

What sense does it make to argue for the necessity of a certain method if the very thing that supposedly makes it necessary—because it allegedly makes alternative methods impossible—turns out upon reflection to make it just as impossible? I answer, not much. And yet this is precisely the kind of argument Whitehead offers for the method of "speculative philosophy," i.e., "imaginative generalization."

Clearly, if the ultimate appeal is to "the general consciousness of what in practice we experience," then any difficulty or impossibility of *beginning* with such consciousness in order, then, to analyze its necessary presuppositions, must be just as telling against *returning* to such consciousness for "renewed comparison of the imaginative scheme with the direct experience to which it should apply" (PRc: 16 [24]). Conversely, if it is really possible to test this ultimate appeal to experience—namely, because consciousness does not completely obscure experience after all—then, clearly, it must be just as possible to start with the experience and proceed to its analysis, obviating any need for so-called imaginative generalization.

Of course, there are good reasons for Whitehead's criticisms elsewhere of epistemological analyses that rely too completely on "strained introspection" and his criticisms here of metaphysical procedures involving interrogation of experience with "the benumbing repression of common sense" (9 [13]). But, granted that self-analysis does indeed require some more objective method, the method called for is not "imaginative generalization," but "*presuppositional analysis*," whereby "whatever is found in practice," or "[w]hatever thread of presupposition characterizes social expression throughout the various epochs of rational society," can be discerned and given its place in "philosophic theory" or "metaphysical description." In this way, renewed observation of direct experience would indeed be rendered acute by rational interpretation, and self-experience could be interrogated in the light of common sense, instead of repressing it.

Just as we cannot understand what human beings in general experience in practice, or perforce presuppose, without understanding ourselves, so we cannot understand ourselves without understanding what human beings in general experience and understand in understanding

themselves and leading their lives. Accordingly, *this* is the point that needs to be kept in mind in thinking through the method proper to philosophy as metaphysics, not any point peculiar to "imaginative generalization."

There are some passages and formulations that might seem to confirm that Whitehead himself, in his way, realizes this. Most notably, there is the large place he assigns to "practice," "the directed activities of mankind," and so on, even to the extent of defining "the metaphysical rule of evidence" itself as requiring that "we must bow to those presumptions, which, in despite of criticism, we still employ for the regulation of our lives" (151 [229]). But even in his discussion of "the method of imaginative rationalization" itself, he talks about "the generalization of particular factors discerned in particular topics of human interest; for example, in physics, or in physiology, or in psychology, or in aesthetics, or in ethical beliefs, or in sociology, or in languages conceived as storehouses of human experience" (5 [7]). Of course, what is wanted is not so much "generalization" of such factors as their "analysis."

25 October 2000