

What is "the fundamental situation disclosed in experience"?

Whitehead answers:

[T]he self-knowledge inherent in the bodily event is the knowledge of itself as a complex unity, whose ingredients involve all reality beyond itself, restricted under the limitations of its pattern of aspects. Thus we know ourselves as a function of unification of a plurality of things which are other than ourselves. Cognition discloses an event as being an activity, organising a real togetherness of alien things. . . .

Thus no individual subject can have independent reality, since it is a prehension of limited aspects of subjects other than itself. . . .

The primary situation disclosed in cognitive experience is 'ego-object amid objects.' By this I mean that the primary fact is an impartial world transcending the 'here-now' which marks the ego-object, and transcending the 'now' which is the spatial world of simultaneous realisation. It is a world also including the actuality of the past, and the limited potentiality of the future, together with the complete world of abstract potentiality, the realm of eternal objects, which transcends, and finds exemplification in and comparison with, the actual course of realisation. The ego-object, as consciousness here-now, is conscious of its experiential essence as constituted by its internal relatedness to the world of realities, and to the world of ideas. But the ego-object, in being thus constituted, is within the world of realities, and exhibits itself as an organism requiring the ingression of ideas for the purpose of this status among realities (*Science and the Modern World*: 216 ff.).

Whitehead takes the position set out here—that "the primary situation disclosed in cognitive experience is 'ego-object amid objects'"—because "the technical phrase 'subject-object' is a bad term for the fundamental situation disclosed in experience." It is a bad term because it recalls "the Aristotelian 'subject-predicate,'" which presupposes "the metaphysical doctrine of diverse subjects qualified by their private predicates." Epistemologically speaking, this is "the doctrine of subjects with private worlds of experience," which, if it be granted, requires that "there is no escape from solipsism." Thus Whitehead speaks instead of "ego-object amid objects." But, clearly, the implication of his so speaking can only be that there is a subject of which both the ego-object and the objects of its experience are alike objects and which serves to ground the "impartial world" transcending the ego's own, otherwise solipsistic experience. (Note, by the way, that Whitehead does not hesitate to speak of either the ego-object or the objects of its experience as "subject[s].")

It is this implication, then, that is made fully explicit in *Modes of Thought*: 140 ff., where Whitehead, again explicitly arguing against solipsism,

insists that "the unity of a transcendent universe, and the multiplicity of realized actualities, both enter into our experience by this sense of Deity." In other words,

the primitive stage of discrimination is not primarily qualitative. It is the vague grasp of reality, dissecting it into a three-fold scheme, namely, The Whole, That Other, and This-Myself.

This is primarily a dim division. The sense of totality obscures the analysis into self and others. Also this division is primarily based on the sense of existence as a value-experience. Namely, the total value-experience is discriminated into this value-experience and those value-experiences. There is the vague sense of many which are one; and of one which includes the many. Also there are two senses of the one—namely, the sense of the one which is all, and the sense of the one among the many. . . . There is the feeling of the ego, the others, the totality. This is the vague, basic presentation of the differentiation of existenceWe are, each of us, one among others; and all of us are embraced in the unity of the whole (150 f.).

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