

# PROCESS STUDIES

Volume 31.2

Fall-Winter

2002

*Articles*

DAVID RAY GRIFFIN, Being Bold: Anticipating a Whiteheadian Century

ROBERT E. DOUD, A Whiteheadian Interpretation of Baudelaire's Poetry

THOMAS M. DICKEN, Charles Hartshorne on the Conservation of Value

BRIAN HENDLEY, In Search of the Elusive Whitehead: A Cautionary Tale

ROLAND FABER, Apocalypse in God: On the Power of God in Process Eschatology

BRIAN G. HENNING, On the Possibility of a Whiteheadian Aesthetics of Morals

JOSEPH BRACKEN, S.J., Continuity Amid Discontinuity: A Neo-Whiteheadian Understanding of the Self

ZHIHE WANG, What Can Whitehead's Philosophy Contribute to Feminism?

ROBERT M. RANDOLPH, The Novum as Meaning

*Reviews*

*Book Notes*

- . *The Concept of Nature*. 1919. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993.
- . *Modes of Thought*. 1938. New York: Free Press, 1966.
- . *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, 1929. Corrected Edition. Ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne. New York: Free Press, 1978.
- Wilmot, Lawrence. *Whitehead and God: Prolegomena to a Theological Reconstruction*. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 1979.

## On the Possibility of a Whiteheadian Aesthetics of Morals

*Brian G. Henning*

BRIAN G. HENNING is a 2003 graduate of Fordham University, Bronx, NY.  
E-mail: [brianhenning@hotmail.com](mailto:brianhenning@hotmail.com).

The metaphysical doctrine, here expounded, finds the foundations of the world in the aesthetic experience, rather than—as with Kant—in the cognitive and conceptive experience. All order is therefore aesthetic order, and the moral order is merely certain aspects of aesthetic order. The actual world is the outcome of the aesthetic order, and the aesthetic order is derived from the immanence of God. (Whitehead, *Religion* 105)

Process philosophy has traditionally focused predominantly on ontology and cosmology. However, in the closing decades of the twentieth century, the scope of its application broadened significantly to include areas such as theology, physics, biology, psychology, and even education. But one area that was not so fortunate is ethics. Process philosophy, nonetheless, has the potential to make a unique contribution to the state of ethical theory, which, having the support of a process ontology, could avoid many of the pitfalls which plague modern ethical theories. Nowhere are these pitfalls more apparent than in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, to whom I am alluding in the title of this paper. For, in keeping with his metaphysics, Kant made the absolute value of the autonomous rational individual the supreme principle of morality and, in so doing, made the human in particular, and ethics in general, discontinuous with the goings-on of the rest of the universe.<sup>1</sup> In stark contrast to this longstanding tradition, it is my intention to demonstrate that it is possible to construct an axiological ethical system which makes humans an exemplification of the aim of the universe rather than an exception to it. My argument proceeds in roughly four parts. I begin by outlining the basic contours of Whitehead's metaphysics and aesthetics and the relation between them. With this as a backdrop, I then proceed to discuss the moral dimension of Whitehead's thought and the standard objections to it. In the third section, I respond to these objections, first, by contrasting two different interpretations of Whitehead's metaphysics and, then, by examining the forms of morality that each entails. Finally, I conclude with my own speculations on how one might proceed to develop a systematic moral philosophy based on a Whiteheadian aesthetics of process.

### *Metaphysics and Aesthetics*

To a certain extent, Whitehead's entire project may be seen as an alternative to the longstanding—and largely uncritically perpetuated—tradition of substance ontology. In contradistinction to this tradition, Whitehead formulates what he

refers to as the "philosophy of organism." The primary reason Whitehead adopted an organic paradigm for his metaphysics was to refute the notion that there are unchanging subjects which require nothing other than themselves in order to exist.<sup>2</sup> In its place, Whitehead affirms a cosmos pluralistically populated by individuals referred to as "actual entities" or "actual occasions."<sup>3</sup> Though not in a crude building block way, actual occasions are the stuff of which the universe is made. Whitehead refers to the becoming of an actual occasion as concrescence, from the Latin *concrēscere*, to grow together. In concrescence, an actual occasion prehends or brings together past actual occasions in its "actual world." The important thing to note regarding the becoming of an actual occasion is that the relationships between actual occasions are internal and constitutive, not primarily external, as they are in substance ontologies. Accordingly, each actual occasion is, in this sense, its relationship to the universe; the occasion is its perspective on the whole.<sup>4</sup> Hence, Whitehead's notion of individuality itself requires essential reference to others. The cosmos is the scene of a perpetual creative advance where the many past individuals come together in the one new atomic individual, which thereby adds itself to the many. "The many become one, and are increased by one" (Whitehead, *Process* 21). This is the essence of what Charles Hartshorne called Whitehead's novel intuition.

Given this cursory introduction to Whitehead's metaphysics, I would like to proceed directly to a discussion of its relation to aesthetics. Although almost all commentators on Whitehead's work rely on a discussion of the role of aesthetic categories in his thought, whether they be salutary or critical, very few spend a significant amount of time examining what Whitehead means by "aesthetic." I intend to demonstrate that to this omission may be traced many of the problems in interpreting the relation between his ethics and his aesthetics. Let us begin with a brief examination of Whitehead's conception of aesthetics.

In *Modes of Thought*, Whitehead warns his reader that "in the history of European thought the discussion of aesthetics has been almost ruined by the emphasis upon the harmony of the details" (62). Although it is not altogether clear from this statement alone what precisely he finds objectionable in the European emphasis upon the harmony of the details, the statement which follows it gives us a clue as to how Whitehead positively conceives of aesthetics: "In the greatest examples of any form of art, a miraculous balance is achieved. The whole displays its component parts, each with its own value enhanced; and the parts lead up to a whole, which is beyond themselves, and yet not destructive of themselves" (62). It is this miraculous balance, which not only achieves a harmonious whole but simultaneously enhances its parts without sacrificing their individuality, that is the key to Whitehead's conception of beauty. With Whitehead's warning in mind, let us push this initial conception of aesthetics further by turning to his treatment of beauty in his work, *Adventures of Ideas*.

Here Whitehead defines beauty as "the mutual adaptation of the several factors in an occasion of experience" (252). The first thing Whitehead men-

tions regarding this definition of beauty is that adaptation implies an end and that this end is twofold. The first aim of adaptation is at the "absence of mutual inhibition among the various prehensions" (252). One will recall that in concrescence actual occasions bring together elements in their actual world. Hence, concrescence achieves the first aim of beauty when the data prehended do not inhibit each other. However, this is merely the "minor form" of beauty. For this form of beauty is essentially the attenuated form of aesthetics described in *Modes of Thought* as the mere harmony of details. Thus, it would seem that Whitehead finds this form of beauty to be inadequate or deficient by itself. There is, however, a second aim of the adaptation toward beauty. According to Whitehead, the major form of beauty

presupposes the first form, and adds to it the condition that the conjunction in one synthesis of the various prehensions introduces new contrasts of objective content with objective content. These contrasts introduce new conformal intensities of feelings natural to each of them, and by so doing raise the intensities of conformal feeling in the primitive component feelings. Thus the parts contribute to the massive feeling of the whole, and the whole contributes to the intensity of feeling of the parts. (*Adventures* 252-53)

Since this account of the major form of beauty involves a number of technical terms which we have yet to examine, it would profit us to treat the parts of this account one piece at a time. First, it is clear that the major form of beauty presupposes the absence of mutual inhibition involved in the minor form of beauty. But in addition to the lack of mutual inhibition, the major form of beauty also involves the introduction of new contrasts which increase the intensity of experience for the component parts. "Contrast" is a technical term for Whitehead which refers to the positive relation of two or more elements involved in concrescence such that those elements are mutually compatible and mutually enhancing (Jones 12). Accordingly, the introduction of new contrasts allow for the parts to "contribute to the massive feeling of the whole, and the whole contributes to the intensity of feeling of the parts" (Whitehead, *Adventures* 252). These two elements, massiveness, which is the variety of detail with effective contrast, and intensity, which is the comparative magnitude of experience, are what Whitehead calls "Strength" (252-53). This is the "miraculous balance" achieved in great art wherein "The whole displays its component parts, each with its own value enhanced; and the parts lead up to a whole, which is beyond themselves, and yet not destructive of themselves" (*Modes* 62).

Given such a rich and sophisticated conception of beauty, what, we may ask, is the relation of Whitehead's aesthetics to his metaphysical system as a whole? The most direct answer to this question is that Whitehead's metaphysics is his aesthetics. In what sense is this the case? What does it mean to say that Whitehead's metaphysics is his aesthetics? The following passage from *Adventures of Ideas* provides a clue: "The teleology of the Universe is directed to the production of beauty" (265). Hence, every actual occasion aims at aesthetic achievement. Whitehead's metaphysics is a speculative description of the relentless process of

the cosmos and, insofar as this process is directed toward aesthetic achievement, Whitehead's metaphysics may accurately be seen as an aesthetics. Put more simply, since the attainment of beauty is the aim of process in general, Whitehead's metaphysics, which is an account of world process, is also an aesthetics. It will be important to keep this conclusion in mind as we proceed to examine the moral dimension of Whitehead's thought, to which I now turn.

### *What is Importance?*

Before I present the basic contours of Whitehead's conception of morality, it is important to preface my remarks by noting that Whitehead did not dedicate any one work to the ethical implications of his metaphysics of process. This is not to say, however, that he was unconcerned with ethics. On the contrary, as I hope the analysis to follow will demonstrate, Whitehead was deeply concerned with the good.<sup>5</sup> With that said, let us proceed to a brief outline of his conception of morality.

In *Modes of Thought*, Whitehead defines morality in the following manner: "Morality consists in the control of process so as to maximize importance" (13). The ostensible simplicity of this statement should remind the reader of our definition of beauty: both are more complex than they first appear and they both bear a similar teleological structure in relation to process. In fact, the similarity between the "mutual adaptation" involved in aesthetic attainment and the "control of process" involved in morality are, I contend, more than coincidental. Like beauty, morality is a teleological process which aims to control process toward some end. The question, then, is what is the nature of the end of morality, namely, importance. It is the answer to this question which has sparked the debate on Whitehead's moral theory.

Arguably, the debate over the ethical dimension of Whitehead's philosophy of organism began in 1941 with Paul Arthur Schilpp's contribution to the Library of Living Philosophers volume dedicated to Whitehead, entitled "Whitehead's Moral Philosophy." This lengthy essay is an apt point of departure for our own investigation because Schilpp's essay has set the tone for nearly all subsequent analyses of the moral dimension of Whitehead's thought.<sup>6</sup> I take Schilpp's argument to be twofold. First, in grounding his ethics in the psychic processes of value-judgments, which are themselves largely emotionally dominated and controlled (Schilpp 571), Whitehead not only establishes a foundation for morals which is "treacherously thin,"<sup>7</sup> he ultimately makes importance equivalent to "interest."<sup>8</sup> It is for this reason, Schilpp suggests, that "Whitehead's moral philosophy could well be classed among the so-called 'moral interest theories' (572).<sup>9</sup> Second, Schilpp contends that Whitehead, to his detriment, reduces ethics to aesthetics. Although Schilpp agrees that both ethics and aesthetics "fall into the field of value-judgments and value-experience, and that both make use of ideal abstractions" (614-15), Schilpp does not see this similarity as a sufficient reason for effectively subsuming the one (ethics) under the other (aesthetics). For according to Schilpp, there are "sufficient differences, both of kind and in

number, between the two types of value judgment and value experience to warrant a rather precise method of differing analysis, procedure, and conclusion for the two areas" (615). Because Schilpp conceives these substantial differences between ethics and aesthetics, he sees the subsumption of ethics under aesthetics as a "disastrous reduction." "After all," Schilpp argues, "morality is not beauty, though the moral life—like a lot of other things—may be beautiful; but it is not the fact that it is beautiful which makes it moral" (615).

Before I examine Schilpp's claims directly, it is appropriate first to address Lynne Belaief's attempt to circumvent the problem highlighted by Schilpp regarding the relation of Whitehead's aesthetics to his ethics. As the following passage from her 1984 work *Toward a Whiteheadian Ethics* illustrates, Belaief's basic contention is that Whitehead's use of aesthetic categories in ethical contexts is nothing more than metaphorical:

the apparent identity of ethical concepts with the basic aesthetic analysis is only apparent, Whitehead [is] being *intentionally metaphorical* when using the language of aesthetics to apply to ethical phenomena, except in the justifiable case when he is discussing the generic origin of moral experience. (53, emphasis added)<sup>10</sup>

I find Belaief's attempt to defuse Schilpp's arguments by making Whitehead's references to aesthetics rhetorical deeply problematic. In opposition to Belaief, it is my intention to demonstrate that Whitehead's usage of aesthetic categories in reference to ethics is an extension of the fundamental metaphysical principles at work in the universe in general. Insofar as this is the case, to make ethics anything other than a species of aesthetics is to make it into an inexplicable aberration to the system. Thus, as the following analysis will show, both Belaief's and Schilpp's arguments ultimately spring from the same misconceptions regarding Whitehead's system.

One of the keys to understanding the relation of Whitehead's moral theory to his metaphysics and aesthetics, the latter two being essentially equivalent, lies in the notion of importance. Let us begin with Schilpp's first contention that Whitehead's conception of importance results in a subjectivistic moral interest theory. As the following passage clearly demonstrates, Schilpp misinterprets both the scope and depth of Whitehead's notion of importance in limiting it to interest:

Importance is a generic notion which has been obscured by the overwhelming prominence of a few of its innumerable species. The terms morality, logic, religion, art, have each of them been claimed as exhausting the whole meaning of importance. Each of them denotes a subordinate species. But the genus stretches beyond any finite group of species. (*Modes* 11)<sup>11</sup>

First, this passage should lay to rest any contention that importance can be limited to even a robust conception of interest. Insofar as morality, logic, religion, and art are merely a handful of the "innumerable species" of importance, it is clear that we must take Whitehead's use of the term in a much wider and more

fundamental sense than mere interest. Furthermore, as the following passage suggests, Whitehead explicitly stated that he understood importance to extend beyond interest: "there are two aspects to importance; one based on the unity of the Universe, the other on the individuality of the details. The word interest suggests the latter aspect; the word importance leans toward the former" (*Modes* 8, author's emphasis). Given critics' claims to the contrary, it is ironic that Whitehead intentionally chose the term importance because it emphasized the unity of the Universe over the interest of the individual details. Moreover, it is crucial to note that Whitehead defines importance by reference to both the "unity of the Universe" and "the individuality of the details." Accordingly, if morality is the control of process so as to maximize importance, but importance is not limited to the individual, then Whitehead's philosophy cannot be adequately characterized as a moral interest theory. Importantly, Judith Jones' interpretation, which I will examine in the third section, affirms both "aspects" of importance without ontologizing them. In this realization, the gravity of Schilpp's (mis)interpretation begins to become clear. For, morality is but one species of process which aims at importance. "The generic aim of process is the attainment of importance, in that species and to that extent which in that instance is possible" (*Modes* 12, emphasis added). Morality, then, is but one species of the process of the universe, the whole of which aims at the attainment of importance. With this conclusion, we have finally arrived at an understanding of the relation of aesthetics to ethics.

In my initial presentation of Whitehead's conception of aesthetics and its relation to metaphysics, I argued that, in an important sense, Whitehead's aesthetics is his metaphysics. Accordingly, if we juxtapose the passages above with the earlier passages on aesthetics, it also becomes clear that importance and beauty are essentially equivalent. For both importance and beauty are appealed to as the ultimate aim of world process. Specifically, recall that in our discussion of Whitehead's aesthetics we find the claim that the teleology of the universe is directed toward the production of beauty. Now we have him making the claim that the general aim of process is the attainment of importance in that species and to that extent which in that instance is possible. Hence, both importance and beauty are at different times described as the ultimate aim of the universe. It is at this point that my reasons for disagreeing with Belaief become most apparent. For if one were to suggest, as Belaief does, that Whitehead's usage of aesthetic categories is merely metaphorical, then either one must deny that the generic aim of the universe is toward aesthetic attainment or one must argue that the aim of ethics is different from the aim of process in general. But both of these conclusions fundamentally violate Whitehead's metaphysical project. Therefore, we must conclude that Whitehead does indeed intend to make ethics a species of aesthetics. But in this conclusion have we not come to agree with those critics who suggest that Whitehead reduces ethics to aesthetics? If I am correct that Whitehead's aesthetics is his metaphysics, that importance and beauty are

equivalent, and that morality is but a species of process, then doesn't Whitehead thereby reduce morality to aesthetics, as Schilpp contends?

The answer to these crucial questions ultimately lies in how one interprets Whitehead's metaphysics. Like Schilpp, the vast majority of commentators examine Whitehead's definition of morality by focusing almost entirely on what he means by importance to the nearly complete neglect of his notion of process. However, insofar as the "maximization of importance" aimed at in morality is only made possible by the "control of *process*," it is absolutely critical to begin with an examination of Whitehead's notion of process. Hence, the proper question with which we ought to have begun this investigation is not, "What is importance?" but rather "What is process?" It is my contention that critics' uneasiness regarding the relation of morality to aesthetics is due almost entirely to a misinterpretation of Whitehead's metaphysics. Accordingly, I maintain that if a proper interpretation of his metaphysics is in hand, then the relation of Whitehead's ethical theory to his aesthetic metaphysics will be made more apparent.

#### *What is Process?*

In this section, I would like to consider the answer that the "classical interpretation" of Whitehead's metaphysics would give to the question, "What is process?" Although he wrote his groundbreaking work entitled *An Interpretation of Whitehead's Metaphysics* nearly two decades after Schilpp's essay, William Christian was really the first scholar to provide a systematic interpretation of Whitehead's metaphysics. In the context of the present discussion, there is one aspect of Christian's thought in particular which is important to highlight. According to Whitehead, an actual occasion is a "subject-superject." *Qua* subject, the occasion is the active center of concrescence, rendering determinate its relations with its world. *Qua* superject, the occasion is considered as a complete, satisfied, fully determinate unit. Now Christian in particular, and the classical interpretation in general, go to great lengths to emphasize the fact that once an actual occasion has achieved satisfaction, once it is a superject, its subjective immediacy has perished and that the perishing of subjective immediacy entails the perishing of the actuality of the occasion. In Christian's own words: "Thus when the satisfaction of an occasion exists objectively it no longer exists as an immediate feeling. That is to say it is no longer actual" (37, emphasis added). Or again, "But X can hardly be the reason for the fact that the datum is now given for A. Because X has now perished and is no longer actual, whereas the only 'reasons' according to the ontological principle are *actual* entities" (321, second emphasis added). Strangely, therefore, a superject is not an "actual" occasion at all. Superjects, for Christian, are completely devoid of any creative activity.<sup>12</sup> In the context of the present discussion, what is notable about Christian's answer to the question, "What is process?" is that it establishes a strong distinction between the active subject and the passive superject.<sup>13</sup>

In the work of George Kline, the strong distinction established by Christian becomes an ontological one. In his article, "Form, Concrescence, and Con-

cretum," Kline sets out to alleviate what he perceives to be equivocations and inconsistencies in Whitehead's use of key terms. Of particular interest in the present discussion is Kline's distinction between two perceived forms of actuality in Whitehead's thought, which he terms actual<sub>1</sub> and actual<sub>2</sub>. Actual<sub>1</sub> refers to an occasion which is "active and self-significant but-not-active" whereas actual<sub>2</sub> refers to an occasion that is "efficacious and other-significant but-not-active" (104). Thus, Kline explains, "actual<sub>1</sub>' applies exclusively to concrescences, to subjects, to what is present; and 'actual<sub>2</sub>' applies exclusively to completed past actual entities" (104). In a way, then, Kline ontologizes the already strong distinction between the subject and the superject introduced by Christian. For, according to Kline, "the distinction between concrescence and concretum is a distinction . . . between different (types of) entities" (132). For both Christian and Kline, therefore, process entails the passive, inactive data of the past, being re-clothed by the vivid immediacy of the subject. Thus, in summary, the classical interpretation of process is marked by a strong ontological distinction between the subject and the superject which eliminates all activity from the objective functioning of the superject. Having arrived at the classical interpretation's notion of process, let us now examine what it might mean to "control process so as to maximize importance" as Whitehead indicates in his definition of morality. In other words, what are the implications of the classical interpretation's metaphysics for Whitehead's moral theory?

For the classical interpretation, activity, creativity, and, most importantly, actuality, are limited to concrescence, to subjectivity. Thus, insofar as the classical interpretation limits actuality to the subject, it also limits importance and value exclusively to the subject. Kline himself says as much in the following passage: "A concretum has significance—meaning and importance—not for itself but *only* for something other than itself: namely, the subsequent concrescences which causally objectified it" (119, emphases added). All importance and meaning are limited to the concrescent subject. However, if all importance is relative solely to the subject, Whitehead's is not only a moral interest theory, it is more nearly a moral solipsism. It is, I contend, the classical interpretation's ontologizing of the subject and the superject that leads to a solipsistic moral interest theory and which leads philosophers such as John Goheen to the conclusion that "As a center of feeling the individual is the arbiter of all value, there is no other source of judgment with respect to satisfactory and dissatisfactory feeling" (449).

Having arrived at such a conclusion, it is not surprising that Schilpp and others interpret importance in the way that they do. For, if process is cast in terms of an ontologized distinction between the subject and the superject, as we get from the classical interpretation, and if the maximization of importance is solely a matter of the decision of the subject, then it is no wonder that Schilpp would conclude that Whitehead's is a moral interest theory and that he reduces ethics to aesthetics. For it is the classical interpretation's overemphasis on the subject

that lends itself to the interpretation of Whitehead's ethics as a subjectivistic moral interest theory or, even worse, as a moral solipsism.

The pervasiveness of what I have been calling the classical interpretation is difficult to calculate. However, I suspect that it has seeped into much of Whiteheadian scholarship.<sup>14</sup> If my conclusion above is correct, this should be a very disturbing trend. Luckily, however, there is a growing number of scholars, such as, Lewis S. Ford, Jorge Nobo, and Joseph A. Bracken, who are mounting sustained challenges to the classical interpretation's implicit hegemony. Unfortunately, however, in the present project, it is not possible to systematically examine the ethical implications of each of the alternatives to the classical interpretation. Accordingly, in the balance of this essay, I examine Judith Jones' *Intensity: An Essay in Whiteheadian Cosmology*, a book which I consider to be one of the most promising interpretations of Whitehead's metaphysics.

Jones develops an account of Whitehead's metaphysics based on the notion of "ecstatic individuality." By focusing on the rich notion of "intensity," Jones sets out to establish that "an entity exists with the ontological status of its subjectivity to some degree in every subject in which it comes to have influence (and, to an extent, in every subject from which it originally derived)" (xii, author's emphasis).<sup>15</sup> Hence, central to Jones' project is the view that the internal relatedness of one individual in another entails the real repetition of the past, as itself, in the present nascent occasion. Jones achieves this by denying the classical interpretation's ontologizing of the subject and the superject because, in so doing, she finds that it essentially repeats the metaphysical errors that Whitehead's system was explicitly developed to avoid. For, according to Jones:

some sense may be made of Whitehead's atomism, which does not require the sharp ontological distinction that seems to lurk behind the verbal ambiguities. Such a distinction seems to me to participate in a major error identified by Whitehead in philosophies of substance: it asserts a kind of independence—the independence of agency—which isolates each individual as such in its own ontological "space," if you will. We recall it was precisely this isolation, not the fact of persistence, of substance that Whitehead deplored. (95)

For Jones, then, if Whitehead's metaphysics is to be the exposition of how all actual occasions are internally related, then any ontological form of independence must be out of bounds. To truly affirm the internal relatedness of one individual in another, there can be no independence, even of agency. Hence, Jones is arguing that the subject and the superject are "existentially of a piece."<sup>16</sup> The implication of this stance cannot be overstated. For if the subject and the superject are one, then "To assert the 'objective' functioning of the superject of satisfaction in the becoming of other entities need not require that subjectivity in all senses wholly perish, nor does it necessitate a view of an entity as a 'closed-up' individuality" (29). Insofar as subjectivity does not wholly perish, the superject is not a static product, a dead datum, or a passive object. Consequently, the subject does not enjoy any independence of agency. However, in order to understand more

precisely in what sense subjectivity does not “wholly perish” it is necessary to examine what Jones calls the “intensity of satisfaction.”

Whereas the classical interpretation focuses on the differences between the subject and the superject, Jones takes a very different tack. She begins by examining the aim of process, rather than its structure. Focusing on Whitehead's eighth Categorical Obligation, the category of subjective intensity, Jones notes that “Whitehead ties the ultimate teleological concerns of process—subjective aim—to the concept of intensity” (9). Hence, insofar as the aim of process is at intensity, what is achieved in satisfaction, understood as an intensity of contrast, not a static product. According to Jones, if we look “at the ‘constitution’ of an actuality in terms of its status as an intensity of contrast, we would note that, qua actual, there is no distinction between the agentive decision and the contrasts effected in those decisions; the decision is the contrast” (89). Accordingly, since what is achieved in satisfaction is a contrast, it becomes impossible to describe an actual occasion's objective functioning in another as passive, static, or dead. Thus, for Jones, “The only thing in Whitehead's scheme that is bereft of inherent activity is an eternal object” (89). *Qua* intensity of contrast, a satisfied occasion is incurably active. According to Jones, then, what is achieved in satisfaction understood as an intensity of contrast is “nothing other than the felt unity of aesthetic achievement” (97). However, Jones is quick to remind her reader that this aesthetic achievement is not something completely independent or private. Rather, it is by definition something that is “self-retentive, ‘infectious,’ requiring for its very essence the presence, internal to it, of former aesthetic achievement” (97). Importantly, therefore, even as objectified, occasions are “yet themselves, in the ontologically significant sense of individuality of existence” (94). Consequently, as Jones suggests in the following important passage, the notion of ecstatic existence greatly problematizes the sharp ontological distinctions that the classical interpretations impute:

I contend that the effort to attach ontological status to anything in the Whiteheadian system—objective datum, satisfaction, subjective form, feeling, character, actuality, and so on—as if anything else were being discussed except the achievement of *aesthetic intensity*, will inevitably produce a picture of Whiteheadian atomism as cryptosubstantialist, when in fact such an effort is itself the cryptosubstantialism infecting the subject matter with its presuppositions about the nature of individuality. (103, emphasis added)

In summary, Jones' notion of ecstatic individuality eliminates the sharp ontological bifurcation of the subject from the superject introduced by the classical interpretation. The implication of this is the denial of any strong form of independence within Whitehead's system. Inasmuch as Whitehead's metaphysics is an attempt to account for the organic relations between occasions, I believe that Jones' notion of ecstatic individuality has much to recommend itself.

#### *Toward a Whiteheadian Aesthetics of Morals*

What are the implications for a Whiteheadian moral philosophy given Jones' ontology of intensity? Initially, it would seem that by making the aim of process

the attainment of aesthetic intensity, Jones would be forced to affirm a subjectivist form of ethics and aesthetics. However, as the following passage from the final chapter of *Intensity* entitled “An Essay on the Morality of Attention” suggests, not only is Jones fully aware of the subjectivist and even solipsistic flavor that Whitehead's moral philosophy is often given, she also believes that her own interpretation avoids these very problems:

The standard problem of subjectivism is held to be particularly acute in a scheme such as Whitehead's, since the scheme founds reality on subjects whose immediate aims suggest the extreme possibility of the most vicious and aestheticist moral solipsism. I hope that the concept of ecstatic individuality, founded on a thorough understanding of intensity, has already begun in the reader's mind to circumvent such a subjectivism, solipsism, or egoism. Since the subject is wherever its effects are, and in a nonderivative ontological sense, subjectivism in the solipsistic or egoistic sense is not an option, or at least not the primary form of moral experience derivable from the atomism. (180)

In this passage, Jones is essentially reiterating the conclusions arrived at above regarding the implications of the classical interpretation's emphasis on concrescence for moral theory. As Jones suggests, however, the notion of ecstatic individuality makes such a conclusion unlikely. But why exactly, if her interpretation grants that the aim of process is the attainment of aesthetic intensity, is Jones not subject to a “vicious and aestheticist moral solipsism?”

In order to answer this question, I propose that, as with the classical interpretation, we examine the definition of morality in light of Jones' interpretation of Whitehead's metaphysics. Recall that, because the classical interpretation limited all activity and, thereby, all control of process to the subject, it also restricted all importance to the “interest” of the concrescing subject. The following is a characteristic passage that proponents of this view would cite in their defense: “Actuality is the self-enjoyment of importance” (*Modes* 117). The classical interpretation focuses on passages such as this because it seems to limit both actuality and importance to the subject. But is this really the case? Is Whitehead limiting self-enjoyment and, thereby, actuality and importance to the concrescing subject? According to Jones' interpretation, this clearly cannot be the case. For, in stark contrast to the classical interpretation, Jones contends that we cannot isolate the subject from the superject and, therefore, we cannot limit activity solely to the subject. Everything, including the superject's objective functioning in another, is active.<sup>17</sup> Thus, Jones extends importance to the actual occasion as a whole, as subject-superject. Interestingly, if we take the passage above in its larger context, we find corroboration for Jones' interpretation:

the sense of importance is not exclusively referent to the experiencing self. It is exactly this vague sense which differentiates itself into the disclosure of the whole, the many, and the self. . . . Actuality is the self-enjoyment of importance. But this self-enjoyment has the character of self-enjoyment of others melting into the enjoyment of the one self. (*Modes* 117-18, emphasis added)

As the emphasized passages suggest, importance is *not* exclusively referent to the subject or experiencing self. Rather, self-enjoyment is marked by the melting

of the *self-enjoyment* of others into the “enjoyment of the one self.” Thus, the “others” to which this refers are past actual occasions which are themselves in some sense self-enjoying. That is, we must not forget that superjects are yet a felt contrast of pulsing energy. This conclusion brings us to an important point. Namely, the relation between importance and value.

To a large extent, importance and value are ontologically equivalent. First, Whitehead uses both importance and value to describe what is attained by actuality. Compare, for instance, the following selections from *Modes of Thought*: “Our enjoyment of actuality is a realization of worth, good or bad. It is a value experience” (116); and “Actuality is the self-enjoyment of importance” (117). Secondly, as the following passages suggest, both importance and value have the same triadic structure of the self, other, and whole: “But the sense of importance is not exclusively referent to the experiencing self. It is exactly this vague sense which differentiates itself into the disclosure of the whole, the many, and the self” (117); and “Everything has some value for itself, for others, and for the whole. This characterizes the meaning of actuality” (111). Thirdly, Whitehead describes morality in terms of both value and importance: “Morality is the control of process so as to maximize importance” (13-14); and “Everything has some value for itself, for others, and for the whole. . . . By reason of this character, constituting reality, the conception of morals arises” (111). Thus, value and importance have the same structure and equally characterize morality and actuality. Because of this, I contend that value and importance are ontologically interchangeable.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, if morality aims at maximizing importance and importance is equivalent to value, then it is valid to conclude that morality aims at maximizing value. However, what is the significance of this conclusion?

To be direct, if morality aims at the maximization of value, but value is understood to extend not merely to the self but to others (the past actual occasions in an occasion’s actual world) and to the whole (the totality of achieved occasions), then it becomes impossible to interpret Whitehead’s moral philosophy as affirming a form of subjectivistic egoism, much less as solipsism. The egoistic self is *not* the arbiter of all value, as Goheen suggests. Actual occasions have value for themselves, but they also become a value for others. Hence, when an actual occasion functions objectively it still has intrinsic value—it is yet itself; what else might it be? Accordingly, as the following selection suggests, although actual occasions have these two sides, we cannot for a moment take them as separate from one another:

no unit can separate itself from the others, and from the whole. And yet each unit exists in its own right. It upholds the 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 of the other. (*Modes* 111)

This inability of the individual to separate itself from the others and from the whole in conjunction with its existing in its own right is what Jones has been calling the individual’s ecstatic existence. The individual’s egoistic upholding of value intensity for itself cannot be taken apart from its sharing its value inten-

sity with the universe. Accordingly, “[t]here must be value beyond ourselves. Otherwise every thing experienced would be merely barren detail in our own solipsist mode of existence” (102).

This conclusion has an important result for how we interpret the notion of importance and how we classify Whitehead’s moral philosophy. Whereas, I have argued, the classical interpretation’s restriction of activity and importance to the subject has lent itself to the classification of Whitehead’s moral philosophy as a moral interest theory, Jones’ notion of ecstatic existence makes such a conclusion impossible. As we saw above, importance and value extend to the occasion as a whole, as subject-superject. Accordingly, past objectified occasions which are repeated in the concrescence of a nascent occasion are themselves centers of value. Again, achieved occasions, understood in the context of the analysis above. It is up to the “decision” of the becoming actual occasion to bring together this welter of values in a way that not only avoids mutual inhibition (as in the minor form of beauty), but also introduces higher forms of contrast and intensity (as in the major form of beauty). Of course, the similarity of this conception of becoming to our previous discussion of beauty is no accident. For aesthetic achievement is the aim of the process of the universe. It is, I submit, this teleological drive of the universe toward beauty that is the key to understanding Whitehead’s ethics.

I contend that given Whitehead’s rich and complex conception of beauty, the fact that ethics is a species of aesthetics is in no way reductive. Let us pose this question to the critics, “Why is it reductive to make ethics a species of aesthetics?” I believe that the crux of the critics’ arguments regarding the so-called “reduction” of ethics to aesthetics is in Schilpp’s simple objection that, “After all, morality is not beauty, though the moral life—like a lot of other things—may be beautiful; but it is not the fact that it is beautiful which makes it moral” (615). Thus, it seems that for Schilpp it is reductive to subsume ethics under aesthetics because what is moral is broader than, or at least different from, what is beautiful. But this statement portrays a greatly attenuated notion of aesthetics. For it clearly suggests a subjectivistic conception of aesthetics wherein the independent subject is the arbiter of all value and importance. However, as I have taken great pains to suggest, Whitehead’s aesthetics is not a matter of subjectivistic or solipsistic considerations. He is defining beauty, importance, and value in a far broader and richer way. Again, given the fact that the aim of the universe itself is at the attainment of beauty, importance, and value, it becomes apparent why morality *must* be a species of aesthetics, but in a non-reductive sense. For inasmuch as morality is simply a specialized species of process, it follows that the aim of morality is the same as that of process in general. Thus, it is not possible for there to be something which is moral but not beautiful. Everything is to some degree beautiful just in the fact that it is; actuality itself is the attainment of value intensity. Thus, in summary, given an interpretation of Whitehead’s aesthetic metaphysics such as that advanced by Jones, which requires that beauty, importance, and value be extended to the entire life of the actual occasion—as both subject and superject—it becomes possible to affirm that Whitehead’s ethics is a species of his aesthetics in a non-reductive sense. For to do so is simply to

affirm that morality is a process that is continuous with the creative advance of the universe as a whole. Consequently, then, the possibility of a Whiteheadian aesthetics of morals has been established.

Having demonstrated the possibility of developing an ethical system grounded in Whitehead's aesthetic metaphysics, I would like to conclude with a speculative sketch of how one might begin to positively formulate a Whiteheadian ethic.<sup>19</sup> At the foundation of a Whiteheadian ethic is the basic experience of value. However, as I have shown, due to the organic relatedness of occasions, this basic sense of value cannot be subjectivistic, much less solipsistic. Everything has some value not only for itself, but for others and for the whole. This triad of the self, the other, and the whole is so fundamental for Whitehead that he says that it characterizes the very meaning of actuality and that it is because of this triadic character of reality that the conception of morals arises (*Modes* 111). The conception of morals arises with this claim because morality is that control of process which aims at the maximization of beauty, importance, and value. Fundamentally, then, Whitehead is affirming an ethical system which is grounded in axiology and aesthetics. Thus, or in stark contrast with Kant, then insofar as an ethical system grounded in a Whiteheadian metaphysic must affirm a universe of value, morality can no longer be limited to merely inter-human relations. Ethics is that study which directs how we ought to conduct ourselves with everything with which we have a relation. That is, if Whitehead's metaphysics is understood as the description of the universe's quest toward aesthetic achievement in that species and to that extent possible, then we can see *morality* as that species of process which is the human person's relationship with the universe which aims at "that union of harmony, intensity, and vividness which involves the perfection of importance for that occasion" (*Modes* 14). This is what Whitehead meant in the passage from *Religion in the Making* which opened this paper: in as much as the world is founded on aesthetic experience, all order is aesthetic order, "and the moral order is merely certain aspects of aesthetic order" (105). In the end, then, Schilpp was incorrect, "Good and evil lie in depths and distances below and beyond appearance. They solely concern inter-relations within the real world. The real world is good when it is beautiful" (*Adventures* 268).

#### Notes

1. In Kant's thought, the discontinuity between the phenomenal and noumenal worlds is well known. Though I do not develop the point at any length here, I am very concerned with the axiological rift which this metaphysical bifurcation creates within Kant's system. For instance, as we see in the *Groundwork*, Kant argues that only rational beings, *qua* legislators of the moral law, are ends in themselves and that, therefore, only they have absolute value. From this he draws the portentous conclusion that all non-rational beings have merely conditioned value, which value depends entirely upon the entity's relation to a rational being (427/63ff.). Given this, Kant's conclusion in his *Lectures* that I have no direct duty to avoid kicking or otherwise torturing, say, a dog comes as no surprise. The only reasons I have for not doing so are because of my direct duties to other human beings. For, Kant says, if we are cruel to animals we may out of habit turn

that cruelty on a rational being (*Lectures* 239). Thus, it is both the metaphysical split between the phenomenal and the noumenal as well as the axiological split between entities with absolute value and those with merely conditional value that I have in mind when I accuse Kant of making human beings discontinuous with the goings-on of the universe. There is, obviously, much more to be said here, for the present project this much should be sufficient.

2. "It is fundamental to the metaphysical doctrine of the philosophy of organism, that the notion of an actual entity as the unchanging subject of change is completely abandoned. An actual entity is at once the subject experiencing and the superject of its experiences" (*Process* 29).

3. Though Whitehead uses them interchangeably, throughout this paper I privilege the latter over the former. I do this because "entity" still connotes properties like static, enduring, and independent, which properties Whitehead explicitly rejects, whereas "occasion" emphasizes temporality, relation, and dynamism.

4. As Whitehead explains in *Science and the Modern World*, "the relations of an event are internal, so far as concerns the event itself; that is to say that they are constitutive of what the event is in itself" (104).

5. Although I am not in a position to fully defend the claim here, it is my sense that Whitehead was a moral philosopher in the tradition of Plato rather than Kant or Mill. And this is just what we would expect, given the nature of his system. For, like Plato, Whitehead does not limit discussions of the good simply to relations between human agents. For both Plato and Whitehead, morality and the good trade in a metaphysical currency. It will be important to keep this in mind when we return to the question as to the relation between Whitehead's metaphysics and ethics.

6. Note that I limit my exposition of Schilpp's arguments to those which have been taken as the context for the handful of subsequent discussions of Whitehead's moral philosophy.

7. According to Schilpp, "it would seem that the founding of real morality upon the quicksand of largely emotional reactions provides a treacherously thin foundation for morals. It would hardly seem possible that Mr. Whitehead could be satisfied with such a flimsy and all too shifty foundation" (611). What this comment actually demonstrates is that Schilpp is interpreting Whitehead's use of 'feeling' in an overly superficial sense. Schilpp himself admits that he does not spend any significant amount of time examining the nature of the "emotional reactions" which constitute the internal relatedness of entities (587 n97). It is a lack of appreciation for the complexity and depth of Whitehead's usage of such language that leads to erroneous conclusions such as Schilpp's.

8. Although Schilpp does *say* that he recognizes that Whitehead wants to give importance a broader meaning, he is ultimately convinced that, insofar as it is basically a value-judgment grounded in a largely subjective emotive process, importance is ultimately equivalent to interest. It is perplexing to me that Schilpp simultaneously recognizes that Whitehead wants to extend the notion of importance beyond mere interest and nevertheless concludes that Whitehead's philosophy should be classified as a moral interest theory. Once again, I believe

that this is due to his misinterpretation of Whitehead's metaphysics. (Cf. Schilpp 568, 572, 589.)

9. "Unless the essential meaning of Whitehead's notion of 'importance' has been missed, there have appeared no sufficiently adequate reasons for accepting this doctrine of the subordination of morals under 'importance'" (Schilpp 610). See also Schilpp 589, 611, and Goheen 454.

10. Belaief reiterates this claim almost verbatim in her 1996 *Ethics* essay, "Whitehead and Private-Interest Theories," stating again that "the apparent identity of ethical categories with the basic aesthetic categories is only apparent. Whitehead is being *intentionally* metaphorical when he uses the language of aesthetics to apply to ethical phenomena, except in the justifiable case when he is discussing the generic origin of moral experience" (279).

11. "Of course the word *importance*, as in common use, has been reduced to suggest a silly little pomposity which is the extreme trivialization of its meaning here. This is a permanent difficulty of philosophic discussion; namely, that words must be stretched beyond their common meanings in the marketplace" (Whitehead, *Modes* 12).

12. "In themselves, apart from further creative activity, these data are like the dry bones which the word of the prophet Ezekiel re clothed with living flesh" (Whitehead, *Process* 131, cited by Christian 65).

13. Although Christian does argue in some sense for a distinct gap between the subject and the superject, he himself does not seem to recognize this fact. For in the following passage he seems to argue that subjectivity and superjectivity are simply different modes of existence of the same entity: "The difference between X in its subjective immediacy and X in its objective immortality is not in content but in *mode of existence*" (132, emphasis added).

14. This seems particularly to be the case in works which do not focus directly on interpreting Whitehead's metaphysics itself, but on some application of it to a particular field of study, e.g., physics, psychology, education, political science, ethics, and so on.

15. See also, "It is my thesis that the functioning of an existent in another existent must be ascribed to the internal account of the first existent, as much as it is to be ascribed to the present self-constitution of an entity in concrescence" (Jones 3).

16. "Past and future aspects of the intensive actuality procured by concrescence are to be conceived as existentially of a piece with the subject of concrescence considered as an atomic fact" (Jones 71).

17. Of course, as the following previously cited passage suggests, this statement does *not* include eternal objects: "The only thing in Whitehead's scheme that is bereft of inherent activity is an eternal object" (Jones 89).

18. If a difference is to be found between the two, it seems that it is merely a matter of emphasis. Whereas the term value seems to suggest that which is achieved in process, importance seems to emphasize the end toward which process strives.

19. The aim of my forthcoming dissertation is to develop and defend a holistic, organic ethical theory grounded firmly in Alfred North Whitehead's aesthetico-metaphysics of process. The seminal insight which informs this ethic, which I refer to as the ethics of creativity, is the fundamental sense of value at the very base of existence; there is no vacuous, valueless existence. As a result of this starting point, it is my contention that it is not enough for an ethical theory merely to prescribe how we ought to interact with other human beings. Rather, insofar as everything is inherently valuable, ethics must be radically reconceived as directing how we ought to comport ourselves with everything to which we relate. Accordingly, rather than having one ethic for our interaction with inter-human relationships and another for the extra-human world, the ethics of creativity is at once an inter-human ethic and an environmental ethic; it is, in this sense, holistic. As there currently is no systematic development of an ethical theory based on a robust conception of Whitehead's metaphysics and aesthetics, this project has the potential to be a substantial contribution to the field of process philosophy. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, it is my intention to engage traditional ethical theories with the hope of effecting a dramatic transformation of their basic presuppositions. Thus, my project is at once critical and constructive.

#### Works Cited

- Belaief, Lynne. "A Whiteheadian Account of Value and Identity." *Process Studies* 5 (1975): 31-46.
- . *Toward a Whiteheadian Ethics*. Lanham: UP of America, 1984.
- . "Whitehead and Private-Interest Theories." *Ethics* 76 (1996): 277-86.
- Cauthen, Kenneth. *Process Ethics: A Constructive System*. New York: Edwin Mellen, 1984.
- Christian, William A. *An Interpretation of Whitehead's Metaphysics*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1959.
- Cobb, John B., Jr. "Toward Clarity in Aesthetics." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 18 (1957): 169-89.
- Davis, Richard S. "Whitehead's Moral Philosophy." *Process Studies* 3 (1973): 75-90.
- Goheen, John. "Whitehead's Theory of Value." *The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead*. Ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. LaSalle: Open Court, 1941. 435-60.
- Gray, James R. *Process Ethics*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1983.
- Harrison, R. K. "A. N. Whitehead on Good and Evil." *Philosophy* 28 (1953): 239-45.
- Hooper, Sydney E. "A Reasonable Theory of Morality: (Alexander and Whitehead)." *Philosophy* 25 (1950): 54-67.
- Jones, Judith A. *Intensity: An Essay in Whiteheadian Ontology*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1998.
- Kant, Immanuel. "Duties Towards Animals and Spirits." *Lectures on Ethics*. Trans. Louis Infield. New York: Harper, 1963. 239-41.

- . *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Trans. H. J. Paton. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964.
- Kline, George L. "Form, Concrescence, and Concretum." *Explorations in Whitehead's Philosophy*. New York: Fordham UP, 1983: 104-48.
- Lawrence, Nathaniel. "The Vision of Beauty and the Temporality of Deity in Whitehead's Philosophy." *Alfred North Whitehead: Essays on His Philosophy*. Ed. George L. Kline. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1963. 168-78.
- Lucas, George R. Jr. "Agency After Virtue." *International Philosophical Quarterly* 28 (1988): 293-311.
- Mason, David R. "Whitehead's Analysis of Perception as a Basis for Conceiving Time and Value." *Zygon* 10 (1975): 398-418.
- Millard, Richard M. "The Ghost of Eternalism in Whitehead's Theory of Value." *Philosophical Forum* 9 (1951): 16-22.
- Press, Howard. "Whitehead's Ethic of Feeling." *Ethics* 81 (1971): 161-68.
- Rotenstreich, Nathan. "The Superject and Moral Responsibility." *The Review of Metaphysics* 10 (1956): 201-06.
- Sherburne, Donald W. "Responsibility, Punishment, and Whitehead's Theory of the Self." *Alfred North Whitehead: Essays on His Philosophy*. Ed. George L. Kline. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1963. 179-88.
- Schilpp, Paul A. "Whitehead's Moral Philosophy." *The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead*. Ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. LaSalle: Open Court, 1941. 561-618.
- Schindler, David L. "Whitehead's Inability to Affirm a Universe of Value." *Process Studies* 13 (1983): 117-31.
- Wilcox, John R. "Whitehead on Values and Creativity." *Philosophy and Theology* 1991: 39-53.
- Williams, Daniel D. "Moral Obligation in Process Philosophy." *The Journal of Philosophy* 56 (1959): 263-70.
- Whitehead, Alfred North. *Adventures of Ideas*, 1933. New York: Free Press, 1967.
- . *Modes of Thought*. 1938. New York: Free Press, 1968.
- . *Religion in the Making*. 1926. New York: Fordham UP, 1996.
- . *Science and the Modern World*. 1925. New York: Free Press, 1967.

## Continuity Amid Discontinuity: A Neo-Whiteheadian Understanding of the Self

Joseph Bracken, S.J.

JOSEPH A. BRACKEN, S.J. is Professor of Theology at the Brueggeman Center for Interreligious Dialogue, Xavier University, 3844 Victory Parkway, Cincinnati, OH 45207-1049 Email: [bracken@xavier.edu](mailto:bracken@xavier.edu)

Given the current disenchantment in academic circles with metaphysical systems in general, and the classical notion of the self as the principle of continuity within human consciousness in particular, it may be time for classical and neo-classical metaphysicians to stop their quarreling over details of their respective metaphysical schemes and address the commonly felt danger to the survival of metaphysics in any form. James Felt, S.J., for example, has recently published a book along these same lines, using insights from Whitehead's philosophy to reinforce a basic Thomistic world view (*Coming To Be*). In this article I will try the opposite tack, namely, to retrieve from a modified Whiteheadian perspective some of the key insights of classical Thomism about the nature of the self. Even though it thus runs the risk of being unacceptable both to conventional Thomists and to orthodox Whiteheadians, at least my efforts should make clear where both evident differences in approach and unexpected affinities between the two systems might lie.

I will begin with an overview of what I see as the strengths and the weaknesses both of the Thomistic notion of the self and of the Whiteheadian notion of the self. Afterward, I will present my own neo-Whiteheadian approach to the self along with an assessment of its strengths and weaknesses.

First of all, with respect to the Thomistic understanding of the self, what I see as its greatest strength is an immediate consequence of the doctrine of hylomorphism. That is, the human soul or the self is therein represented as the form of the body and as a spiritual agent in its own right. In this way, the human experience of being basically the same person over time is theoretically confirmed. Yet we human beings also regularly experience discontinuity in our sense of self-identity. Some events in our lives clearly have a much more profound effect on us than others, and all the events when taken together normally exhibit an incremental pattern of change or development that cannot be accurately predicted in advance. Here the theory of hylomorphism is no longer very helpful. Admittedly, accidental change is factored into the conventional understanding of matter and form. But, since the substantial form is by definition a preconceived nature or essence with a purely abstract range of possibilities, one is hard pressed systematically to account for genuine novelty or dramatic change within one's personal history (e.g., a significant transformation of life-values or thoroughgoing change of lifestyle).