Some of Whitehead's statements on philosophical method are confusing, if not confused. Thus he says, for example, "The main method of philosophy in dealing with its evidence is that of descriptive generalization. . . . Philosophic generalization seizes on those characters [sc. of fact] of abiding importance, dismissing the trivial and the evanescent. There is an ascent from a particular fact, or from a species, to the genus exemplified. . . . Philosophy is the ascent to the generalities with the view of understanding their possibilities of combination" (*AI*: 301 f.).

Surely, the procedure Whitehead speaks of here as "generalization" would be more appropriately described as *"analysis"*—even as his metaphor of "ascent" seems rather less apt than the metaphor of *descent*, or of "digging," as Maurice might well have put it. It's one thing to generalize from a particular fact; it's something else again to analyze a particular concept, and, in that way, to analyze meaning, and so also to analyze the necessary conditions of the possibility, or the presuppositions, of meaning.

The "generalities" to which philosophy is the ascent, or descent, are not the genera, of whose "mingling" species and facts are the product. For genera in that sense are as ordinary as all other ordinary abstracts, whether species and individualities, on the one side, or categories, on the other. No, the generalities that philosophy properly seeks are the *extraordinary* generalities properly distinguished as "existentials" and "transcendentals," which are the necessary conditions of the possibility of human existence (in the case of existentials) and of any and all existence (in the case of transcendentals).

Question: If the generalities to which philosophy ascends were merely genera in the sense of ordinary abstracts; and if it were true that "no genus in its own essence indicates the other genera with which it is compatible" (302), how—even conceivably—could any scheme of generalities that philosophy might come up with satisfy the criterion of "coherence" as Whitehead formulates it (*PRc*: 6)?

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