

ON "PERISHING"

It appears as though "perishing," as Whitehead understands it, may not be something ascribable to an actual entity in itself but can only be ascribed to an actual entity in relation to others, i.e., as objectified by its nondivine successors. At any rate, if this is Whitehead's meaning, one could explain without difficulty the countless passages in which perishing is identified with objectification (as, e.g., "The notion of the prehension of the past means that the past is an element which perishes and thereby [*sic*] remains an element in the state beyond, and thus is objectified" [ESP, 89]; or "Its [*sc.* the actual entity's] perishing is its assumption of a new metaphysical function in the creative advance of the universe" [AI, 262; italics added; cf. also pp. 227, 305, 375]). One could also explain why Whitehead can say that, whereas "in the temporal world, . . . objectification involves elimination" and "it is the empirical fact that process entails loss; the past is present under an abstraction," nevertheless, "there is no reason, of any ultimate metaphysical generality, why this should be the whole story" (PR, 517). As objectively immortal in God, actual entities do not perish; their perishing is simply the way in which they are objectively immortal "in the temporal world," i.e., as objectified by their nondivine successors. This would also explain what Whitehead means by "the retention of mutual immediacy" in God's consequent nature (PR, 525; italics added), namely, that in the case of God's objectification, in radical contrast to all other, "the present fact" does have "the past fact with it" in "full immediacy" (PR, 517. See also his use of the phrase, "direct union of immediacy among things" (*ibid.*))

And yet Whitehead also argues that "satisfaction," which "closes up the entity," "constitutes the completion of the actual togetherness of the discrete components. The process of concrescence terminates with the attainment of a fully determinate 'satisfaction'" (PR, 129 f.; italics added). He then says, "Completion is the perishing of immediacy" (PR, 130. Cf. also PR, 126: "In the organic philosophy an actual entity has 'perished' when it is complete. The pragmatic use of the actual entity, constituting its static life, lies in the future. The creature perishes and is immortal" [*italics added*]).

Therefore, as correct as the proposed account may appear to be, it cannot be reconciled with all of the textual evidence--especially that which identifies "perishing" with "completion" or "termination" (= "satisfaction," "superject") and that which distinguishes between "perishing" and "objective immortality" (e.g., "The creature perishes and is immortal," or "our immediate actions . . . perish and yet live for evermore").

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~~When~~, then, should one do? First of all, one may insist that, insofar as "perishing" does refer to something ascribable to an actual entity in itself, as the entity which suffers, or is the subject of perishing, it does not refer to the "loss" of anything but only to the "completion" or "termination" or "closing up" of something--namely, that actual entity's process of concrescence. "Completion is the perishing of immediacy. . . . an actual entity has 'perished' when it is complete." Hence, in this absolute, or non-relative sense of the word, "perishing" is equivalent in meaning with "satisfaction," "superject," "the 'entity as concrete' abstracted from the

'process of concrescence'"--in short, the entity as absolutely itself, and thus fully determinate. But, evidently, this absolute sense of "perishing" is not its only sense; it also has a relative meaning--even as do "satisfaction," "superject," etc. (cf., e.g., PR, 71 where "a superject" is said to be "the atomic creature exercising its function of objective immortality"). So far as used in this relative sense, then, "perishing" may indeed entail loss, but only because of the necessarily abstract, eliminating character of objectification "in the temporal world" (PR, 517). In other words, whereas "process entails loss" in the case of all objectification other than God's, in God's objectification "immediacy is reconciled with objective immortality" (PR, 532).

I conclude, then, that, even, on this revised account, Christian's notion of "perishing" is not implied and is, indeed, disclosed as a misinterpretation of Whitehead's meaning.

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Fall, 1968-1969