defects of human society".² Whitehead says that as long as the images of the Sermon on the Mount are "but the dreams of an unrealized world, so long they must spread the infection of an uneasy spirit."³

He writes: "As society is now constituted a literal adherence to the moral precepts scattered throughout the Gospels would mean sudden death".⁴ So, practical men scoff at the whole idea, without realizing that the infection continues to be the hope of salvation for our technological society. How does this take place? Whitehead writes:

The ideals cherished in the souls of men enter into the character of their actions. These interactions within society modify the social laws by modifying the occasions to which those laws apply. Impracticable ideals are a program for reform. Such a program is not to be criticized by immediate possibilities. Progress consists in modifying the laws of nature so that the Republic on Earth may conform to the Society to be discerned ideally by the divination of Wisdom.⁵

¹Ibid., pp. 29f.

²Ibid., p. 25.

³Loc. cit.

⁴Ibid., p. 23.

⁵Ibid., p. 49.

People prefer "the more stable generalities of science" because religion and morality have a "chequered history"¹ but "The concentration of attention upon matter-of-fact is the supremacy of the desert".² Aesthetic, moral, and religious notions disrupt and energize the process of civilization. New ideals bring "a rise in the energy of social behaviour".³ The predicament of the moral aspect of life is also the predicament of all the other aspects of life in "a universe always driving on to novelty".⁴ Human behaviour plays an important, even decisive, role in the general creativity, a fact that society is beginning to realize must be accepted in a responsible manner if the human species is to survive.

Though each occasion of creativity becomes a stubborn fact to be taken into account by what follows in the process, the subsequent occasions are free to handle it in their own ways. Contemporary occasions act in isolation and independently of each other, "the ground for the freedom within the Universe".⁵ According to individual subjective form they accept or reject prehensions from around them.

Thus in any two occasions of the Universe there are elements in either one which are irrelevant to the constitution of the other. The forgetfulness of this doctrine leads to an over-moralization in the view of the nature of things. Fortunately there are a great many things which do not much

¹MT, p. 26; my italics.

²Ibid., p. 27.

³Loc. cit.

⁴SP, p. 127.

⁵AI, p. 200.

matter, and we can have them how we will. The opposite point of view has been the nursery of fanaticism, and has tinged history with ferocity.¹

Section 6. Some General Criticism

Not everyone finds Whitehead's system acceptable. The objector is often trying to find some static concept, for example, of God, that is firmly fixed within his own perspective. The study of the Philosophy of Organism can bring an extension of the process by which the meanings of words develop, with experience, from their simple forms.

A source of difficulty is that Whitehead has not developed fully, and separately, the implications for those important aspects of life that are religious and moral, but when one begins to understand his metaphysics one realizes that concepts do develop continually and subtly, that new concepts emerge, and that there is no possibility for exactness except, as Whitehead suggests, in the most abstract concepts of mathematics and ideals of the Good (perfection).² You can approach exactness only by leaving out more or less of what is involved.

There is criticism of Whitehead's vocabulary, which he answers in these words:

Every science must devise its own instruments. The tool required for philosophy is language. Thus philosophy redesigns language in the same way that, in a physical science, pre-existing appliances are redesigned.³

How else can new insights be communicated than "by the introduction of novel verbal characterizations, rationally coordinated"?⁴ For example,

¹Ibid., p. 201.

²SP, p. 112.

³PR, p. 16.

⁴MT, p. 237.

when Whitehead uses the word "feeling" to cover the fundamental experience of all actualities, we realize that all, in their own ways, take account of their surroundings. All feel, whether they have sense-organs or not. Human experience itself is haunted by vague feelings¹ that are not received by means of the usually designated senses. To say that feelings link each actual occasion to the other occasions is a very good way of extending the meaning of the word.

Section 7. "Ecology"

Whitehead provides a metaphysics that is especially useful at the present time when "ecology" has become a matter of urgent concern. It seems to be a popular idea that we should throw aside all rules for behaviour and act according to individual desire, but we are beginning to suspect that such a course is suicidal. The "presiding occasion" of a human personality is the focus of streams of influence from and towards the process in which it finds itself. "Input" and "feedback" are going on all the time and limit each other. "The point is that every individual thing infects any process in which it is involved"² This is being brought home to mankind; and men are beginning to realize that their existence depends on maintaining their environment in a favourable condition.

Charles Malik speaks for me when he writes:

When you absorb Professor Whitehead's material, you "feel" most genuinely the flux of things; you "feel" that every-thing is in flux; you "feel" what he is fond of calling the "welter"; you "feel" the fact of universal feeling

¹As touched on above, p. 5.

²MT, p. 133.

(everything feeling everything else); you "feel the structured, vectorial character of this feeling; you place your experience in its proper status in the flux of things; you see everything arising, forming itself, and then perishing; process, change, becoming, fluency, stare you in the face; the assassination of Caesar had its own antecedents, and "when it occurred" it objectified itself in the immortal womb of the historical flux. Everything suddenly melts before your eyes into fluent drops of experience. . . . This solid desk, the New Testament, that plant, Socrates, all these things are complex organized societies of drops of experience; every such drop is an esthetic [sic] balance struck creatively amidst clashing influences streaming "in the end" from every item in the universe, past, present, and future. The principle of organization of these societies (i.e. the form or shape of the flux) is the outcome of the Laws of Nature, laws which in the end express the cooperation of God's will and the creative decision of the drops of flux themselves. All this order of the world round about us - material, physical, physiological, political, social - is produced by this patient evocation of God and responsive decision of the world.¹

When we have this view of ongoing reality we can understand how it is that continuous effort is required to devise rules for the conduct of human affairs.

I cannot, then, understand Malik when he writes that to Whitehead "consciousness and knowledge and ethical questions have no cosmological importance, though they may be of supreme importance to man".² On the contrary, Whitehead insists that all activity is related to the whole process. Man's activity depends on his consciousness and knowledge, and on his answers to ethical questions; and he affects the whole process. Indeed, we are beginning to realize that we have difficult and urgent ethical problems to solve, for example, related to tinkering with the atom, with genes, with the balance of nature.

¹Charles Malik, Op. cit., 577.

²Ibid., 578.

We begin to understand Whitehead's insight and to realize that man is part of his environment, and his environment is part of man, and that man's decisions are of vital importance to the whole cosmos.

Section 8. Advantages of Whitehead's View

Whitehead's philosophy offers to our view a Universe in process of creation within which the human organisms play a decisive part. It forces us to recognize the place of man within nature and his intimate relations with all else; and it enables us to relate the finite universe to that transcendent and immanent "power in virtue of which nature harbours ideal ends, and produces individual beings capable of conscious discrimination of such ends".¹ Whitehead says that reverence for that power "is the foundation of the respect for man as man", the respect that "secures that liberty of thought and action, required for the upward adventure of life on this Earth".²

It accommodates the eager zest for adventure, for novelty, and for audacity of speculation, found especially in the young of the species, and especially bewildering today, which enlivens human history and without which the whole experience would atrophy.

It provides a way of reconciling absolute moral obligation with human misunderstandings and mistakes; and it underlines the necessity for continual review of laws. As we develop a further insight into the nature of things we must see that it is expressed in our rules for conduct. As Whitehead points out, the meanings behind our symbols are continually opening out for us and are never wholly

¹AI, p. 93.

²Loc. cit.

clear. The laws always lag behind; and lawyers will always be necessary to interpret them; and there will always be difficult moral decisions.

When we speak about finding out all the factors and making a rational moral decision on that basis, we realize that this is not possible beyond the limits of our understanding. Only God has all the data; and he does not determine or know the outcome. The individual takes a chance every time he does anything. The risk is large if the issue is large; but that is the condition of any new venture. That trite saying, "Nothing ventured, nothing gained", is true of all of life. When this human situation is faced, then remorse over mistakes can be turned to constructive use. Whitehead's system allows us to see that human freedom rests on a hierarchy of human potentialities from the most evil to the very best; and the individual has a choice. Otherwise there would be no freedom, and freedom, of appropriate kind, is possessed by every drop of creativity.

Section 9. Situational Ethics

It seems to some people that, since heaven cannot be found up in the sky, then there is no God up there keeping a watchful eye on earth and ready to consign people to Hell if they misbehave. It follows that it cannot be true that God handed to Moses the Ten Commandments carved on stone tablets; and they conclude that without God in authority the Commandments can be ignored. Without some ultimate reference outside the world, it seems to these people that "anything goes", you can "do your own thing" with abandon. There are, of course, some constraints imposed by circumstances and other people, but the

clever person can get around them and do what he likes; and there is no way, without that outside reference, they say, of showing this to be morally wrong.

Young people, especially, who lack experience and vision, take this to mean that they can do whatever they like. They point out that some older members of society profess publically to be upholding the traditional law while they are secretly breaking it. Disillusionment, and possibly bitter experience because of this two-faced attitude, along with natural inclinations, underlie the youthful protest, a protest that, to the surprise, and perhaps chagrin, of older people, seems to be turning out to be a purifying influence within the process of civilization.

Freedom from supernatural restraint leads to what is called "situational ethics". There is an attempt to separate the particular occasion of activity from the rest of the process. This view aims at present pleasure; it preserves not the values of the past and takes no account of the future. Whitehead's philosophy lets us see that local situations are intrinsically woven together in wider communities and in the total unity of all that is, and no entity acts in its own separated corner.

On the other hand, "situational ethics" may serve as a catchword to remind us that the principles deduced from the metaphysical scheme have to be applied within the concrete process. There continues to be too much "simple-minded use of the notions 'right or wrong'".¹

The process, as Whitehead views it, includes all there is. There is no way of finding a source of values outside it. ". . .

¹MT, p. 15.

apart from things that are actual, there is nothing - nothing either in fact or in efficacy".¹ "Thus the search for a reason is always the search for an actual fact which is the vehicle of the reason".²

God is not outside the process issuing fiats from afar. In his primordial nature "he is not before all creation, but with all creation".³ He is "the primordial unity of relevance of the many potential forms".⁴ In his consequent nature he is "the realization of the actual world in the unity of his nature, and through the transformation of his wisdom".⁵ The actual world is created by the concreting actual entities in response to the lure provided by God's primordial nature. ". . . existence involves implication in agency. . .".⁶ The moral responsibility is placed on rational beings to act "so as to maximize importance".⁷ The aim is "at greatness of experience in the various dimensions belonging to it."⁸ Kline finds in Whitehead 'a blending of aesthetic and moral categories . . . into something very close to the classical Greek conception of the "nobly fair" . . .'.⁹

¹PR, p. 64.

²Ibid., pp. 64-65.

³Ibid., p. 521.

⁴Ibid., p. 529.

⁵Ibid., p. 524.

⁶AI, p. 293.

⁷MT, p. 19.

⁸Loc. cit.

⁹George Kline, Alfred North Whitehead (Englewood Cliffs, 1963), p. 4.

It has always seemed to me that only a very superficial view would allow for a defence of "situational ethics". Whitehead shows that it is nonsense. The ultimate reference, the reference to infinite value, is always there, even if not in conscious awareness. To think that any individual entity is important is to see in it something that matters, some enduring quality that abides. As Whitehead says: "In some sense or other, Importance is derived from the immanence of infinity in the finite".¹

To the infant, with his instinctual equipment, his own wants are all that matter. As he grows, his awareness widens to include his home, his society, and eventually, perhaps, the whole world, when he makes his decisions. It is a fact of experience that people are able to choose the most difficult and personally unpleasant action with the intuition that it matters in the depths of things.

In "Immortality" Whitehead writes: "Value is in its nature timeless and immortal".² Again, he writes: "The value-judgment points beyond the immediacy of historic fact".³ Also:

But what these codes do witness to, and what their interpretation by seers of various races throughout history does witness to, is the aim at a social perfection. Such a realized fact is conceived as an abiding perfection in the nature of things, a treasure for all ages. ⁴It is not a romance of thought, it is a fact of Nature.

¹MT, p. 28.

²SP, p. 87.

³Ibid., 88.

⁴AI, pp. 289-290.

Section 10. Love Thy Neighbour

The universe, as seen through Whitehead's scheme, is a vast society of pulsing, interacting but individual, creating, actual occasions. Conscious civilized entities can try to enrich their own experience which, as we have seen, is bound up with the experience of all. They, therefore, broaden their outlook to ever-widening horizons as "the civilization of consciousness"¹ proceeds. It is not easy to maintain the equilibrium in this enormous social structure. Does Whitehead suggest some general guiding principle? He writes:

Although particular codes of morality reflect, more or less imperfectly, the special circumstances of social structure concerned, it is natural to seek for some highly general principles underlying all such codes. Such generalities should reflect the very notions of the harmonizing of harmonies, and of particular individual actualities as the sole authentic reality. These are the principles of the generality of harmony, and of the importance of the individual. The first means 'order', and the second means 'love'. Between the two there is a suggestion of opposition. For 'order' is impersonal; and love, above all things, is personal. The antithesis is solved by rating types of order in relative importance according to their success in magnifying the individual actualities, that is to say, in promoting strength of experience. Also in rating the individual on the double basis, partly on the intrinsic strength of its own experience, and partly on its influence in the promotion of a high-grade type of order.²

We look for enlightenment as to what Whitehead means when he uses the word "love", a word that commonly denotes many kinds of attitudes of involvement with other persons, with animals, with things, with events, etc. He writes: "The emotional significance of the object as 'It', divorced from its qualitative aspects at the moment presented, is

¹Ibid., p. 290.

²Ibid., pp. 290-291.

one of the strongest forces in human nature".¹ Again he writes:

Such love [the love of particular individual things] is the completion almost necessary for finite reality, and all reality is in some way finite. In the extreme of love, such as mother's love, all personal desire is transferred to the thing loved, as a desire for its perfection. Personal life has here evidently passed beyond itself, but with explicit, definite limitation to particular realities.²

In the language appropriate to the higher stages of experience, the primitive element is sympathy, that is, feeling the feeling in another and feeling conformally with another.³

He writes that 'tenderness' and 'love' are a specialization of a more general notion, which he calls "Peace" and defines as a "Harmony of Harmonies which calms destructive turbulence and completes civilization" by excluding "the restless egotism"⁴ which is bound to infect a universe of entities striving for individual satisfaction. Peace is a positive, broadening feeling due to the emergence of the "deep metaphysical insight" that "fineness of achievement is as it were a key unlocking treasures that the narrow nature of things would keep remote".⁵ From this insight comes a "coordination of values", "the removal of the stress of acquisitive feeling", "a surpassing of personality", "a grasp of infinitude", and "the intuition of permanence". "Peace", as Whitehead defines it, is "the barrier against narrowness" and results in "the love of mankind as such".

¹Ibid., p. 261.

²Ibid., p. 287.

³PR, p. 246.

⁴AI, p. 283.

⁵Loc. cit.

⁶Ibid., pp. 283-285.

This "deep metaphysical insight" is the source of the "impractical ethics of Christianity", mentioned above (p. 41). Along with civilization there is developing a more satisfying realization of what the "love of mankind as such" can be.

If we can recall for a moment, Whitehead's analysis of the aesthetic experience (p. 21f above), of which the moral experience is a species, the value depends on the degree of Massiveness and Strength that can be brought within the Harmony or order. The Massiveness and Strength depend on the quality of experience of the individuals and the number of individuals involved. It seems to me that Whitehead is saying, in his writing as examined in this thesis, that "the love of mankind as such" and its analogue appropriate to each of the animal, vegetable, and other individuals of the process, allow for the maximum value-experience in the creative interchange that is continually and forever in process.

It is necessary to have moral codes to guide human beings, who are all limited to personal horizons. The codes and their application need to be subject to constant scrutiny and revision as civilization evolves and man's vision of the actualities and the potentialities of the process evolves with it. There is no escape from the human moral responsibility in the evolution.

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