

Like any other philosophy properly so-called, process philosophy is a more or less reflective self-understanding that is comprehensive in scope and generally secular rather than specifically religious in constitution. As such, it properly includes, although it is not exhausted by, both a metaphysics and an ethics, which is to say, both a theory of ultimate reality in its structure in itself and a theory of how we ought to act and what we ought to do given the structure of ultimate reality and its meaning for us.

The metaphysics that this self-understanding implies, and that process philosophy therefore properly includes, is in every sense anti-dualistic, being in one sense monistic, in another sense a qualified pluralism. It is monistic in the sense that it recognizes but one transcendental concept, or one set of such concepts, in which anything that is concrete and singular can and must be described. Thus, for process metaphysics, there are not many kinds, but only one kind, of ultimate subjects of predication; and no difference between any one such ultimate subject and any other amounts to an absolute difference in kind, whether it be a merely finite difference between one and another part of reality or even the infinite difference between the all-inclusive whole of reality and any of its included parts. Even the integral whole of reality as something concrete and singular is so in literally the same sense in which this must be said of anything that is more than a mere abstraction or an aggregate. This is why *the* transcendental concept for process metaphysics is precisely "process," in the sense that to be anything concretely and singularly real is to be either an event or an individual—either an instance of becoming or an ordered sequence of such instances, each of which is an emergent unity of real, internal relatedness to all the things that have already become in the past—together with, of course, everything that they, in turn, necessarily presuppose—which then gives itself along with all of them to all the other such emergent unities that are yet to become in the future.

And yet if process metaphysics is in this way attributively monistic, it is at the same time substantively pluralistic, albeit in a qualified sense. It is pluralistic insofar as it recognizes not one but many ultimate subjects of predication. Although anything concrete and singular is either an instance of becoming or an individual sequence of such

instances, all of ultimately the same kind as any other, there are any number of these instances, each an emergent unity of real, internal relatedness ontologically distinct from all the others. Above all, there is the unique ontological distinction between, on the one hand, the self and all others as all mere parts of reality and, on the other hand, the all-inclusive whole of reality. Even as each fragmentary becoming is ontologically distinct from every other, so each of them severally and all of them together are ontologically distinct from the integral becoming of the whole. And yet the distinction between part and whole is unique; and for this reason, the pluralism of process metaphysics, real as it certainly is, is also qualified. Although "part" and "whole" are indeed correlative concepts in that each necessarily implies the other, the symmetry between their two referents presupposes an even more fundamental asymmetry between them. For while there could not be an integral becoming of the whole without the fragmentary becomings of the parts, any more than there could be the fragmentary becomings of the parts without the integral becoming of the whole, what the whole as such necessarily implies is not *these parts or those*, since all of its parts, unlike itself, are merely contingent rather than necessary, but only *some parts or other*—or, alternatively, that the intensional class of parts have at least some members and so not be a null or empty class. On the other hand, what each and every fragmentary becoming necessarily implies is not merely *some whole or other* (since the idea of more than one whole of reality is patently incoherent and absurd), but rather *the one and only necessarily existing whole*—the one integral becoming of which all fragmentary becomings are contingently occurring or existing parts and but for which none of them would be possible either in principle or in fact, or have any abiding significance.

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Unique to process theology, so-called, is the understanding of God, self, and the world that it explicates in the concepts and terms of process metaphysics. A distinctive feature of this understanding is its interpretation of "God" as properly referring to the one strictly universal individual, and hence to the integral whole of reality, whose many parts are properly distinguished as belonging to the two main types of "self" and "the world." If this interpretation is monistic enough to bear a certain resemblance to pantheism, it is still

different from positions that traditionally have been so designated. By distinguishing as process philosophy does between the abstract identity of the whole as the one individual sequence of integral becomings and the concrete reality of these becomings themselves, each in itself and as an ordered sequence, process theology is able to assert the sole necessary existence of God in contrast to the radical contingency of everything else, thereby maintaining the unique ontological distinction between God, on the one hand, and self and the world, on the other. To this extent, it is undoubtedly more like traditional theism in its classical forms than any form of traditional pantheism, although the pluralism it asserts in thus distinguishing God from self and the world is like that of the process metaphysical theory whose concepts and terms it employs in being, not an unqualified, but a qualified, pluralism. God is indeed asserted to be ontologically distinct from everything else, but everything other than God, whether self or the world, is held to be absolutely dependent on God, whereas God is only relatively dependent on it, being dependent on it neither for existence nor essential identity, but only for the concrete content of God's integral becoming insofar as it is internally as well as externally related to all fragmentary becomings.

I contend that just such a qualified pluralism as process theology explicitly asserts is necessarily implied by the Christian witness, and specifically by its distinctive stress on both divine and human agency, as well as creaturely agency generally. As the Protestant Reformers rightly insisted, this witness affirms that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone. Thus it is sharply different from any monergistic understanding of grace, according to which faith is so created in us by God's act that we are saved without any free and responsible action of our own. The question, however, is whether this difference warrants the familiar interpretations of Christian witness as necessarily implying synergism. My answer is that, if the Christian understanding of grace and freedom is to be described as "synergistic" at all, it is so only in much the same way in which process theology's understanding of God and the self may be said to be "pluralistic," which is to say, it is at most a *qualified* synergism, in that ^{it} asserts a certain symmetry between grace and freedom only by presupposing at the same time an even more fundamental asymmetry between them. It asserts that there is indeed a difference between God's

gracious acceptance of all things and our acceptance of God's acceptance through obedient faith, which is our own free and responsible act and not any act of God. But it also presupposes that, whereas God would be God and would be the gracious, all-accepting God that God is had we never existed at all, we could neither exist nor exist in faith, except for the radical prevenience of God's grace.

In short, if the Christian understanding of grace and freedom is synergistic, it nevertheless bears enough of a resemblance to monergism to imply and to be implied by a metaphysical understanding of God and the self that, like process theology's, is at most a qualified pluralism.

(Following "Process Theology and the Wesleyan Witness"; cf. also "The Metaphysics of Faith and Justice" in *Doing Theology Today*: 117-122).

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