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CLARE PALMER

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Introduction

> One theological school in the West claims to have an intellectual alternative to the errors of classical Western metaphysics which brought on the alienation of humanity from nature and hence the eco crisis. Process theology therefore should be listened to with respect.
>
> (Mar Gregorias, 1980: 39)

WHILE Paulos Mar Gregorias follows this remark with substantial reservations about the metaphysics of process theology, he does not revoke his view that process thinking offers an intellectual approach peculiarly equipped to tackle what has become known as the eco crisis. In holding this view he is not alone. Prominent North American process theologians, such as Charles Hartshorne and John Cobb, as well as others working in the tradition of process thinking, have produced a number of publications advocating a process approach to environmental questions.[1] However, little has been published from outside the process tradition that critically examines this aspect of process thinking, in particular the interpretation of environmental ethics which might flow from it.[2] Indeed, some writers have expressed confusion (not without reason, as I shall argue) about exactly what the implications of a process approach to environmental ethics might be: 'It is quite unclear what kind of ethical relations could emerge with respect to the homunculi which inhabit 'occasions of experience' or how this esoteric reformulation is supposed to make a difference to our everyday behaviour' (Plumwood 1993: 130). This book aims to respond both to claims about the environmental significance of

[1] Hartshorne 1974*a*, 1979, 1981; Cobb 1973, 1979; Birch and Cobb 1981; Cobb and Daly 1990. This is by no means a complete listing.

[2] Sessions (Devall and Sessions 1985: 236–42) is critical of the environmental aspect of process thinking in his essay 'Western Process Metaphysics (Heraclitus, Whitehead, Spinoza)'. Some aspects of process thinking are also attacked (although a quasi-process position is adopted) in Keffer, King, and Kraft (1991: 23–47). Plumwood (1993: 130 offers a brief critique of process thinking based on what she argues is its human-hierarchical nature, a criticism to which I will return.

process thinking, and to questions about what the ethical implications of process thinking about the environment might be.

There are, undoubtedly, a number of ways of approaching such a project. I chose to begin by testing out some of the basic ethical themes of process thinking (Chapter 1) and thereafter adopted a largely comparative methodology, where interpretations of environmental ethics from within the process tradition were laid alongside other major approaches within environmental ethics. I called these approaches (in rather clumsy terminology) individualist consequentialist (Chapter 2), individualist deontological (Chapter 3), and collectivist consequentialist (Chapter 4). In Chapter 5, process thinking was compared with a philosophical movement which claims to 'go beyond ethics': that of deep ecology. This seemed an important comparison, both because deep ecology is an important popular movement in environmental philosophy, and because of the claims which are made by some deep ecologists concerning their links with process thinking.

The adoption of this comparative method throughout the book means that process thinking can be used to interrogate—and can be interrogated by—other approaches to environmental ethics, similarities and differences in approach can be characterized, and the vulnerability of process thinking to criticisms made of other environmental ethical approaches can be assessed. Such a method avoids the difficulties of judging process thinking against one single and absolute ethical standard, substituting instead a number of dialogues between process thinking and other environmental ethical positions. This method also throws up a number of questions, not only about the ways in which process thinking can address environmental issues, but also about the problems raised by any single, all-embracing approach to environmental ethics. Thus, in conclusion, the potential for more pluralistic approaches to environmental ethics is considered.

This comparative approach to process thinking and environmental ethics, together with the space limitations of a book, has resulted in a focus on a relatively small area both of process philosophy and of environmental ethics. I have concentrated on the later philosophical texts of A. N. Whitehead for my basic understanding of process thinking, although I have tried to take account of occasions when later process philosophers (in particular Hartshorne) have rejected or significantly developed Whitehead's

thought. In the knowledge that Whitehead's philosophical ideas were still crystallizing in 1925 and the years subsequent to this, I have not quoted from his earlier philosophical writing about issues on which he later changed his mind.[3] I have also referred extensively to more recent writing by Hartshorne, Cobb, Jay McDaniel, and Daniel Dombrowski, which specifically discusses process thinking and the non-human natural world. I have also concentrated in this book on a small (if significant) group of positions in environmental ethics. This has resulted in the neglect of some important understandings of environmental ethics (such as those stemming from ecofeminism) and in the truncation of the presentation of some other approaches (in particular those of Lawrence Johnson and Robin Attfield). This restriction is a matter of regret, but also of necessity.

This book aims to examine process thinking in relation to environmental ethics. As such, it does not focus on wider issues—for example, process interpretations of the nature of being—although such questions are touched upon in Chapter 5.[4] Neither does it attempt to judge the truth or otherwise of claims by process thinkers about the presence of actual occasions of experience throughout a teleological universe. Such claims have been disputed elsewhere. Here the focus is primarily on the ethics of process thinking, and the environmental implications of such an ethical approach. I have written this book in the belief that, given the widespread assumption of the ecological significance of process thinking, such a critical study is now overdue.

[3] For a full analysis of Whitehead's changing views, see Ford (1984).
[4] Gare (1995) has developed process metaphysics in this direction.

I

Process Thinking, the Creation of Value, and Approaches to Ethics

> I suggest that you take as a model for your essay on Whitehead's moral philosophy a well-known treatise on the Snakes of Ireland.
>
> (Schillp 1951: 593)

This response, received by Paul Schillp when he announced his intention to write a paper on Whitehead's moral thinking, is an understandable one. Whitehead's primary concern in his later philosophical work was not moral philosophy, but the construction of a new metaphysics. It is to this task that his philosophical thinking was dedicated, and he never attempted to construct an ethical system. Ethics were, in this sense, secondary to his purpose.

The secondary nature of ethics in Whitehead's system means that precise details of the source of value, and consequently of his ethical position, can be obscure, and need on occasion to be teased out. Broadly speaking, however, an evaluative structure does flow from Whitehead's process metaphysics, a structure developed by other process thinkers, in particular Charles Hartshorne. In this chapter, I will consider the ways in which value is generated in Whitehead's system, entailing a brief examination of the formation of the 'actual occasion' or 'entity' and Whitehead's understanding of the nature of God. I will also consider some developments of Whitehead's position by Hartshorne. I will then move on to consider the human, macro-level of ethics which is underpinned by this process understanding of value. Resemblances between this ethical system and that of utilitarian ethical systems will be considered—in particular that of J. S. Mill. This opens the way, in Chapter 2, to examine the more recent consequentialist systems consciously constructed to take the non-human world into account. These similarities raise the question of whether process thinking is open to the same criticisms as utilitarianism, and in particular whether it shares with utilitarian systems a difficulty

in coming to terms with many of the problems generated by environmental ethics. This examination will provide a foundation for the comparison of process thinking with other approaches to environmental ethics in Chapters 3 and 4.

The Actual Occasion

The 'actual occasion', or 'actual entity' (broadly, Whitehead uses these terms synonymously), is the fundamental component of Whitehead's system, and of all process systems that originate in a Whiteheadian context. As Whitehead (1978: 18[1]) states: '"Actual entities"... are the final real things of which the world is made up. There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real.' Everything which is actual in the universe is an actual occasion or is composed from actual occasions. Describing actual occasions is, however, difficult. Whitehead's first description of them in *Process and Reality* is as 'drops of experience, complex and interdependent' (ibid.).

In characterizing actual occasions as 'drops', Whitehead uses language directly dependent on that of William James.[2] It is, none the less, a peculiarly apt expression for his own position. The word 'drop' first suggests the spatial extension which actual occasions possess: 'Every actuality in the temporal world is to be credited with a spatial volume for its perspective standpoint' (ibid. 68). Secondly, it indicates a degree of discreteness, of self-completion. This is central to Whitehead's system—but should not be misinterpreted. An actual occasion is discrete as far as its contemporary occasions are concerned; 'contemporary events happen in causal independence of one another' (ibid. 61). Time is atomic, being composed from distinguishable and extended drops. This does not mean that any single actual occasion is unaffected by *past* actual occasions; they are vital to its formation. A third suggestion conveyed by the image of a 'drop' is that of constant process and growth, up to a point of fullness: 'Each actual thing is only to be understood in terms of its becoming and perishing. There is no halt

[1] All references are to the corrected edition.

[2] James (1911: ch. 10). Ford (1984: 52, 64) points out that Whitehead had developed his epochal theory of time before he came across James's description of experience 'growing by buds or drops of perception'.

in which the actuality is its static self, accidentally played upon by qualifications derived from the shift of circumstances. The converse is the truth' (Whitehead 1948). However, this statement also requires careful qualification. The fact that the actual occasion is a process does not, for Whitehead, mean that it is divisible, that at any point it has a past, present, or future. To understand this requires a closer examination of the nature of the actual occasion.

Actual occasions are, Whitehead argues, the drops of experience at the most fundamental level of the universe. This assertion forms part of Whitehead's case against dualism, and his rejection of the Cartesian view that the human mind is the only location of subjectivity in the created world. Human experience is not radically different from the rest of the natural world; it rather reflects the way that the world actually is.[3] Indeed, at root, Whitehead derives his concept of actual occasions from his understanding of human experience. Human experience is a very selective manifestation of the general experience of actual occasions. 'Consciousness', Whitehead (1978: 267) remarks 'is the crown of experience, only occasionally attained, not its necessary base.' Consciousness is a narrowing and a focusing, a highlighting of particular areas of experience, to the exclusion of more general experience. Actual occasions themselves, while they have subjectivity, have no consciousness.[4]

An actual occasion has no existence outside its own becoming. Being *is* becoming. Once an occasion is no longer in the process of coming to be, it has perished. There is 'no halt in which the actuality is its static self'; or, as A. H. Johnson (1983: 35) puts it: 'All you have are the processes of growth towards actual entityhood and the demise of actual entities. In a sense you don't have an actual entity as such, because you never catch one complete. It is either coming or going—never here.' Thus it is essential to consider the constituents and the development of actual occasions in order to understand them.

[3] In this subjectivization of the natural world, Whitehead is following a long-standing Continental philosophical tradition. Eagleton's (1990: 131) comments about Hegel's system 'modelling Nature itself after the freely self-generative subject, thus grounding that subject in a world whose structure it shares', could equally be made of Whitehead.

[4] For a detailed explanation, see Cobb (1966: 39).

The Development of Actual Occasions

Whitehead proposes that certain vital components make any actual occasion what it is: temporally preceding actual occasions which have now perished; eternal objects; the initial aim provided by the primordial nature of God; the consequent nature of God; and the subjectivity of the actual occasion itself. I will consider these constituents in turn.

Each actual occasion comes to be in the cradle of other, perished actual occasions. These perished occasions provide objective data which the currently actualizing occasion can incorporate into itself. The actualizing occasion is said to *feel* or *prehend* these perished actual occasions. However, it is not obliged to absorb all of them into itself. It may negatively prehend an objectified actual occasion, which means that it may exclude it. Every actualizing (or, in Whitehead's preferred term, concrescing) occasion prehends, either positively or negatively, every preceding actual occasion in the universe: 'An actual entity has a perfectly definite bond with every item in the Universe' (Whitehead 1978: 41). However, most of these are felt 'vaguely', providing a kind of background for the concrescing occasion.

Eternal objects provide a second kind of data for the actual occasion. Whitehead describes them as 'pure potentials for the determination of fact' (ibid. 22). They are abstract potentials for things which might be actualized: colours or shapes for instance. It is impossible to avoid a comparison between eternal objects and Platonic forms, but there are crucial differences between them. For Plato, it is the Form which is real, while for Whitehead and process thinkers in general, it is the *actual* which is real, and the abstract eternal object is dependent on the actual for instantiation. As Pols (1967: 7) points out, eternal objects ingress (into the actual world) and are meant to ingress; they do not, like Platonic Forms, have a life of their own. By its very nature, an actual occasion may only actualize some of the total array of eternal objects: for instance, it cannot actualize two different colours simultaneously. The context in which the actual occasion comes to birth also limits the eternal objects it may actualize. Only certain eternal objects are relevant to any one actual occasion: for example, the colour spectrum is not relevant to an actual occasion which forms part of something transparent. Relevant and compatible eternal objects, however,

together with the array of perishing actual occasions which surround the concrescing actual occasion, constitute two of the factors involved in the creation of the actual occasion.

It is important to notice that Whitehead's concept of eternal objects is not accepted by all process thinkers. Hartshorne (1970: 59), for example, considers that eternal objects are regrettably Platonic, commenting: 'I do not believe that a determinate colour is something haunting reality from eternity, as it were, begging for instantiation, nor that God primordially envisages a set of such qualities.' Rather than these 'eternal universals, independent of time' Hartshorne (ibid. 64) suggests, following the philosopher Peirce, that all specific qualities are emergent and time-dependent. He comments, 'Something like this blue can occur over and over again, but not precisely this blue. Particular qualities in their absolute definiteness are irreducibly relational and historical.'

To consider the remaining constituents of the actual occasion, we will first have to examine Whitehead's understanding of God.

God in Whitehead's System

In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead presents his concept of God in its most developed form.[5] First, God is described as an actual entity, as is everything that is actual: 'God is an actual entity, and so is the most trivial puff of existence in far off space' (1978: 18).[6] For Whitehead, God is dipolar, with two aspects: a *primordial* nature and a *consequent* nature. The primordial nature is 'free, complete, primordial, eternal, actually deficient and unconscious' (ibid. 345). It is abstract and conceptual, 'the unlimited conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of potentiality' (ibid. 343). While the primordial nature of God does not create eternal objects ('his nature requires them in the same degree that they require him'), it orders them according to their relevance to each concrescing actual occasion. In this sense, the primordial nature *lures* each actual occasion

[5] See Ford (1984: 101–2) for detail on the way in which Whitehead's concept of God may have developed. It is worth noting, however, that Hartshorne does not accept Whitehead's description of God as an actual entity.

[6] See also (1978: 356). Suchoki (1988) argues, from a process perspective, that the subjectivity of actual occasions may be retained in the consequent nature of God. This position is a considerable development of Whitehead's thought, and I will not consider it further here.

to concresce in accordance with the ordering presented to it by God. This is what can be described as the initial aim, which determines 'the initial gradations of relevance of eternal objects for conceptual feeling; and constitutes the autonomous subject in its primary phase of feelings with its initial conceptual valuations [i.e. of eternal objects] and with its initial physical purposes' (ibid. 244). The consequent nature of God, in contrast, is 'determined, incomplete, consequent, "everlasting", fully actual and conscious'; 'the objectification of the world in God' (ibid. 345–6). In the consequent nature God feels the world and is affected by it. Every new occasion adds to the consequent nature; hence this aspect of God, in contrast with the primordial nature, is always incomplete, always growing and changing. Thus the experiences of the actual occasions in the world become part of God, and, while their immediate subjectivity has perished, they are preserved, or 'saved' objectively within the consequent nature of God.[7]

Whitehead describes the consequent nature of God as 'the weaving of his physical feelings onto his primordial concepts' (ibid. 345). This suggests that the consequent nature can be thought of as the integration of God's physical feelings of the actual world with the conceptual feelings of the primordial nature. Thus in his consequent nature God contains a conceptual awareness of possibility, as well as the physical feeling of actuality. It is the 'subjective form of this feeling of contrast' (between the 'in fact' and 'might be') which Whitehead describes as consciousness. The use of the term 'weaving' here indicates another important element of God's consequent nature. In the consequent nature, the multiplicity of objective actual entities are woven together in an ultimate harmony of patterned contrasts, which are felt by God. This will be of some significance in the consideration of value in Whitehead's system.

Whitehead also suggests, at the end of *Process and Reality*, that the consequent nature of God 'passes back into the temporal world, so that each actual entity includes it as an immediate fact of relevant experience' (ibid. 351). How this is possible is a subject of some discussion in process thinking. Ross (1983), for example, maintains that this cannot consistently happen within Whitehead's system. Hartshorne (1970: 277), however, develops this aspect of Whitehead's thought by suggesting that God and the world reflect

[7] Cobb (1966: 153); Pols (1967: 42); Ross (1983: 74).

(and enhance) one another's feelings. Whitehead himself does not examine in detail the effects on actual entities of prehending the consequent nature of God. Presumably the ability to feel the rich harmony of God's consequent nature enhances the potential satisfaction available to every actual entity. This in turn has value implications, which will be considered later.

The Initial Aim, and the Subjectivity of the Actual Occasion

Consideration of the aim of the actual occasion is a complex and difficult one in process studies, as many of Whitehead's interpreters agree.[8] Whitehead himself is not entirely clear what role he considers the aim of the occasion to play. As we have seen, he certainly speaks of an *initial aim* supplied by the primordial nature of God to the actual occasion. To make sense of this, of course, we will have to develop this consideration of the initial aim in the context of Whitehead's understanding of God.

The initial aim presents to the actual occasion a range of possibilities which it may choose to actualize. This initial aim is taken over by the subjective aim of the concrescing occasion itself, which, ultimately, makes what was potential become concrete and real. Thus, the initial aim of God—which grades the eternal objects—together with the actual world of perished actual occasions, 'jointly constitute the character of the creativity for the initial phase of the novel concrescence' (Whitehead 1978: 245).

The subjectivity of the actual occasion finally makes potentiality actual. Characteristic of the actual occasion is its freedom, or autonomy. Ultimately, the decision about self- actualization is freely made by the concrescing occasion, within its necessary contextual constraints—'no actual entity can rise beyond what the actual world as a datum from its standpoint—its actual world—allows it to be' (ibid. 83). It is important that the initial aim provided by the primordial nature of God, luring the occasion on to actualization, is seen as persuasive, rather than coercive. The occasion is never obliged to concresce in any particular way; it is a 'self-creating creature'.

Whitehead speaks of the *phases* of the actual occasion, internal stages in its self-actualization. This is problematic, since, as we

[8] This problem is tackled with great lucidity by Pols (1967: 42).

have seen, he insists that an actual occasion is indivisible. It appears that the phases of the occasion occur, in some sense, outside time; that the discrete occasion is what time is, what time is made from, as an indivisible whole.[9] Whitehead describes these phases as the conformal phase and the supplemental phase. The conformal phase of the actual occasion is composed from physical feelings of initial data: it can be called the physical pole of the actual occasion. These feelings are largely repetition of the data already existing in the world; the physical pole 'conforms' to the past. In contrast, the supplemental phase is composed from conceptual feelings of eternal objects; it can be called the mental pole of the actual occasion. It is here that originality or novelty can be generated, where new eternal objects are combined with physical feelings from already existing data to produce a new whole. Thus, the subjective aim of the actual occasion selects a combination of physical and conceptual feelings in order to generate its own, complete, subjectivity. Different actual occasions, however, coming to be in different contexts, have widely varying emphases on the physical and mental poles. The stronger the mental pole, the greater the degree of novelty possible; the stronger the physical pole, the more the occasion repeats, or conforms to, what already exists.

This examination of physical and mental poles, and degrees of novelty and repetition, provides a background to a consideration of the value generated by an actual occasion.

Process Thinking and Value

The Use of Intrinsic Value

Before examining Whitehead's understanding of value generation, it is important to clarify how I will be using the term 'intrinsic value'. This term has caused considerable confusion within (and outside!) environmental ethics. O'Neill (1993) has identified three main uses of the term: *Intrinsic Value 1 (IV1)*—non-instrumental value, something being an end in itself (value can be subjective or

[9] Ross makes a number of apposite comments here about major differences between God and other actual entities in Whitehead's work. These include the inability of God to negatively prehend objective actual occasions, and the need for all actual occasions to be equally relevant to God. As pointed out in n. 5, Hartshorne entirely rejects the idea that God can be seen as an actual entity.

objective); *Intrinsic Value 2* (*IV2*)—value an object has in virtue of its intrinsic properties, non-relational value (a use associated with G. E. Moore); and *Intrinsic Value 3* (*IV3*)—objective value, value independent of any valuer. This classification, whilst not definitive, is a useful one. I will generally be using intrinsic value in the *IV1* sense identified by O'Neill—to indicate non-instrumental value. This conflicts with the usage of some environmental ethicists; where confusion may arise from this, I shall indicate in the text.

Intrinsic Value and the Actual Occasion

At the most fundamental level in Whitehead's system, what is actual generates intrinsic (non-instrumental) value, and since actuality is exclusively composed from actual entities, just by existing, actual entities generate intrinsic value. As Whitehead (1926: 100) comments: 'Value is inherent in actuality itself.' The locus of this value is the subjectivity or experience of the actual entities. To exist, in Whitehead's system, is to have some kind of self-enjoyment and thus, self-valuation:

> ... we see at once that the element of value, of being valuable, of having value in itself, of being an end to itself, of being something which is for its own sake, must not be omitted in any account of an event as the most concrete actual something. Value is a word I use for the intrinsic reality of an event. (Whitehead 1938*a*: 117)

Actual entities are the location of intrinsic value, and intrinsic value is located in, and only in, what is actual. Even the graded eternal objects envisaged by the primordial nature of God have only potential value. It is only when actualized that eternal objects have actual value. The identification of value with actuality means that value can only be present in the universe in the actual entities—and in the consequent nature of God.

God, of course, is vital to the generation of value in Whitehead's system. The consequent nature of God, as actual and conscious, generates intrinsic value within the universe on a different scale to that generated by all other concrescing actual entities. All actual entities contribute to God's consequent nature; the way in which an occasion actualizes itself, and thus the value it produces, affects God's own actualization and the intrinsic value God generates. God's aim in the universe is at the 'fulfilment of his own being'

(Whitehead 1978: 105). Since God's consequent nature is constantly growing, there can never be a time at which God reaches a completed state of fulfilment. The consequent nature 'can reach no final maximum, but is endlessly capable of increase' (Hartshorne 1970: 310). The aim is at maximum possible fulfilment in each fleeting moment of time. To speak of the maximum possible fulfilment of God at any time is the same as to speak of the maximum generation of intrinsic value at any time. The greater the intrinsic value generated by actual entities, the greater the intrinsic value possible for God, and thus the more fulfilled God's being may be.

Although intrinsic value is created by all that is actual, and thus contributes to God's fulfilment, all actual entities do not generate the same amount of value. To understand this, we need to know in more detail what Whitehead regards to be ultimately fulfilling to God's being. In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead (1978: 105) states that 'God's purpose in the creative advance is the evocation of intensities.' It is this which is ultimately fulfilling, and thus the amount of value an actual entity produces is dependent on the intensity of feeling it can produce for itself and for God. The more intensity it can produce, the more valuable it is.

How, then, do actual entities produce intensity for God's being? The first form of intensity Whitehead (1978: 102) discusses one might call 'trivial' or 'low-grade'. It is produced by narrowness. This occurs when actual entities, in the process of concrescing, 'block out all unwelcome detail', negatively prehending (excluding) all novel data. Thus each new actual entity closely repeats the old. There is, as Whitehead says, 'no originality in conceptual prehension'. This form of intensity, which Whitehead says is characteristic of what we know as material bodies, does not contribute significantly to God's intensity of feeling, though it does demonstrate some 'enhancement of the mental pole'.

The second form of intensity Whitehead discusses one might call 'creative' or 'high-grade' intensity. It is produced primarily by depth of contrast within concrescing actual occasions, usually derived from the prehension of novel data. The ability of an actual occasion to produce such intensity is largely dependent on the strength of its mental pole or supplementary phase. As we have seen, the physical pole, or conformal phase, of the actual occasion largely repeats the data which already exists in the world around it. In some actual occasions, the physical pole is extremely strong,

outweighing the weak mental pole. Such occasions fail to integrate new eternal objects into their experience. Other occasions have a strong mental pole, with conceptual, as well as physical feelings, and integrate new eternal objects into their actualization to make a new synthesis.

However, caution is needed in explanation here. It is not because the synthesis achieved by occasions with a strong mental pole is new that it is valuable, it is because it provokes intensity. Originality or novelty is not in itself valuable, nor does it *necessarily* generate more value, as the process thinker Pols (1967: 67) points out: 'While it is true that novelty is a necessary condition for the heightening of intensity, it is not true that each novelty is a sufficient condition for the heightening of intensity.' Novelty is essential for change to happen; without novelty, there would be only repetition. However, novelty is necessary but not sufficient for creative advance. The aim of advance is greater satisfaction, which is expressed by Whitehead (1978: 83) as intensity of experience: 'the end is concerned with the gradations of intensity in the satisfactions of actual occasions'. The more intense the experience, the more it is valued by the actual occasion, and hence by God.

It is not, however, pure intensity that is of value. Intensity must be ordered, rather than chaotic. Chaotic or disordered intensity is intensity generated by conflicts or incompatibilities within the feeling of an actual occasion, caused when an occasion prehends conflicting perished actual occasions or eternal objects. Ordered or harmonized intensity is composed from *contrasts*, rather than *conflicts*. An actual occasion which produces a high level of ordered intensity is described by Whitehead as 'beautiful'. Other occasions, however, produce intense but inharmonious experience (aesthetic destruction) or harmonious but unintense experience (triviality). An intense experience which lacks harmony is described by Whitehead (1948: 295) as 'the feeling of evil in the most general sense, namely physical pain and mental evil, such as sorrow, horror, dislike'. Conversely, a harmonious experience which lacks intensity is described as 'the loss of the higher experience in favour of the lower experience' (Whitehead 1926: 95). In humans, triviality can be described as 'degradation—the comparison of what is with what might have been'.

Whitehead also suggests (although does not fully develop) a third way in which the intensity of God's feeling is enhanced:

God's feeling *about* the actual occasions concrescing within the universe. This relates closely to Whitehead's (1978: 110) understanding of God as an actual entity with an existence 'not generically different from that of other actual entities'. Like all actual entities, God has a 'perfectly definite bond with every item in the universe', and prehends objective actual occasions, synthesizing or 'weaving' them into a new unity.[10] Thus, as an actual entity, God not only feels the feelings of the actual occasions within the world, but can also feel contrasts between them. So within God as well as within all occasions, depth of contrast can enhance intensity of feeling, and contribute value to the universe.

It seems then that intensities for God, and hence value, can be produced in three ways in Whitehead's system. Most trivially, value is produced by 'narrowness'. The insignificance of this kind of value for process thinking is such that I will not be pursuing it further here. More profoundly, value is produced by ordered intensity in actual occasions felt by God, and by depth of contrast between actual occasions, also felt by God. One might summarize these by saying that value is generated both by God feeling the feelings of actual occasions, and by God having feelings *about* the feelings of actual occasions. The former of these has been the primary focus of study in process writing to date; the implications of the latter remain largely unexplored (although I shall look at them in more detail in this book). Whilst the difference between these sources of value creation may seem to be trivial, there are important implications here for value generation in Whitehead's philosophy, which will be developed later.

It will be clear from this description that value in Whitehead's system is aesthetic, rather than ethical. Ethical value, in process thinking, is a subset of aesthetic value. 'All order is therefore aesthetic order, and the moral order is merely certain aspects of the aesthetic order' (Whitehead 1926: 105). Aesthetic value is generated from harmony and intensity of experience; ethical value is defined, by Hartshorne (1984: 10), as 'not the value of

[10] Process ethics, like the majority of utilitarian systems, is totalizing as well as maximizing. Some utilitarian systems—in particular those developed with the ethical consideration of future generations in mind—aim at highest *average*, rather than highest *total* utility overall. This is still a maximizing approach. Process thinking, however, is clearly a totalizing approach, since the consequent nature of God integrates and sums all experience. I will only be discussing similarly totalizing approaches in this book.

experiences themselves, but rather the instrumental value of acting so as to increase the intrinsic value of future experiences of those of others than oneself'. Ethical acts (only possible for 'conscious' beings, rather than for the actual occasion, which lacks consciousness) are those which generate the greatest aesthetic value overall. This may mean the sacrifice of some present harmonious intensity, in order to generate greater harmonious intensity in the future; the renunciation of some aesthetic value now, in order to generate more total aesthetic value.

At the level of actual occasions, where to speak of 'ethics' is inappropriate, the initial aim provided by the primordial nature of God takes into account what one might call the 'ethical interest'. That is to say, the initial aim points towards the best possible actualization for that occasion—a 'patterned intensity of feeling arising from adjusted contrasts'—in the light of the effect of such an actualization on other, future occasions (Whitehead 1978: 244). As Cobb (1966: 128) expresses it: 'The initial aim is always that aim at the ideal harmony possible for that occasion. It is the aim at a balance between the intensity of that occasion's experience and its contribution beyond itself.' This does not mean that the occasion is determined by the initial aim. Some indeterminations are always present, to be decided by the freedom of the actual occasion. But even so, it is clear that actual occasions do not always actualize in accordance with the initial aim; that is to say, not every actual occasion produces maximum harmonious intensity, taking into account the effect on future occasions. This is because the subjective aim of the actual occasion, into which the initial aim is absorbed, can, through the phases of the occasion, modify the initial aim.

This, however, generates its own difficulty, aptly summarized by Randall Morris:

> The freedom of the actual entity would appear to reside in the ability of the actual entity to modify its initial aim, to make some specific aim its own. However, since the initial aim includes a specific ideal, which is God's ideal for that occasion, the data and location of which the actual entity initially conforms to, must we not conclude that any modification is, in fact, degradation? (Morris 1986: 23)

Presenting the initial aim as a range of possibilities may be intended to resolve this difficulty, but as Morris correctly suggests, one of the possibilities must produce maximum harmonious

intensity, and so must be preferred over others as the specific ideal for that occasion. Thus the concept of a range of possibilities within the initial aim just pushes the problem one step back. The conclusion which can be drawn from this is that the greatest fulfilment possible for the actual occasion is to conform to the aim presented to it by God; that is, to act so that maximum total harmonious and rich experience is generated for the consequent nature of God, despite the possible sacrifice of harmonious and intense experience which this might entail for the occasion itself. Thus, if the occasion either concresces more trivially or more disharmoniously than it was possible for it; or if it chooses its own maximal harmonious and intense experience at the expense of future experience, it has failed to generate maximum possible value in the world. That less value is created does not, of course, mean that the occasion behaves unethically; ethics is only possible where experience becomes conscious, in humans and conceivably a few other mammal species. This value shortfall is, in a sense, the forerunner of ethics in the same way as the subjectivity of the actual occasion is the forerunner of consciousness. Ethics is the supreme and most developed form known of the decisions about concretion taken by the actual occasion.

Consideration of process ethics moves from the micro-level of value generation by actual occasions to the macro-level of the human being. In process thinking, human beings, like all other living and non-living objects, are societies of actual occasions. Together with some other mammals, they are marked by the peculiarly powerful mental poles of their constitutive actual occasions. This means that they have a high potential for the generation of harmonious and intense experience. This high-value potential of human beings, together with their ability to make ethical decisions, is of central importance in this study. But whether on a micro-or a macro-level, the ultimate aim is still to generate maximum harmonious and intense experience for the consequent nature of God. I will now move on to consider the ethics which might be engendered by such an approach.

Process Thinking and Utilitarianism

As we have seen, Whitehead's system is clearly teleological. The primordial nature of God acts in the world, luring the concrescing

actual occasions on to ever greater levels of harmony and intensity. These actual occasions, when they are complete, are absorbed into the consequent nature of God. Thus God, by acting in this persuasive manner in the world, lures it towards 'depth of satisfaction as an intermediate step towards the fulfilment of his own being'. The consequent nature of God is thus 'ever enlarging itself' to integrate all the actual occasions that have ever existed (Whitehead 1978: 349). Process thinking, then, subscribes to a contributory theory of value: all value generated by the harmony and intensity of the actual occasions, and by depth of contrast between them, contributes to God's consequent nature—a nature which, as we have seen, is endlessly capable of increase.

From this, certain characteristics of process ethics emerge. Since process thinking as a metaphysical system is teleological, so also is process ethics. Ethical behaviour consciously conforms with God's aim at harmonious intensity. Thus, process ethics is consequentialist: to behave ethically is to act in a way which produces the best consequences—the production of harmony and intensity of experience for the consequent nature of God. Process approaches to ethics thus contrast with deontological ethics, where ethical behaviour is determined by rules of right and wrong which are independent of their consequences. This consequentialist rather than deontological approach is of key significance. In addition to its consequentialist nature, process thinking is a maximizing ethical system. Within God is summed all valuable experience. The more value that is generated by actual occasions, the more fulfilment is possible for God's being. The ultimate aim of ethical behaviour is to produce the greatest possible value for the consequent nature of God.

In possessing the characteristics of consequentialism and value-maximization, process ethics is, in structure at least, similar to many utilitarian approaches, in particular classical utilitarianism.[11] What is important for utilitarianism is changes in states of affairs, that is to say, the process, rather than things in themselves. This is, Bernard Williams comments, due to the consequentialist nature of utilitarianism: 'I take it to be the central idea of consequentialism that the only kind of thing that has intrinsic value is states of affairs,

[11] The similarity is also noticed by Morris (1986: 124–6), who comments 'Morality consists in the maximization of experience. Each philosopher provides his own version of the principle of utility.'

and that anything else that has value has it because it conduces to some intrinsically valuable state of affairs' (Smart and Williams 1973: 83). Many utilitarian systems also aim at maximizing value or utility—however it might be defined—by achieving the best balance of good consequences over bad.

Thus some utilitarian and process approaches to ethics share several crucial methodological characteristics: those of consequentialism and value-maximization. Obviously, there are also important metaphysical differences, primarily that Whitehead's process system is theistic. In fact, the presence of the consequent nature of God summing experiences gives process thinking an anchor for its ethical perspective which is lacked by utilitarians, where locating a 'general good' is somewhat problematic (since there is nothing which corresponds to the sum of experience). A second metaphysical difference is the central role of the actual occasion in process thinking: human beings, and other sentient organisms, rather than being the primary individuals, are complex societies of actual occasions. Value, then, in process thinking, is focused on the actual occasions of which everything is composed and on the consequent nature of God. However, despite their deeply divergent metaphysical frameworks, process thinking and some forms of utilitarianism at least, share an ethical affinity.

Process Thinking and Mill's Utilitarianism

Mill's utilitarianism is, as is well-known, based on pleasure and pain. Value (which, as a consequentialist, Mill locates in 'states-of-affairs' rather than 'things-in-themselves') is experiential, relating to the states of feeling in organisms which have this capacity. Here, Mill's approach differs from some forms of consequentialism, which are not experience-centred (for instance, that of Robin Attfield, as will become evident in the next chapter). Mill's locus of value in experience is, of course, congenial to a process understanding of value, as relating to the subjective feelings of actual entities. At first sight, however, Mill's focus on pleasure and pain seems very different from the value criteria of harmony and intensity of experience adopted by most process thinkers.

However, Mill's understanding of pleasure and pain is considerably more complex than this initial comparison would suggest. In particular, Mill differentiates between different qualities of

pleasure, as well as quantities of it; and these qualities closely resemble concepts of valuable experience identified by process thinkers. As Mill comments in *Utilitarianism*:

> It is indisputable that the being whose capacities of enjoyment are low, has the greatest chance of having them fully satisfied; and a highly endowed being will always feel that any happiness which he can look for, as the world is constituted, is imperfect. But he can learn to bear the imperfections, if they are at all bearable; and they will not make him envy the being who is indeed unconscious of the imperfections, but only because he feels not at all the good which those imperfections qualify. It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be a Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied... (Mill 1979: 260)

The broadening of the concept of pleasure here in Mill brings it very near to the idea in process thinking of harmony and intensity of experience. The contentment of a pig, or of a fool, is like a harmonious experience which lacks intensity; it is of less value than an experience with a greater degree of intensity, even if it lacks the same amount of harmony. Mill also considers that value is lost if a less rich or less intense way of life is adopted, through electing to take the 'nearer good'. This is identical to the process concept of triviality, where the most intense experience possible is not actualized, and hence generates less value than it might otherwise have done. Whitehead, for instance, comments that: 'Good people of narrow sympathies are apt to be unfeeling and unprogressive, enjoying their egotistical goodness. Their case, on a higher level, is analogous to that of a man completely degraded to a hog' (Whitehead 1926: 96). Mill and Whitehead thus consider intense, complex experiences to be of more value than simple, trivial experiences. Mill argues for this as a matter of human preference: we would all prefer an intense, even if dissatisfying experience to a trivial, satisfying one; we would all rather be a sad Socrates than a happy fool. While issuing in the same conclusion, Whitehead's reasoning here is rather different; while it may be true that the generation of more intense experience may be preferred by human beings, its ultimate importance is the contribution which it makes to the consequent nature of God.

The similarity between Mill and Whitehead has passed largely unnoticed in process writing. Indeed, John Cobb, one of Whitehead's most widely known interpreters, attacks utilitarianism vehemently. Equating utilitarianism, it seems, with a simple,

Benthamite position, Cobb rejects its ethical approach: 'An old example [of the case against it] is that many of us would prefer to share with Socrates an experience of pain than to share with a pig the experience of contentment... Values must be correlated with reflective preferences, or assertions about them are meaningless and arbitrary' (Cobb 1966: 101). In fact, Cobb is here making the same objection as Mill to Benthamite utilitarianism: Bentham's calculus of pleasure and pain is an over-simple one, failing to take into account, for instance, the more profound experiences that would be preferred after thought rather than immediate and thoughtless pleasures. Mill most definitely thinks, like Cobb, that to have a more complex experience is a better state, even if this brings more dissatisfaction. Bube, in his consideration of value in Cobb, comments that Cobb is 'ironically borrowing from John Stuart Mill's version of hedonism' by using Mill's very example of a pig and Socrates (Bube 1988: 47). But if Cobb is borrowing this example, he is doing so unconsciously (he does not appear to realize that this example comes from Mill). The real irony is that, despite his attack on utilitarianism, by a different system, Cobb has come up with something very close to it.

A similar argument concerning the resemblance between process thinking—in particular of Hartshorne's approach—to Mill's understanding of pleasure and pain has been made by J. Moskop (1980) and stimulated a response by T. Nairn (1988: 170–9). Their exchange is of considerable interest to this study. Moskop (1980: 18) likens process thinking to Mill's utilitarianism in a broader context than purely that of his complex understanding of the qualities of pleasure. He suggests five key theses on which Mill and Hartshorne agree. These are (1) that the aim of ethical behaviour is to further the good; (2) that the good is experiential; (3) that there are morally significant differences of quality between experiences; (4) that the experience of all sentient beings is morally considerable; and (5) that experience is valuable as a balance between two poles—which Mill calls tranquillity and excitement, and which Hartshorne calls harmony and intensity.

The accuracy of Moskop's points 1–3 has already been argued in this chapter; and point 4 will be considered in the following chapter. However, there are serious problems with Moskop's point 5: here his argument seems to have been carried too far. Moskop argues that tranquillity and excitement for Mill are equivalent to

intensity and harmony for Hartshorne. This is, however, problematic. Tranquillity and excitement are, first, of limited significance to Mill, being merely one of the ways in which he elaborates the concepts of pain and pleasure. In contrast, harmony and intensity are of crucial importance to process thinking. More importantly, Moskop accurately describes tranquillity and excitement as 'poles' for Mill: people oscillate between them, and one is a preparation for the other. A pleasurable life would be composed from both tranquil and exciting experiences. But it is clear that they are mutually *preclusive* experiences. It is impossible to be both tranquil and excited simultaneously. The two are at different ends of one scale. However, this is not true of harmony and intensity in process thought. In the papers which Moskop cites, as he points out, Hartshorne (1974*b*: 215) discusses the nature of *contrast* and intensity, and even goes so far as to say: 'It is an aesthetic principle that intensity of experience depends on contrast.' But Moskop seems to have confused *contrast* with *conflict*. It would only be the case that intensity is on the other end of the scale from harmony if intensity *meant* conflict. But intensity should be, as Whitehead (1978: 115) makes clear, an ordered state, not one of conflict. It is *possible* to have an intense and harmonious experience at the same time, although this is uncommon because a greater capacity for intensity makes conflict more likely. But it does not *necessitate* it. It is perfectly *possible* for Socrates to be satisfied and hence to have an intense and harmonious experience which would be of more value than an intense but non-harmonious experience. The aim, in process thinking, is to maximize both harmony and intensity as much as possible. Thus, Moskop (1980: 23) is mistaken to argue that both Mill and Hartshorne 'recognise the importance of a balance between simple, harmonious experiences (tranquillity) and more complex or intense experiences (excitement)'. In fact, only Mill recognizes this balance. For Hartshorne, the balance is that of an experience which neither has intensity but lacks harmony (the sad Socrates) nor one which has harmony but lacks intensity (the happy fool). The more intensely harmonious, or harmoniously intense, an experience is, the better. Certainly, there is no virtue for Hartshorne in oscillating between the two positions.

Moskop also comments that excitment and tranquillity are not used by Mill as synonyms for higher and lower pleasures. Yet a process thinker *does* consider that a more intense experience is a

higher one. A very intense experience with very little harmony is valued far more than a very harmonious experience with very little intensity.[2] So an unhappy Socrates (intense but not harmonious experience) is of much more value than a happy pig (harmonious, but not intense experience). Thus they do not act as value balances for one another in the way that tranquillity and excitement do.

While this comparison between Mill and Hartshorne pushes the resemblance between them too far, it does not destroy Moskop's underlying contention. In many respects, both of structure and of content, process ethical thinking does resemble the utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill.

The Problem of Justice

Thomas Nairn, in his article responding to Moskop's argument, makes several criticisms of the view that process thinking is closely related to Mill, or indeed to hedonistic utilitarianism in general. His initial remarks concern the metaphysical divide between process thinking and utilitarianism—in particular, the theistic nature of the process system. However, as we have seen, the acknowledgement of a different metaphysical foundation does not mean that there can be no ethical similarity between the two positions.

Nairn's more substantial criticism concerns the question of justice in process and utilitarian ethics. His fundamental argument is that, if process ethics behave like utilitarianism, and God is at the root of ethics, then God must be behaving, or wanting others to behave, in a utilitarian way. This, for Nairn, is a violation of his own as well as Hartshorne's concept of God. He comments: 'An unjust God, however... would be unloving, and therefore would not be God at all' (Nairn 1988: 175).

Fundamental to this criticism is Nairn's belief that utilitarianism is an unjust ethical system. If God were to behave in the way in which Moskop describes—a way akin to utilitarianism—then God

[12] In opposition to this, Cobb (1966: 102) does say that 'great strength accompanied by serious discord may be inferior to a simple and placid harmony'. However, this is not reinforced elsewhere in his own work, or in that of other process thinkers who argue that a discordant intense experience is of more value than a trivial harmonious one. (Indeed, this appears to be the whole point of the Socrates/fool analogy.)

would be unjust.[3] Since God cannot be unjust, either Moskop's interpretation of Hartshorne, or Hartshorne himself, must be wrong. Nairn chooses to defend Hartshorne against Moskop, and to argue therefore that process ethics does not support a utilitarian position. Lying behind this accusation that utilitarianism is unjust is Nairn's understanding of utilitarianism as a maximizing value system. We have already seen that process thinking can be accurately so characterized. Some philosophers have expressed doubts as to whether Mill himself intended to be thus understood. Sprigge (1990: 18), for instance, suggests that, by distinguishing different qualities of pleasure and pain, Mill may have understood them to be incommensurable. Such value incommensurability could make summing pleasures impossible.[4] If this is a correct interpretation of Mill, then he differs in this respect from process thinking, and indeed from most utilitarian approaches, which do aim at the best overall consequences or production of maximum utility (however utility may be understood). It is this aggregative, maximizing nature of utilitarianism that leaves it open to the criticism that it is unjust. Since process ethics adopts the same maximizing methodology, one would expect process thinking to be vulnerable to the same justice critique. After all, as Hartshorne (1974*b*: 214) comments: 'to be ethical is to seek aesthetic optimization of experience for the community'.

It is essential to have some kind of definition of what is meant by justice in this context. In general, justice concerns that which is fair or impartial, usually when making decisions about the treatment of individuals, or arbitrating in a situation of conflict. However, when the 'problem of justice' in both utilitarian and process thought is being considered, a slightly more precise understanding is usually in mind: that of the limits of what one may do to someone else, the issue of personal inviolability. Bernard Williams describes justice in this sense as 'respect for the integrity of the individual' (Smart and Williams 1973: 108). Both process thinkers and utilitarians have been accused of failing to respect this integrity and putting no ultimate limits on what may be done to create more utility or harmony and intensity of experience. J. L. Mackie, for instance,

[13] Mill himself, of course, deals with just this problem and argues that a moral God 'must fulfil the requirements of utility to a supreme degree' (Mill 1979: 273).

[14] The question of difficulty of summation in process ethics will be developed later.

argues that; 'On a utilitarian view, transferring a satisfaction from one person to another, while preserving its magnitude, makes no morally significant difference' (Mackie quoted in Frey 1985). In other words, so long as the same amount of satisfaction is generated, the *distribution* is immaterial. Thus an action may cause some individuals acute suffering, but if their suffering is outweighed by the much increased happiness of others, then the action is morally justifiable—indeed, desirable. Similarly, it could be argued that in a process ethical system an action that trivializes or deharmonizes the experience of some individuals, but that, overall, increases harmonious and intense experience for the consequent nature of God is morally desirable. Yet such behaviour appears to be unjust. In other words, utilitarianism and process thought can allow, or even provide, a moral imperative for acts that seem to be unjust or reprehensible to someone who accepts an idea of personal inviolability. Regan (1984*a*: 209), a critic of utilitarianism, argues that utilitarianism treats individuals as 'mere receptacles of what has positive value (pleasure) or negative value (pain). They have no value of their own; what has value is what they contain.' As an analogy for utilitarianism, Regan describes individual organisms as cups containing either sweet or bitter liquids (pleasures and pains). The aim of moral decisions must be to achieve the best aggregative balance of sweet and bitter between the cups, involving redistribution or the breaking of cups if necessary. The cups in themselves are not of value; the value is in the balance of sweet and bitter that they contain. What matters is the best possible distribution of the liquids between the cups—even if some end up without any liquid at all.

It is difficult to avoid the suggestion that this picture also gives a powerful expression of the ethical approach adopted by process thinkers. Max Stackhouse (1981: 108), for instance, describes process thinking as a philosophy where concrete entities are dissolved in a web of relationships.[5] As he goes on to comment, this throws up great problems for process thought: 'There is a "thinginess" about life that does not easily dissolve into its relationships; there is a reality about a self—a Socrates or Jesus, a John Smith or Jane Doe—that is not easily accounted for by appealing to a "synthesis of a multiplicity of relations".' It is this lack of 'thinginess' that is

[15] The parallels between process philosophy and so-called deep ecology are very striking at this point. This will be further examined in Ch. 5.

the fundamental cause of unease concerning process attitudes to justice. Henry Clark (1981: 136) argues that process thought, on this count, becomes unable to 'productively address the issues of personal inviolability, equity and rights'.

However, a number of responses can be made to this attack. It might be suggested, for instance, that Hartshorne's understanding of the human being as 'dipolar' protects his thinking at least from such difficulties. Hartshorne maintains that all human individuals—and God—have an 'essence' which constitutes one part of their nature. This essence can be defined as 'the individual in abstraction from all in him which is accidental or without which he would still be himself' (Hartshorne and Reese 1953: 4). This 'essence' is what constitutes our personal identity, but as Hartshorne (1974*b*: 201) maintains, 'Personal identity is a partial, not complete identity; it is an abstract aspect of life, not life in its concreteness. Concretely each of us is a numerically new reality every fraction of a second.' This constantly changing concreteness constitutes, in Hartshorne's account, the other pole of being. These poles resemble, at least, Regan's image of the cups (the essence of personal identity, the self) and the water (the constant flow of changing experience). If Hartshorne were to maintain that the abstract pole, the essence, was of *ethical* significance, then this might allow him to resist the charge that his philosophy, at least, is unable productively to address 'personal inviolability, equity and rights'. However, further study of Hartshorne's work does not tend to support this position.

First, when making ethical decisions, Hartshorne (1974*b*: 203) insists that to concentrate on one's own thread of personal identity is 'an illusion of egoism'. This is not true only of one's own thread of personal identity but also of that of any particular others. 'Both you and the other, as individual animals, are passing phenomena whose careers may cease at any time' (ibid. 206). Ethical behaviour, therefore, according to Hartshorne, should not be about protecting individual threads of identity, but rather about the general good. The general good will, of course, attach to abstract threads of personal identity (in the same way as in Regan's example the water is contained in cups). But the particular threads of identity, like the cups, are not what is important: 'Our ultimate obligations are to the future in an impersonal or suprapersonal sense, to humanity, nature and God' (Hartshorne 1981: 105).

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