

"Philosophy" in general 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, 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. "Process philosophy" in particular, then, is just such a reflective, comprehensive, and secular understanding of existence together with the metaphysical and ethical theories that explicate its necessary ^{presuppositions and} implications.

For this kind of philosophy, to be a self is not merely to be continually becoming, but also to exist, in the emphatic sense in which "existence" means that one understands one's becoming and, within the limits of one's situation, is responsible for it. Thus one understands, above all, one's real, internal relatedness—not only to one's own ever-changing past and future, but also to a many-leveled community of others similarly caught up in time and change and, together with them, to the all-inclusive whole of reality itself. But one also understands, relative to this same whole of reality, one's own essential fragmentariness and the equally essential fragmentariness of all others. With respect to both time and space, the whole alone is essentially integral and nonfragmentary, having neither beginning nor end and lacking an external environment. This is not to say, however, that the whole of reality is understood as mere unchanging being, in every respect infinite and absolute. On the contrary, insofar as the whole is neither merely abstract nor a sheer aggregate, it must be like the self and anything else comparably concrete and singular in being an instance of becoming, or an ordered sequence of such instances, which as such is always finite in contrast to the infinite realm of possibility and relative and not absolute in its real, internal relations to others.

On the self-understanding distinctive of this philosophy, then, to be human is to live as a fragment, albeit an understanding and, therefore, responsible fragment, of the integral whole of reality as such. In other words, for this philosophy, the meaning of ultimate reality for us demands that we entrust both our own becoming and the becomings of all others to this ultimate whole of which we are parts and then, by loyally serving as best we can the transient goods of all the parts, make the greatest possible contribution to the enduring good of the whole.

As for the metaphysics that this self-understanding implies, it is in every sense antidualistic, 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 fully 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 one such ultimate subject and another 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 either an instance of becoming or an individual sequence of such instances in the same sense in which this may be said of any other thing that is more than a mere abstraction or ^{an} aggregate. This explains, of course, why *the* transcendental concept for such a metaphysics is precisely "process," in the sense that to be anything concretely and singularly real in the full sense of the words is to be an instance of becoming: an emergent unity of real, internal relatedness to all the things that have already become in the past, which then gives itself along with them to all the other such emergent unities that are yet to become in the future.

But if process metaphysics is in this way attributively monistic, it is nonetheless substantively pluralistic, even if in a qualified sense. This is the case insofar as it recognizes not one but many ultimate subjects of predication. Although anything fully concrete and singular is an instance of becoming of ultimately the same kind as any other, there are any number of such instances, each an emergent unity of real, internal relatedness ontologically distinct from all the others. Above all, there is the unique ontological distinction between the self and others as all mere parts of reality, on the one hand, and the one all-inclusive whole of reality, on the other. 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 this means that 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, what the whole as such necessarily implies is not *this part or that* (since all of its parts, unlike itself, are merely contingent rather than necessary), but only *some part or other*—or, if you wish to put it so, that the intensional class of parts have at least some members and thus not be a null 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), but rather *the one and only necessarily existing whole*—the one integral becoming of which all fragmentary becomings are contingent parts and but for which none of them would be so much as even possible or have any enduring meaning.

This brings us to the ethics of process philosophy, which, like its metaphysics, is thoroughly antidualistic. It recognizes at most a relative, not an absolute, difference between self-interest and interest in others, and also between how we are to act and what we are to do toward the others who, understanding their becomings, are insofar on the same level as ourselves, and how we are to act and what we are to do toward all those whose becomings take place at some lower level without understanding. Because even self-interest is in its way an interest in others—namely, ^{the others that are} in one's own past or future instances of becoming—and because all instances of becoming that can be affected by how we act and what we do are attributively one even if substantively many, there is only one ethical principle, or one set of such principles, governing the whole of our moral life, whether this be spoken of in terms of "judgments of obligation," or, alternatively, in terms of either "judgments of virtue" or "judgments of value." Of course, our moral acts themselves, if not also the modes of our action, must be differently specified in the different situations in which we are required to act and in relation to the different others and levels of others for whom we are responsible. But for a process ethics of obligation, the one thing we are obliged to do in every situation and in relation to every other is to realize as fully as we can the intrinsic good that lies in each and every instance of becoming,

This means, among other things, that there is always a specifically political aspect to our moral responsibility. This is so, at any rate, if "politics" is taken in a broad sense as having to do, not only with the formation of specific structures of the state and government, but also with the formation

and transformation of structures of order generally. Because all becoming, and hence the realization of all intrinsic good, necessarily presupposes an order more or less permissive of emergent unities of real, internal relatedness to others, one can promote the optimal realization of intrinsic good at all levels of becoming only by forming appropriate structures of social and cultural order.

Cf. "Process Theology and the Wesleyan Witness": 28-32.