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## “WE ARE IN THE WORLD AND THE WORLD IS IN US”

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### Abstract

*“We are in the world and the world is in us.” This is how Whitehead sums up the fact that, within the realms of reality, there exist no two detached occasions. The actual world is a community of occasions that form ‘a solidarity of many actual entities’. Togetherness pervades all experience, whether we consider a single actual occasion, or the whole stream of experience. The notion of togetherness is present in the Whiteheadian ontological principle, whereby there is real togetherness in the constitution of every actual entity. Thus existence must always be some form of togetherness.*

When Francis Xavier, a Jesuit missionary at the service of John III King of Portugal, arrived in Japan in 1549, he brought with him a message of catholicity, that is to say a message of universality. His mission was to spread the Gospel, but his attitude was an all-embracing and all-inclusive stance. The message of his teaching was one of togetherness in diversity and oneness in multiplicity. Were he to have lived in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he might have drawn on process philosophy and philosophers

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such as Henri Bergson, Sri Aurobindo, Kitaro Nishida, and especially Alfred North Whitehead.

“We are in the world and the world is in us.”<sup>1</sup> This is how the late Whitehead sums up the fact that, within the realms of reality, there exist no two detached occasions. The actual world is a community of occasions that form ‘a solidarity of many actual entities’.<sup>2</sup> Togetherness pervades all experience, whether we consider a single actual occasion, or the whole stream of experience.<sup>3</sup> The actual world is a community of temporal actual occasions, designated by Whitehead as epochal.<sup>4</sup> The notion of togetherness is present in the Whiteheadian ontological principle, whereby there is real togetherness in the constitution of every actual entity. The ontological principle states that everything in the world can be referred to some actual entity: nothing exists in separation from actual entities.<sup>5</sup> Togetherness is thus found in the becoming of the world, and in the becoming of every actual entity. Whitehead’s ontological principle means that everything must be either in actuality or in potency.<sup>6</sup> This way of being either in actuality or in potency is always a way of being in solidarity. Thus existence must always be some form of togetherness.

The actual world is a community of epochal entities. They always refer to one another as they come into being. The actual world is constant passage into novelty.<sup>7</sup> But novelty is possible because there is togetherness in the community of actual occasions that necessitates creativity. “The epochal occasions are the primary units of the actual community, and the community is composed of the units. But each unit has in its nature a reference to every other member of the community, so that each unit is a microcosm representing itself the entire all-inclusive universe.”<sup>8</sup> It is patent actual occasions need one another for their communal existence and they can only exist in togetherness. The old Cartesian maxim, frequently quoted by Whitehead that states that an existent requires nothing but itself in order to exist is thus refuted.<sup>9</sup> The refutation of the Cartesian dictum implies the solidarity of the whole universe and corroborates the ontological principle. Nothing comes floating into the actual world from nowhere.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Modes of Thought*, 165.

<sup>2</sup> *Process and Reality*, 40 [65].

<sup>3</sup> *Process and Reality*, 189 [288].

<sup>4</sup> *Religion in the Making*, 91.

<sup>5</sup> *Process and Reality*, 32 [48], 43 [68], 244 [373].

<sup>6</sup> *Process and Reality*, 40 [64], 46 [73].

<sup>7</sup> *Religion in the Making*, 90; *Concept of Nature*, 54.

<sup>8</sup> *Religion in the Making*, 91.

<sup>9</sup> *Process and Reality*, 6[10], 50[79].

<sup>10</sup> *Process and Reality*, 70 [108], 244 [373].

A common world is shared by all actual entities; sharing a common world means that the world also shares in every actual entity that shares in the common world. The huge complexity in each and every actual entity does not rob it of its unity and individualisation. However, complexity means interdependence of all occasions within the common world.

Every new actual occasion is a novel entity emerging from the total universe and comprising the actual world, as well as pure potentiality. Actual occasions are self-creative. "A new creation has to arise from the actual world as much as from pure potentiality: it arises from the total universe and not solely from its mere abstract elements. It also adds to that universe. Thus every actual entity springs from *that* universe which there is *for it*. Causation is nothing else than one outcome of the principle that every actual entity has to house *its* actual world."<sup>11</sup> The process of coming into being is a process of novelty and also a process of new addition to the actual world. The actual world is given for the new creature, and, in turn, the novel entity accommodates this antecedent actual world that is given for it. "The many become one and are increase by one."<sup>12</sup> The next sentence in *Process and Reality* enlightens Whitehead's very notion of multiplicity, as well as the temporal nature of the actual entities that are the active elements of these multiplicities. It reads as follows: "In their natures, entities are disjunctively 'many' in process of passage into conjunctive unity."<sup>13</sup> A new addition to the universe is not mere repetition; on the contrary, it is pure novel unification drawing on the whole universe. It is a temporal process that necessitates the determination of creativity. The creatures are its outcome. "Thus an actual entity is the outcome of a creative synthesis, individual and passing."<sup>14</sup>

Together-ness is also a ground concept in other process thinkers' philosophies like Sri Aurobindo and Bergson's. Bergson describes reality as the flow of succeeding states of consciousness that interpenetrate and augment this flux as they come into being. This continuity is heterogeneous, i.e. different states can be identified and acknowledged. However, they are not separate, neither are they indistinguishable for they exhibit a together-ness that preserves their individuality. The flux of life presses on as it carries along all the indestructible past, which is a together-ness of diverse states past and present. Bergson's multiplicities are multifarious even though they cannot be separated into their different composing elements. Aurobindo also emphasises multiplicity in so far as he underlines unity as the foundation of multiplicity,

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<sup>11</sup> *Process and Reality*, 80 [123-124].

<sup>12</sup> *Process and Reality*, 21 [32].

<sup>13</sup> *Process and Reality*, 21 [32].

<sup>14</sup> *Religion in the Making*, 93.

which in turn founds unity back again.<sup>15</sup> He conceives of an essence of life that is the movement of a universal existence; "the play and movement embodies itself in a multiplicity of forms, a variation of tendencies, an interplay of energies."<sup>16</sup>

Togetherness is present in nature. In *Concept of Nature*, Whitehead focuses on the bifurcation of nature. It consists in considering two different natures, instead of one nature, whole and cohesive. There is one nature, which is submitted to causal mechanisms, and another that includes human beings as self-determining. The bifurcation of nature is the unfortunate result of confusing "what the mind knows of nature" with "what nature does to the mind"<sup>17</sup>. This distinction about what is in nature and what is in the mind should not be considered as valid; it splits reality, which is one, into two different systems of actuality. It is interesting to note that in Aurobindo's doctrine, the bifurcation of nature is also clearly rejected. He writes in *The Life Divine*: "earth-existence cannot be the result of the human mind which is itself the result of earth-existence."<sup>18</sup> Now, if we bear in mind there is an irrevocable togetherness in the whole universe, we will find that solidarity precludes the bifurcation of nature. "Natural philosophy should never ask what is in the mind and what is in nature."<sup>19</sup>

As Whitehead says in *Concept of Nature*, nature is passage.<sup>20</sup> In *Modes of Thought* he writes: "there is no nature apart from transition, and there is no transition apart from temporal duration. This is the reason why the notion of an instant of time, conceived as a primary simple fact, is nonsense."<sup>21</sup> Every undertaking of nature requires other undertakings of nature, one leading into the other. Temporality seems to originate in this dynamic solidarity. There is a multiplicity of existences that intertwine and unite giving rise to the emergence of this inexhaustible duration of the universe. Their existence requires togetherness. In a process world, being in isolation is an absurdity. Aurobindo puts it in a slightly different way: "The evolution of human mind and life must necessarily lead towards an increasing universality."<sup>22</sup>

Whitehead describes the basic experience as referring to others. Primary worth is the very foundation of our existence.<sup>23</sup> Original experience takes value into

<sup>15</sup> *The Life Divine*, 65-67, 161-162.

<sup>16</sup> *The Life Divine*, 65.

<sup>17</sup> *Concept of Nature*, 27.

<sup>18</sup> *Concept of Nature*, 249.

<sup>19</sup> *Concept of Nature*, 29-30.

<sup>20</sup> *Concept of Nature*, 54.

<sup>21</sup> *Modes of Thought*, 152.

<sup>22</sup> *The Life Divine*, 1093.

<sup>23</sup> *Modes of Thought*, 109.

consideration. It is but a vague experience. The feeling of worth comes with the vagueness of first experience and with its differentiation from other value experiences. Clear perception is not a primary experience. The vague feeling of primary experience allows for differentiation and for some kind of individualisation. In Whitehead's words, "the notion of worth is not to be construed in a purely eulogistic sense. It is the sense of existence for its own sake, of existence which is its own justification, of existence with its own character. [...] The fundamental basis of this description is that our experience is a value experience, expressing a vague sense of maintenance or discard; and that this value experience differentiates itself in the sense of many existences with value experience; and that this sense of the multiplicity of value experiences again differentiates it into the totality of value experience, and the many other value experiences and the egoistic value experience. There is the feeling of the ego, the others, the totality. This is the vague, basic presentation of the differentiation of existence [...]"<sup>24</sup>

Experience is thus a realisation of worth, be it positive or negative. And actuality is worth in itself. There is a vague sense of importance that differentiates and individualises the actual occasion from the totality from which it emerges, and also from every other emerging actual occasion. Eventually, an actual entity is both its own means of attainment and its own end. In the completion of this temporal process of self-development, a sense of worth is beyond the actual entity itself and manifested in self-attainment.<sup>25</sup> Initial worth is vague and indefinite, but final worth enriches and surpasses self-realisation. Value experience thus both constitutes and transcends the actual entity.

"Everything has some value for itself, for others, and for the whole."<sup>26</sup> Togetherness is the very foundation of value. No worth is to be found by itself and for itself. Worth always emerges in relation to others; existence emerges likewise. No existence is to be found by itself and for itself. Worth and existence are both instances of togetherness. Solidarity is the character of the actual world. The elements of the world are not separable and comprise a unity. Solidarity is thus a kind of ontological allegiance to reality, for there is no other true way of existence.

Western civilisation mainly conceives of a world composed of differentiated elements that can be taken apart and assembled back together with no inconvenience to the whole. Each part taken *per se* is separate and unrelated to others. It can be analysed and envisaged by itself, for "it requires nothing but itself in order to exist."

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<sup>24</sup> *Modes of Thought*, 109-110.

<sup>25</sup> *Process and Reality*, 350 [531].

<sup>26</sup> *Modes of Thought*, 111.

It is often combined with other pieces making up a whole; the sum of these separate elements makes up a totality that is reduced to the very addition of its parts. The whole is thus equal to the sum of its parts. Each part is self-sufficient; it can take advantage of other elements in the constitution of the world to improve its own performance in the actual world. In the absence of any relationship to other elements, each component is thus at ease to appropriate and make use of others with no concern for their common origination. This kind of appropriation may imply the exhaustion and destruction of important parts of a totality. These parts are not just one more addition to a set of pieces; they have a particular worth. Taken by themselves they may seem destitute of any value, for they have been torn apart from their original source. As they were integral parts of this source, the source itself is depleted. Taking one part away from the whole destroys the relationship between whole and part. It is not a mere decrease in quantity, but a question of quality and integrity. Loss of integrity means that a coherent whole no longer exists, because there was 'an arbitrary disconnection'<sup>27</sup> of fundamental elements of reality.

Process philosophers other than Whitehead have emphasised the importance of the whole over its parts. Henri Bergson argued the whole holds more than the sum of its parts; for instance, an idea already contains the whole of the image that grows out of it and thus materialises it. By dividing a whole spatially we get the parts that compose it. However, the idea is complete and originates from itself, not from the successive parts to which we can reduce it by way of our intellect.<sup>28</sup> He writes: "there is an ideal scheme of the whole, and this scheme is neither an extract nor a summary. It is as complete as the image will be when called up, but it contains, in the estate of reciprocal implication, what the image will evolve into parts external to one another."<sup>29</sup> As a matter of fact, the idea includes more than what results from it. The same applies to movement and meaning. Movement is more than the points of a trajectory into which it can be decomposed; likewise, words draw their meaning from the whole context from which they emerge, through the relations which they express in the whole.<sup>30</sup>

Others, like Aurobindo, consider our consciousness as causing division: "In our separative consciousness, imperfectly visited by glimpses of catholicity and universality, [...] things exist as opposites."<sup>31</sup> Division leads to the denial of

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<sup>27</sup> *Process and Reality*, 6 [9].

<sup>28</sup> Cf. « L'effort intellectuel » in *L'énergie spirituelle*.

<sup>29</sup> "Intellectual Effort" in *Mind-Energy*, 198-199.

<sup>30</sup> *Mind-Energy*, 208.

<sup>31</sup> *The Life Divine*, 299.

togetherness and enhances the separative principle. Nishida regards the unifying experience as foundational. He writes: "Only when there is a unifying self does nature have a goal, take on significance, and become a truly living nature. [...] we immediately grasp a certain unifying reality in the whole."<sup>32</sup>

Wholeness relates thus to worth, the value of any existent in virtue of its very existence, which founds itself on the worth of the world. The value of the world is based on the solidarity of all creatures. Everything has some value in a world of togetherness. And everything relates its worthiness to the value of everything else. "We have no right to deface the value experience which is the very essence of the universe. Existence, in its own nature, is the upholding of value intensity. Also no unit can separate itself from the others, and from the whole. And yet each unit exists in its own right. It upholds value intensity for itself, and this involves sharing value intensity with the universe. Everything that in any sense exists has two sides, namely, its individual self and its signification in the universe. Also either of these aspects is a factor in the other."<sup>33</sup> Value intensity concerns the individual as well as the whole universe.

In process thought, morality thus emerges from the universe because value is found at its very core. Value has an ontological nature. Existents come into being as value entities; the sheer fact of existence carries value with it. In this way, ethical principles are grounded on an ontological foundation, which is the sole source of their legitimacy.

In the Whiteheadian system, the ontological foundation of ethics relies on the ontological categories. Ethics is no separate philosophical subject because morality is inherent to the world, i.e. order is ontological. If value is constitutive of being, then there is no positive need for prescribing rules. Value emerges as beings come into existence. Their particular modes of being accommodate value, so that value is immanent to reality and morality elicited from its different modes of being. Process aims at greater intensities of value. Freedom and novelty stand at the root of this continued creation of novel value intensities. The community of existents originates worthier forms of experience. There is a sort of "righteousness in the nature of things"<sup>34</sup> that is quite revealing. The conformity to this righteousness gives rise to harmony in the actual world; and the deviation from rightness gives rise to evil.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *An Inquiry into the Good*, 71.

<sup>33</sup> *Modes of Thought*, 111.

<sup>34</sup> *Religion in the Making*, 63.

<sup>35</sup> *Religion in the Making*, 61-62.

Evil is destruction and degradation aiming at elimination. It is descent towards worthlessness.<sup>36</sup> However, "harmony is limitation", in so far as 'unlimited possibility' is fruitless. Value emerges from this restriction. "Thus rightness of limitation is essential for growth of reality."<sup>37</sup> Harmony introduces order into reality, so that actual occasions share a common background that gives them unity. They cannot be torn away from their background. Their isolation and uprooting violates the nature of things, disrupts the process of nature and causes relentless evil. The harmonious growth of reality is the only mode of being consentaneous with process.

The creatures of process create themselves. As they come into being, they modify their environment but they must remain an integral part of it. Actual occasions are self-determining; and in so being are responsible for themselves, and for their reflection onto the actual world. "The point to be noticed is that the actual entity, in a state of process during which it is not fully definite, determines its own ultimate definiteness. This is the whole point of moral responsibility."<sup>38</sup>

Actual entities have value for themselves, for each other and for the actual world taken as a community that is whole. Togetherness between the individual and the world demands a convergence and intensification of values. Harmony emerges from such an adjustment and strengthening of values. In Whitehead's words, this is called 'world-loyalty.'<sup>39</sup>

Eco-Sophia, the wisdom of living together with all creatures in our home of individual and common existence leads us to ourselves as individuals, and also to a community of beings that includes all existents. The worth of these beings generates an ontic praxis that does away with normative ethics. It strengthens solidarity amongst beings and encourages self-realisation. The world, composed of a diversity of individuals, remains whole and entire. It includes all existents in togetherness. The world emerges as an undivided, all-encompassing process wherein all constituents are also whole and all-inclusive. Individualisation does not preclude togetherness and differs greatly from separateness. Immanence and transcendence come together in so far as

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<sup>36</sup> *Religion in the Making*, 95-96.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *Science and the Modern World*, 94.

<sup>38</sup> *Process and Reality*, 255 [390].

<sup>39</sup> *Religion in the Making*, 60.

<sup>40</sup> *Science and the Modern World*, 206.



actual entities present themselves as wholes that integrate the actual world, and as individualisations that are unique and add onto the world community.

As our civilisation comes closer and closer to a dead end after centuries of rapacious assault on nature, Whitehead's words acquire renewed significance: "Every organism requires an environment of friends, partly to shield it from violent changes, and partly to supply it with its wants."<sup>40</sup> "Thus each occasion, although engaged in its own immediate self-realisation, is concerned with the universe."<sup>41</sup>



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<sup>40</sup> *Modes of Thought*, 167.