

Reconsidering Fundamental Issues

EMERGENT MONISM AND THE CLASSICAL DOCTRINE OF THE SOUL

by Joseph A. Bracken, S.J.

Abstract. Traditional Christian belief in the existence of human life after death within a transformed material universe should be capable of rational justification if one chooses carefully the philosophical scheme underlying those claims. One should not have to appeal simply to the power of a loving God to justify one's beliefs. A revision of Whitehead's metaphysical scheme is proposed that allows one to render these classical Christian beliefs at least plausible to a broad range of contemporary thinkers as a consequence of a cosmology based on the principle of universal intersubjectivity and the need for a common ground between opposing subjectivities.

Keywords: actual occasion; field; God-world relationship; intersubjectivity; matter/spirit dichotomy; soul/body relation; (Whiteheadian) societies.

In *Whatever Happened to the Soul?* Warren Brown, Nancey Murphy, H. Newton Malony, and their collaborators argue that the classical distinction between soul and body as respectively spirit and matter is a form of dualism that has been repudiated by the findings of natural science, above all neurophysiology (1998, 127–48). Consciousness and other mental operations can be closely correlated with neuronal activity within the human brain; hence, there is no empirical evidence to postulate an independent spiritual substance corresponding to the classical notion of the soul as the subject of mental properties. At the same time, these authors are opposed to reductive physicalism or ontological materialism with its philosophical

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premise that all allegedly mental activities are nothing but the by-products of purely physical energy-events within the human brain. Hence, they espouse what they call *nonreductive physicalism*, the belief that “the human nervous system, operating in concert with the rest of the body in its environment, is the seat of consciousness (and also of human spiritual or religious capacities)” (p. 131). For them, there is no *mind* or *soul* as a spiritual entity over and above the brain or nervous system but only these higher-level “supervenient” functions of the brain. They claim that the human being is a unitary psychophysical reality whose mental functions emerge out of a properly disposed neuronal base in the brain. Ontological dualism has been overcome in favor of an emergent monism whereby matter properly disposed becomes capable of higher-order spiritual functions.

Brown, Murphy, and Malony, to be sure, do not wish to cast doubt upon traditional Christian belief in the resurrection of the body and life after death as a result of their theory of nonreductive physicalism. Elsewhere in their book they argue for the continuance of personal identity or life after death as a result of the power of God: “The identity for self as a body/soul unity is now dependent upon a source or power beyond its own capacity for survival” (p. 189). Similar sentiments are expressed by John Polkinghorne in *The God of Hope and the End of the World* (2002, 108): “. . . there is indeed the Christian hope of a destiny beyond death, but it resides not in the presumed immortality of a spiritual soul, but in the divinely guaranteed sequence of death and resurrection. . . . The only ground for this hope . . . lies in the faithfulness of the Creator, in the unrelenting divine love for all creatures.”

While I am sympathetic to the concerns of Brown, Murphy, Malony, and Polkinghorne that human psychosomatic unity be affirmed in opposition to any form of metaphysical dualism, I am uneasy that they appeal simply to the power of God to resurrect the human person somehow in altered form after death. *Quod gratis asseritur, gratis negatur*: What is gratuitously asserted is (or at least can be) gratuitously denied. There is no philosophical common ground here with the nonbeliever in arguing for the plausibility of life after death.

Admittedly, as Philip Clayton claims in *God and Contemporary Science* (1997, 258–60), transempirical truth-claims play a role in science as well as in religion. That is, scientists make use of theories that cannot be directly verified through appeal to empirical evidence, yet these same theories have considerable value for them in helping to organize and control the empirical data within their disciplines. Hence, theologians should likewise be privileged to employ transempirical hypotheses about the possibility of life after death. Yet the transempirical hypotheses employed by scientists can be indirectly verified through appeal to the way in which they make sense of the empirical data under investigation. No such indirect form of verification seems to be possible for the claim of Brown, Mur-

phy, Malony, and Polkinghorne that God, in some way unknown to us human beings here and now, will resurrect humans to a new life free from all suffering and no longer subject to mortality. Nothing in this world suggests that this could eventually happen.

OVERCOMING THE DICHOTOMY BETWEEN MATTER AND SPIRIT

Accordingly, I here propose an alternative theory for an understanding of the human person that offers a philosophical rationale for traditional Christian belief in life after death and is consistent with an overall metaphysics of creation and the God-world relationship. Hence, although it is a trans-empirical hypothesis, its range of application goes well beyond the specific issue of life after death for human beings and thus stands a better chance of being indirectly verified by appeal to empirical evidence on a wide variety of fronts. In brief, I propose that the dichotomy between matter and spirit will never be overcome unless and until one concedes that matter and spirit are dialectically interrelated so that each requires the presence and activity of the other, at least in some attenuated form, as its necessary counterpart or objectification. Materialistic scientists, therefore, who insist that the mental or spiritual capacities of human beings and other higher-order animal species are to be explained exclusively in terms of neuronal interactions within the brain of the individual are thus in my judgment more consistent in their thinking than philosophers and theologians who maintain that only at a certain point in the evolutionary process does matter spontaneously give rise to spirit. Either spirit in some attenuated form has been present in material creation from the beginning or it is simply not there at all, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. The big question, of course, is how spirit in an attenuated form can be present even in clearly inanimate material reality.

One thinks immediately of the celebrated hypothesis of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin that corresponding to the "Without," or external appearance of things in this world, there is a "Within," or interior reality, that develops in proportion to the growth in complexity and self-organization in the outer world (Teilhard 1965, 54–58). My recourse is to the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead with his presupposition that "the final real things of which the world is made up" are actual entities or actual occasions, that is, momentary immaterial subjects of experience which by their dynamic interrelation from moment to moment make up all the material things of this world, both animate and inanimate (Whitehead 1978, 18). In my judgment, Whitehead is more logically rigorous than Teilhard in working out his metaphysical scheme and thus less open to the charge of romantic mysticism on the part of empirically minded critics. At the same time, I must modify Whitehead's scheme in order to use it as a philosophical underpinning for a metaphysics of creation and the God-world relationship

in which belief in life after death for human beings and in the eschatological transformation of the material universe have a place.

Whitehead's proposal that the material world is ultimately made up of immaterial subjects of experience in dynamic interrelation is, of course, itself partially derivative from the philosophy of G. W. Leibniz in his controversial work *The Monadology* (1898, 215–77). Therein Leibniz solved the long-standing philosophical conundrum whether matter is infinitely divisible by stipulating that matter in the common-sense understanding of the term is a by-product of the interplay of countless immaterial "monads" or unified centers of force within a common field of activity. Matter is thus divisible into a finite number of monads, but the monads themselves as immaterial entities are not further divisible (Leibniz 1898, 217–18 nn. 1–3). Whitehead's counterproposal was to retain the insight that immaterial entities ultimately make up the material things of this world but to insist that these monads are not "windowless," as in Leibniz's scheme, or permanently constituted one way rather than another by God the Creator (1898, 219 n. 7; 244–47 nn. 48–52). Rather, for Whitehead actual entities are strictly momentary subjects of experience that spontaneously constitute themselves by *prehending* (literally, grasping on a feeling level) other actual entities in the environment or world out of which they are arising. Whitehead, therefore, does not have to appeal to a preestablished harmony between monads as determined by God but can instead stipulate that the actual entities create their own patterns of interrelation at every moment through prehension of their predecessors and the explicit or implicit patterns of behavior operative over time among them.

Whitehead inherited from Leibniz, however, a predisposition to philosophical atomism—the belief that all macroscopic realities, the persons and things of this world, are nothing more than aggregates of actual entities in dynamic interrelation. He recognized, to be sure, that because actual entities come and go in rapid succession there must exist what he called "societies" of actual entities (Whitehead 1967, 204) that would carry forward the pattern of interrelation among successive generations of actual entities and thus serve as a principle of continuity in the midst of change much akin to the classical notion of substance. But he apparently had no clear idea of how societies as such objective higher-order ontological unities were different from the process of subjective self-constitution or self-unification characteristic of actual entities. Yet, it is precisely this dimension of Whiteheadian societies as objective higher-order ontological unities different from their constitutive actual entities that is necessary to justify, on Whiteheadian grounds, belief in a soul as emergent out of the brain as a physical organ and yet as distinct from it. Likewise, only on the basis of this revised understanding of Whiteheadian societies can one affirm the logical possibility of subjective immortality not simply for individual actual occasions or fleeting moments of experience for human beings, as

Marjorie Suchocki worked out some years ago in her book *The End of Evil* (1988, 81–114), but for a redeemed self that represents the totality of an individual's life history or sum of its experiences.

I begin with a summary exposition of my reinterpretation of Whiteheadian societies and then indicate how it applies to an understanding of the soul that is emergent out of the neural infrastructure of the brain and yet distinct from it.

RETHINKING WHITEHEAD'S CONCEPT OF SOCIETY

There are relatively few passages in *Process and Reality* where Whitehead speaks at length about the nature of societies. In one of those passages he describes societies in their dynamic interrelation as “environments” and “layers of social order” for their constituent actual occasions:

Thus a society is, for each of its members, an environment with some element of order in it, persisting by reason of the genetic relations between its own members. Such an element of order is the order prevalent in the society. But there is no society in isolation. Every society must be considered with its background of a wider environment of actual entities, which also contribute their objectifications to which the members of the society must contribute. . . . Thus we arrive at the principle that every society requires a social background, of which it is itself a part. In reference to any given society the world of actual entities is to be conceived as forming a background in layers of social order, the defining characteristics becoming wider and more general as we widen the background. (Whitehead 1978, 90)

By “genetic relations” among actual entities Whitehead means that later actual entities derive the pattern for their mutual self-constitution from their immediate predecessors in the same society. Thereby a “common element of form” (Whitehead 1978, 34) or pattern of behavior is transmitted from one set of actual occasions to another within that society. My focus in this article, however, is on Whitehead's description of a society as “an environment with some element of order in it.” I would prefer to use the term *field*, even though I am well aware of how the notion of field is generic and defined differently in different disciplines. I define it simply as an objective context for the interaction of entities that is itself somehow structured by the interplay of those same entities. In this sense, it is akin to another generic notion, that of *system*.¹ Both fields and systems, moreover, as the passage from Whitehead suggests, can be readily seen as “layered” within one another, thus conditioning their ongoing mutual operation. The defining characteristics of an animal organism, for example, influence and thereby condition the existence and behavior of individual cells within the organism, even as the cells by their dynamic interplay limit the functioning of the animal organism as a whole.

Still another reason to think of Whiteheadian societies as fields rather than simply as aggregates of actual entities (occasions) with an “element of order” between and among them is that the field, unlike an aggregate, can

be said to perdure over time as successive generations of actual entities come and go. With each new generation of actual entities there must be a new aggregate. A field, on the other hand, as the context or "place" for the interplay of actual entities, does not come and go with each new generation of actual entities. Rather, the field endures as the objective context or environment out of which each new generation of entities arises and to which each generation contributes its own very modest modification of the pattern which it inherited from its predecessors. Whitehead seems to confirm this hypothesis: "The causal laws which dominate a social environment [read 'field'] are the product of the defining characteristic of that society. But the society is only efficient through its individual members. Thus in a society, the members can only exist by reason of the laws which dominate the society, and the laws only come into being by reason of the analogous characters of the members of the society" (Whitehead 1978, 90–91).

In other words, a field as simply a context for the interaction of entities has no reason to exist if it is totally empty, devoid of entities. But the entities (more specifically, Whiteheadian actual entities as momentary subjects of experience) need a structured or lawlike field of activity out of which to arise in order to pattern themselves in their individual self-constitution along the lines of predecessor actual entities in the same society.² Hence, there must always be such a context or lawlike environment for successive generations of actual entities, even though the field itself initially came into existence and is here and now sustained in existence only in and through successive generations of actual entities with roughly the same pattern of existence and activity. The field and its constituent actual entities mutually condition one another from moment to moment.

A FIELD-ORIENTED APPROACH TO THE GOD-WORLD RELATIONSHIP

Given this field-oriented reinterpretation of Whiteheadian societies, how are we to understand the God-world relationship? First, a field-oriented interpretation of Whiteheadian societies allows one to affirm a trinitarian understanding of God as a community of divine persons. Second, it allows one to affirm the world of creation in terms of the doctrine of panentheism. That is, one can legitimately propose that the world of creation at every moment comes into being within the field of activity proper to the divine persons and is then sustained in existence through incorporation into the divine communitarian life. Third, it allows one to affirm the existence of the soul as an entity distinct from the brain that enjoys its own special form of subjective immortality even as it shares in the overall transformation of material creation in virtue of the latter's progressive incorporation into the divine life.

How, then, can one legitimately propose a trinitarian understanding of God within this neo-Whiteheadian framework without danger of tritheism, belief in three gods in close collaboration rather than one God in three persons? Key to my argument here is the philosophical claim that the objective unity proper to a Whiteheadian society is qualitatively different from the purely subjective unity of its constituent actual occasions, taken both individually and collectively. A Whiteheadian society is neither the agent of its own self-constitution like an individual actual occasion nor simply an aggregate of actual occasions. Rather, in Whitehead's language, it is an environment or objective context in which an ongoing succession of actual occasions can retain over time basically the same pattern of interaction or "common element of form." As such, it represents a higher-order unity or form of existence than that proper to its constituent actual occasions, even though, as already noted, it comes into being and is sustained in existence only by the ongoing interplay of successive generations of such actual occasions.

Thus it is relatively easy to conceive the unity of the Triune God in terms of a common field of activity that serves as the ground of their being or their divine nature. Each of the divine persons is to be considered as a "personally ordered society" of actual occasions whose structured field of activity overlaps perfectly with the fields of activity proper to the other two divine persons. Because the field of activity for each of the divine persons is by definition infinite, together they must constitute only one all-embracing field of activity. This accounts for their unity as one God, namely, an ongoing intersubjective community in which each divine person is totally immanent in the very existence and activity of the other two persons. As I see it, this is basically what Thomas Aquinas had in mind with his description of the three divine persons as "subsistent relations" who share everything in common except their relational differences as distinct persons (Aquinas 1951: I, Q. 29, a. 4 *resp.*). In both cases, the divine persons are a unitary reality in that they possess one and the same nature (or, as I see it, shared field of activity).³

Moreover, if one conceives this shared divine field of activity as a matrix or ontological ground for the world of creation, one is in possession of a model for the God-world relationship that can be rightly regarded as panentheistic rather than pantheistic. As in panentheism, God must transcend the world as well as be immanent within it. Yet the guiding presupposition of this model for the God-world relationship is that the three divine persons co-constitute a common field of activity which is theirs alone apart from the decision to create finite beings who could share in their divine life, albeit in a necessarily limited way. Within this divine matrix proper to the persons of the Trinity, creation can gradually come into existence as an ordered hierarchy of ever more complex Whiteheadian societies of actual

occasions, each with its specific “common element of form” or shared pattern of existence within a circumscribed field of activity.

How the original actual occasions came into existence can be explained as follows. If one stipulates that the divine initial aim to the creaturely actual occasion both empowers it to become itself and gives direction to its concrescence, one can affirm the classical Christian doctrine of creation from nothing, not just at the first moment of the cosmic process for the initial set of actual occasions but at all subsequent moments and for every subsequent set of actual occasions. I presume here that even at the dawn of the cosmic process sets of creaturely actual occasions would coexist so as to provide a basis for the formation of societies at a later stage. One could project the following scenario for the early stages of the cosmic process. There existed at first only coincidental nexuses of actual occasions with little or no coherence or persistence over time. Then by degrees the components of atoms (electrons, protons, neutrons) came into being, each as a temporal series of actual occasions with a distinguishable form. Then, over an extended time, first atoms and then molecules as more complex societies of actual occasions came into being. Finally, at least on this planet if not elsewhere in the universe as well, life came into existence as still more organized societies of actual occasions in the form of proto-organisms with a “soul” or dominant subsociety of actual occasions. From these proto-organisms followed by degrees all the other forms of life, including human life, as still more organized and interconnected Whiteheadian societies.

The end result, of course, is a strictly communitarian model of the God-world relationship. That is, not individual actual occasions but societies of actual occasions are, if not the *final*/real things of which the world is made up, at least the *conventional* or *normal* components. Yet, as already noted, within this communitarian understanding of the God-world relationship, one can logically affirm the priority of the divine community to all created communities or finite societies of Whiteheadian actual occasions so that the divine persons are genuinely free to create or not create, to give creatures a share in their communitarian life or not. At the same time, because all of these finite societies of actual occasions exist within the divine matrix as their ontological ground of existence and activity, one can with equal logic assert for this model of the God-world relationship the doctrine of pantheism, whereby creatures live in God and at the same time have their own existence and activity. In this way, one avoids the logical extremes of monism (pantheism) or dualism (the classical God-world relationship in which God is seen as separate from the world as its transcendent Creator).

THE SOUL/BODY RELATIONSHIP

At this point we are ready to take up the special case of the human soul as distinct from the brain and the rest of the human body. The human em-

bryo during gestation gradually develops in complexity as a physical organism. In Whiteheadian terms, there is a slow buildup of more and more complex societies of actual occasions. From a philosophical point of view, what is key here is the emergence of higher-order Whiteheadian societies out of the interplay of actual occasions within lower-level Whiteheadian societies. Successive generations of actual occasions, in other words, gradually evolve in terms of the complexity of the pattern governing their mutual interrelation. When the pattern reaches a certain stage of complexity, a new society, or higher-level ontological unity, emerges and with it a new regnant nexus of actual occasions to preside over that newly formed “structured society” (Whitehead 1978, 103). Eventually that regnant nexus can become a personally ordered society of living actual occasions, or “soul,” for the entire structured society, or society made up of subsocieties (Whitehead 1978, 107).

In this way, we can understand the emergence of the rational soul in human beings out of the developing infrastructure of the brain and central nervous system. It is not inserted into the organism by direct divine intervention but is, so to speak, a further development of the organism’s own process of self-development or complexification. The actual occasions constitutive of the soul are different in degree but not in kind from the actual occasions at work in the infrastructure of the brain. That is, as Whitehead explains,

the brain is coordinated so that a peculiar richness of inheritance is enjoyed now by this and now by that part; and thus there is produced the presiding personality [read “soul”] at that moment in the body. Owing to the delicate organization of the body, there is a returned influence, an inheritance of character derived from the presiding occasion and modifying the subsequent occasions through the rest of the body. (Whitehead 1978, 109)

Yet these actual occasions constitutive of the “presiding personality,” or soul, within the brain are still in the end momentary self-constituting subjects of experience like any other actual occasion within the human body or in the world at large.

At the same time, if one likewise claims that divine initial aims not only give direction to created actual occasions but also empower them to become themselves by a spontaneous self-constituting decision, we may legitimately say that God creates and sustains the human soul as it emerges out of the infrastructure of the brain and central nervous system. God’s creative activity is then, so to speak, at work from the inside of the organism’s own process of self-development rather than operative from the outside by way of an extrinsic intervention into that same process. Likewise, God’s creative and sustaining activity for the society of personally ordered actual occasions constitutive of the human soul is no different from God’s creative and sustaining activity for every other society of created actual occasions in this world. Hence, there is no special divine intervention in the

cosmic process so as to create the human soul as a strictly immaterial reality. Metaphysical dualism is thereby avoided and emergent monism instead affirmed.

LIFE AFTER DEATH AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF
THE UNIVERSE

Finally, we take up the issue of life after death for human beings and the transformation of the physical universe through progressive incorporation into the divine communitarian life. For, if one concedes that the three divine persons by their dynamic interrelation coconstitute a conjoint field of activity for the workings of the divine life, and if one further concedes that this divine matrix serves as the ontological ground of being for the world of creation, then one has at hand the ontological basis for asserting that the divine persons and their creatures can coexist in their separate subjectivities and yet share the same divine life, albeit in different degrees. The divine persons and all created subjectivities together coconstitute the divine matrix, or common ground of being, at any given moment. In its fundamental structure, of course, it is constituted by the ongoing relationship of the three divine persons to one another. But in line with Whitehead's notion of the divine consequent nature, what happens in the world is thereby progressively incorporated into the divine life: "The revolts of destructive evil, purely self-regarding, are dismissed into the triviality of merely individual facts; and yet the good they did achieve in individual joy, in individual sorrow, in the introduction of needed contrast, is yet saved by its relation to the completed whole" (Whitehead 1978, 346).

Martin Buber in his celebrated book *I and Thou* (1970, 53–85) took note of the fact that two human beings by their dynamic interrelation co-create what he called "the Between" (*das Zwischen*),⁴ a meeting place where the two subjectivities can influence and affect one another without danger of the one being absorbed into the other as an accidental modification of the other's existence and activity. Intersubjectivity requires such an intentional common ground, which is structured by the ongoing exchange between two or more participants and which perdures as an objective reality as long as they remain in living contact with one another. Applied to the God-world relationship as envisioned above, this means that the divine matrix is *das Zwischen*, the intentional common ground between the three divine persons and their creatures as created subjects of experience. Each of the self-constituting decisions of these created subjects of experience contributes in some small way to the further structuring of this objective reality that they share with the divine persons.

Unlike the divine persons, however, human subjects of experience at the moment of their self-constitution in this world are not fully aware of their co-participation in this all-encompassing divine matrix. Only at the moment of death, when the personally ordered society of actual occasions

constitutive of the "soul" wins freedom from the normal constraints of life in the body, does the actual occasion operative in this final moment presumably achieve enlightenment through the action of God's enabling grace. Suchocki claims that every actual occasion in its moment of "enjoyment," or fulfilled subjectivity, experiences transformation through incorporation into the divine life (Suchocki 1988, 88). I contend instead that, although the personally ordered society of actual occasions constitutive of the human person is progressively being incorporated as a given finite field of activity into the all-encompassing divine field of activity, only the final actual occasion within that same field will actually experience this transformation through the action of divine grace.⁵ Yet, in and through thus appropriating more fully its own history, namely, the structured field of activity already constituted by the decisions of its predecessors, this final actual occasion will be in a position uniquely to evaluate and appreciate the significance of its life for both itself and others and thus come to an abiding sense of "transformation, redemption and peace" (1988, 109).⁶

All of these remarks, of course, apply only to human beings in their successive moments of self-consciousness. Yet all other created realities, including the bodies of human beings, as noted above, are likewise constituted by the dynamic interplay of momentary subjects of experience and are likewise being taken up at every moment into the all-encompassing divine matrix. In my adaptation of Whitehead's thought, they are finite structured fields of activity that can be progressively incorporated in terms of their basic pattern or structure into that same divine matrix. For the same reason, these finite fields of activity require a final set of actual occasions as their subjective focus in the moment before the death of the organism or the dissolution of the inanimate compound. This final set of actual occasions, moreover, will experience in varying degrees something like the transformation of the human soul at the moment of death. That is, to the degree that the actual occasions constitutive of these societies experienced spontaneity or even rudimentary self-awareness in this life, they will presumably experience a transformed existence within God. Our human bodies will be renewed through participation in the divine life; all animals and plants that have ever existed on this earth will likewise be present within the divine life as alive in a new strictly immaterial way. Even the subatomic components of inanimate nature with their ceaseless movement within the present order will not be present within God as something purely static or lifeless but as endowed with new energy. For, as promised in the Apocalypse, or Book of Revelation (21:1-4), the old order will have passed away, and there will be a new creation, a new heaven and a new earth.⁷

Here we encounter the problem of the Christian doctrine of the Last Judgment. If the resurrection of the body and the transformation of the material universe are taking place at every moment in the history of the

universe, how can one properly speak of the end of time and the Last Judgment? As I see it, key to the doctrine of the Last Judgment is that God's justice and mercy will simultaneously be vindicated in a way that all human beings can experience and understand. In a sense, within the scenario that I have sketched above, the Last Judgment is taking place at every moment in the cosmic process, at least since the origin of the human species. But certainly at the moment when the human species ceases to exist (either on Earth or elsewhere in the universe), the Last Judgment in the biblical sense will already have taken place. Every human being will know his or her place in that cosmic drama, and, if "saved," give everlasting thanks to God for the wonders of God's creation.⁸ As for the end of the physical universe, one can only say that it emerged by degrees from the divine matrix and will forever remain linked with it, however it naturally comes to an end or is transformed into still another universe at some future date.⁹

CONCLUSION

To sum up, it is my contention that one can justify traditional Christian belief in the existence of the human soul and the possibility of life after death for human beings within a transformed material universe if one chooses carefully the philosophical scheme underlying those claims. One cannot prove these beliefs rationally or beyond the shadow of a doubt, but one likewise should not have to appeal simply to the power of a loving God to make them happen as promised. Midway between these logical extremes is the hypothesis that a properly conceived metaphysical scheme such as my own revision of Whitehead's philosophy should allow one to render these classical Christian beliefs at least plausible to the nonbeliever. In this way there can at least exist some sort of philosophical common ground between the believer and the nonbeliever about the nature of physical reality. Neither party may ultimately "win" the argument, but the intervening discussion will keep both sides honest about the inevitable limitations of their own position and the rational plausibility of the opposing position. Given the finite character of the human mind, this may be all that one can reasonably expect from such honest exchange of views.

NOTES

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1. Ervin Laszlo defines a natural system as "a nonrandom accumulation of matter-energy, in a region of physical space-time, which is nonrandomly organized into coacting interrelated subsystems or components" (Laszlo 1972, 30). See also p. 23, where he links his notion of systems with field theory in physics.

2. A more conventional Whiteheadian solution would run as follows: Actual entities apprehend the pattern exhibited by their predecessors through a process Whitehead calls "objectification" (1978, 23). That is, physical influences (prehensions) derived from antecedent actual entities are evaluated positively or negatively in terms of various conceptual prehensions derived partly from

those same antecedent actual entities and partly from other sources. Finally, there is a “transmutation” of these suitably modified physical and conceptual influences so as to attain a unified physical “feeling” of the nexus or aggregate of actual entities from which the original physical feelings or prehensions in all their diversity were derived (1978, 244–55). As I argue elsewhere, it would be a much simpler process if newly concreting actual entities immediately prehended the structure of the field out of which they were originating (Bracken 1994, 10–24, esp. 16–17; 2001, 146–51). That is, they would apprehend the structure of the nexus as a whole directly rather than indirectly through an elaborate analysis and comparison of the structure or pattern proper to individual parts or members. In the end, the results would presumably be the same, but the process of transmission of form would thereby be far more objective and reliable.

3. Creaturely societies of actual occasions, by contrast, are separate from one another because their respective fields of activity in some respects overlap and in other respects are different from one another. Husbands and wives, even after many years of marriage, never completely share the same field of activity; each has a sphere of activity proper to himself or herself which defines him or her as a separate individual. In that sense, the persons of the Trinity are distinct from one another in that they represent three different but necessarily interrelated subjectivities who together constitute a unique corporate reality or divine community. But they are in no sense separate individuals who here and now choose to coconstitute a community but who can separate from one another at will without loss of personal integrity.

4. William Desmond (1995, esp. 200–207) likewise sees the necessity of exploring the “between,” or the common ground between dynamically interrelated subjects of experience, as the true basis for understanding what it means to be.

5. Ultimately at stake here between Suchocki and me is the philosophical issue of the continuity of the human self within the parameters of process-relational metaphysics. Suchocki, an orthodox Whiteheadian, is logically obliged to accord subjective immortality to each individual actual occasion or moment of experience within a person’s lifetime as it is prehended by God into the divine consequent nature. As a result, there is the unresolved problem of the “million Marjories” all enjoying the risen life but with no indication of how they together constitute the unitary reality of the redeemed human self. I, on the contrary, argue that the human self is a structured field of activity for successive moments of consciousness that endures as individual actual occasions come and go. Hence, only a final actual occasion is needed to allow the personally ordered society of actual occasions which is the human person to experience full incorporation into the divine life.

6. See also Miroslav Volf (2000, 263): “The doctrine of justification presupposes *continued life and agency* of human beings precisely in the passivity of their being justified.” The saved individual, in other words, is simultaneously both passive (saved by God’s grace) and active (experiencing himself or herself in a new way). In neo-Whiteheadian terms, this would mean that the final actual occasion would be fully self-constituted and yet ever more able to enjoy what it has contributed to salvation history.

7. John Polkinghorne, in line with the teachings of St. Paul, affirms that in the world to come there will be a “new creation” such that nonhuman creation will share in the divine life (2002, 113–23). The weakness of his position is that he offers no philosophical justification for that belief. My neo-Whiteheadian metaphysics of universal intersubjectivity offers such a philosophical justification. That is, if, in line with Whitehead’s dictum, “the final real things of which the world is made up” are actual occasions or momentary subjects of experience, what ultimately survives is the divine matrix, an all-encompassing field of activity structured by subjects of experience (both divine and created) in ongoing dynamic interrelation. There is no dichotomy between matter and spirit that must be overcome by the power of God in the world to come. In the final analysis, all is spirit, i.e., immaterial subjects of experience in dynamic interplay within a common structured field of activity.

8. See Tanner 2000, 222–37. I agree with Tanner that, properly understood, Christian eschatology has no more to do with the physical end of the universe than the doctrine of creation has to do with its temporal beginning: “Eternal life is a present reality; we possess now, in an unconditional fashion, life in God as the source of all good and need not wait for death to pass from the realm of death to that of life” (p. 231).

9. Unlike most contemporary systematic theologians, scientist-theologians such as Polkinghorne fully expect “that cosmic history will continue for many billions of years and that, before its foreseeable end, humanity and all forms of carbon-based life will have vanished from the universe” (Polkinghorne 2002, 140–41).

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