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COMPREHENSIVE COMMITMENTS AND THE PUBLIC WORLD:

TILLICH, RAWLS AND WHITEHEAD ON THE NATURE OF JUSTICE

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ABBREVIATIONS OF PRIMARY SOURCES

John Rawls

IOC	"The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus"
IPRR	"The Idea of Public Reason Revisited"
JFPM	"Justice as Fairness: Political, Not Metaphysical"
PL	*Political Liberalism*
TJ	*A Theory of Justice*

Paul Tillich

I	*Systematic Theology*, volume I
II	*Systematic Theology*, volume II
III	*Systematic Theology*, volume III
CTB	*The Courage to Be*
IH	*The Interpretation of History*
LPJ	*Love, Power, and Justice*
MB	*Morality and Beyond*
PE	*Political Expectation*

Alfred North Whitehead

AE	*The Aims of Education and Other Essays*
AI	*Adventures of Ideas*
AESP	*American Essays in Science and Philosophy*
MT	*Modes of Thought*
PR	*Process and Reality*
RM	*Religion in the Making*
SMW	*Science and the Modern World*

CHAPTER ONE

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

This dissertation has emerged from the conviction that a theory of justice should have a comprehensive basis, but should also be relevant to modern societies that legitimate a plurality of comprehensive views.[1] I shall proceed by examining two exemplary modern conceptions of justice, each of which emphasizes one of these aims. Paul Tillich provides a compelling ontological basis for his theory of justice; for him, the principle of morality is rooted in the nature of being itself. John Rawls, on the other hand, intends to forgo any dependence on universals in order to maximize the relevance of his theory to societies that legitimate a plurality of comprehensive views. In the case of each thinker, I shall examine the starting point from which he begins to construct a theory of justice, the initial assumptions—both implicit and explicit—upon which the theory is based, the means by which it is developed, and the adequacy of the theory which results.

In the course of this examination, I shall argue that Rawls's contention that the fundamental ideas of constitutional democracy are conceptually independent of notions inherent in comprehensive moral schemes is not persuasive. Simply put, a

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[1] The term pluralism, as used in this dissertation, simply denotes a diversity of comprehensive commitments.

commitment to what has been called a thin theory of the good—sufficient only to adjudicate among competing individual claims—is both politically inadequate and philosophically untenable. Yet, while Tillich's understanding of the content of the moral aim—to become a person within a community of persons—is both politically constructive and philosophically persuasive, his view of the source of the moral imperative is more difficult to apply in pluralist contexts. For Tillich, the meaning of our being—the unconditional obligation to become in actuality what we are essentially—is derived from a source that necessarily transcends the structure of our existence. This means that while the content of a theory of justice can be described through ontological analysis, the ground of justice cannot. The issue, then, is not whether the insights of the Christian faith as described by Tillich are able to respond adequately to the moral aim, but whether, given a pluralist political context, those whose comprehensive commitments are not Christian can also have adequate access to the moral imperative. In responding to this challenge, I shall suggest that the insights of Alfred North Whitehead can help extend Tillich's effort to strengthen the link between religion and morality.

In this initial chapter, I shall note the importance and role of a theory of justice as it relates to the constitutional history of the United States. I shall also sketch in general terms the relationship between reason and religion in pluralist contexts, especially as it plays out in terms of the tension between rational religion and religious liberty. I shall then note several ways one can approach the formulation of a theory of justice, and preview briefly how Tillich, Rawls, and Whitehead engage this challenge.

I. THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF A THEORY OF JUSTICE

The U.S. Declaration of Independence declares that everyone has been divinely endowed with an inalienable right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Some two millennia before the founding of this nation, Aristotle contended that the character of authentic human life is such that happiness stands as its chief end. The founders, therefore, did not break new ground when they modified Locke's notion of the right to life, liberty, and property; they simply followed a well-worn and time-honored path when they decreed that happiness is a fundamental right. However, the specification of happiness as the formal goal of life does not address the substantive question of what happiness itself might be or how one might act to achieve it.

The question is whether the concept of happiness has substantive content which can be specified, at least in general, or is (merely) the formal designation of whatever an individual's idiosyncratic and morally inscrutable goals might happen to be. Even if one resolves this issue with respect to an individual life, the same issue emerges in a public context. What is the proper character of the political order, such that maximum happiness can be garnered by the individuals that constitute it?

Augustine, exemplary in this respect among theological apologists, believed that the chief end of human life was both substantive and specifiable: to love God and enjoy God forever. Even though the absolute righteousness of the City of God can never be achieved in the state of nature which characterizes the Earthly City,

Augustine nonetheless maintained that the presence of the City of God as a normative concept sufficiently constrains the state of nature so that some measure of justice— love of God and others under conditions in which God is both partially affirmed and partially denied—is possible. In other words, divinely inspired love is the substance of which justice is the public form.

The founders of our nation did not choose this substantive approach, in part because of their historically justifiable determination to keep the domains of church and state separate. The First Amendment to the constitution makes clear that the basic concern of James Madison, its chief architect, was the protection of the right of freedom of conscience.[2] The Virginia Declaration of Rights, on which Madison based his assertion in the first amendment, declares that all persons have "an equal right to the free exercise of Religion according to the dictates of conscience," a notion given theological ground in the duty of every person towards the creator. Since this duty precedes both in time and degree the obligation to the state, the inalienable and equal right to the free exercise of religion ineluctably follows.

The political consequence of the philosophical commitment to liberty or freedom as the essential human characteristic implies that individuals are themselves the sole judge of which actions are conducive to happiness. If individuals are free to pursue whatever goals they as individuals judge best, then the state has no basis for deciding whether a particular action will make someone a happier person or a more fulfilled individual. Its only concern is that one person's exercise of the freedom to

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[2] The source and content of Madison's thought is helpfully discussed in chapter 4 of Ronald F. Theimann, *Religion in Public Life: A Dilemma for Democracy* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1996), to which my brief summary here is indebted.

seek happiness does not impinge on the freedom of another. If it does, the state steps in to ensure that the balance of liberty is set right. The problem is that this approach isolates private convictions from the public world, which raises the question not only of the role of religion in pluralist contexts, but also of the nature of religion itself.

II. REASON AND RELIGION IN PLURALIST CONTEXTS

In his essay titled "Paradigm Lost: From the Sense of the Whole to the Sense of the Presence of God," Ingolf Dalferth recalls the Enlightenment-era origin of rational religion, which was designed at a time when people were tired of the strife and conflicts of opposing religious sects. In order to produce a stable and well-ordered society, they believed their social consensus must include "a sense of the whole, a comprehensive view of the end and purpose of human life in the universe that provides a full account of the nature of humanity, of moral responsibility, and of how people should live their lives."[3] The religion that resulted was not one sect among others, but a public religion—both in the sense of being open equally to all and of being supported by reasons that were reasons for everyone. When it came time to deal with differences of opinion, however, the advocates of rational religion expected each person to be impartial and neutral, that is, have no allegiance to a particular point of view, but rather achieve a universal perspective that was not confined to their particular community of interest. But over time, neither rational religion nor any of the

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[3] Ingolf U. Dalferth, "Paradigm Lost: From the Sense of the Whole to the Sense of the Presence of God." (paper presented at the Religion in a Pluralistic Age: The Third International Conference on Philosophical Theology, 2001), 21-22.

historical religions could achieve this level of impartiality and universality. As Dalferth puts it, "rational religion alone and none of the historical religions could stand the test of public acceptance by neutral reason: either one was a rational theist or one's beliefs were not reasonable."[4] In this situation, individuals were forced to choose between acting rationally and following the guidelines of reason or, alternatively, holding a religious belief, which entailed taking leave of public rationality and thus not being reasonable.

The paradigm of rational religion, Dalferth rightly asserts, failed to provide a religion that could be universally accepted by all citizens as the basis for their political participation. Citizens of modern democratic societies have turned out to share less in common than was once thought. But instead of accepting our differences, and recognizing that our legal and political system must safeguard our freedom profoundly to differ about the meaning of existence and the goal of life, the liberal strategy has been to privatize these differences and cultivate common ground in the less substantive matters on which we can agree.[5] However, such a strategy for dealing with differences of belief and opinion works well—if at all—only in relatively homogenous societies with shared historical backgrounds.

The ideal of religious liberty entails not only being able to hold religious beliefs and engage in worship, but also to act on one's beliefs—in individual as well as common domains of life. Which is to say that religious convictions are all-encompassing: they cannot be limited to one's private life alone, and indeed can

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[4] Ibid., 22.

[5] Ibid., 24.

legitimately be limited only by the proviso that the actions of one individual based on his or her beliefs do not impede the ability of other people to exercise their own beliefs. This limitation, in other words, does not exclude from the political or public realm actions based on religious conviction. As Kent Greenawalt has pointed out, "the claim that citizens and legislators should rely exclusively on secular grounds is not only wrong but absurd. It invites religious persons to displace their most firmly rooted convictions about values, the nature of humanity, and the universe in a quest for a common basis of judgment that is inevitably unavailing when virtually everyone must rely on personal perspectives."[6]

If personal perspectives and religious convictions cannot in fact be banned from the public realm,[7] the resulting problem, as John Rawls puts it, is to discover how it is "possible that there exist over time a stable and just society of free and equal citizens profoundly divided by reasonable though incompatible religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines." (PL xx) The answer that Rawls asserts includes an ideal of public reason centered on what he calls the criterion of reciprocity, which

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[6] Kent Greenawalt, *Religious Convictions and Political Choice* (New York: Oxford University Press) 258.

[7] Dalferth, "Paradigm Lost: From the Sense of the Whole to the Sense of the Presence of God", 28. cites Robert Audi's article "Liberal Democracy and the Place of Religion in Ethics," in R. Audi and N. Woltersdorff, *Religion in the Public Square: The Place of Religious Convictions in Political Debate*, (Lanham, MD/NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997), p. 1-66, in which Audi describes what it means to do so in principle. Audi asserts that all arguments in public debates have to follow the principle of secular rationale and the principle of secular motivation. The first states that one has a prima facia obligation not to support any public policy that restricts human conduct unless one has an adequate secular reason; the second says that the obligation holds unless one is motivated by what Audi calls normatively adequate secular reason, "where sufficiency of motivation here implies that some set of secular reasons is motivationally sufficient, roughly in the sense that (a) this set of reasons *explains* one's actions and (b) one would act on it even if, other things remaining equal, one's other reasons were eliminated." (29).

states that in the public realm only those reasons for action are legitimate if we can reasonably think that others might also reasonably accept them. However, citizens of a given community do not all engage in the common life of the community for the same reasons: the ground may be common but the reasons for standing on it diverse, even incompatible.

The same tenuous relationship exists between reasons given for religious belief and the belief itself. Reasons are not normally the basis for believing in the first place. If a given set of reasons for belief is refuted, the usual response of the believer is not to stop believing but to search for better reasons. If faith is lost, the cause usually has to do with a change in a way of life rather than the presence of persuasive critical arguments. Religions are complex ways of life, not devoid of reason but not reducible to reason alone. "In religion, as well as in politics, there is more than one use of reason, both public and private, and the two sets of distinctions (between public and private, and politics and religion) do not coincide.[8]

The relationship between reason and religion will play a central role in the considerations that lie ahead. At this juncture, suffice it to say that a compelling and cohesive theory of justice depends on reason having a central role in both the articulation of religious beliefs and the mediation of public discourse about justice. The challenge will be to specify whether these two conversations—the articulation of comprehensive beliefs and the discourse about justice—should overlap and, if so, on what terms.

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[8] Ibid., 30-31.

**III. TILLICH AND RAWLS: EXEMPLARS OF TWO APPROACHES TO
    JUSTICE**

In his *Introduction to Political Philosophy*, Alan Gewirth delineates two broad

streams concerning the moral evaluation of political power, each of which understands

the nature of human life and the role of human political institutions in a different way.

Deontological theories insist that one ought to do what is inherently fair or just or right

in consideration of the act itself or of a principle the denial of which entails a self-

contradiction. The aim of these theories is the achievement of justice, or fairness.

Teleological theories, in contrast, insist that one ought to do what will bring the best

consequences. The aim of teleological theories is the achievement of utility, or

happiness. They focus not on the form in which something is to be distributed as a

matter of duty, but on the maximizing of a content that is good.

I have chosen to examine in detail the theories of justice proposed by Paul

Tillich and John Rawls. Each of these two thinkers is arguably the leading twentieth

century proponent of the type of theory he articulates. Any attempt to address the

issues posed by a theory of justice must confront, either directly or indirectly, Tillich

and Rawls, as well as their respective critics and defenders. For his part, Paul Tillich

advocates a view of existence and a correlative theory of justice that is derived from a

teleological commitment, while Rawls's theory of justice as fairness develops from a

consideration of deontological criteria. In other words, for Tillich, the aim at the

consequences of an action make it right, judged by criteria that are material or

substantive. For John Rawls, something is right in principle, judged always by criteria that are formal or relational.[9]

The most comprehensive statement of Paul Tillich's theory of justice appears in his 1954 book titled *Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological Analyses and Ethical Applications*. The subtitle is telling: according to Tillich, the search for the basic meaning of justice, as well as of love and power, must be carried out as part of the search for the basic meaning of all concepts which are present in the human cognitive encounter with the world. Tillich presupposes a world that a rational human mind can grasp by the intuition of its essential structures. The elaboration of this structure is the work of ontology, which asks not about particular beings, but about being as such, about the structures which are presupposed in any encounter with reality, and about the character of everything that is in so far as it is. As a principle or structural element or category of being, justice has an ontological basis.

In his *Systematic Theology*, Tillich points out that the ontological question presupposes an asking subject and an object about which the question is asked, which in turn presupposes the self-world structure as the basic articulation of being. One of the pairs of elements that constitute this basic structure is the polarity of individualization and participation. In the experience of this polarity under the actual conditions of existence, human beings are aware of the unconditioned as a limit to

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[9] It is worth noting that deontological and teleological theories must be arranged in serial order. That is, if human existence is such that it has a good that ought to be maximized or a goal that should be pursued, then not to pursue that good or goal, and to set in place one or more deontological criteria instead, would be to deny a principle which has arisen from a consideration of human existence alone. The resulting moral system would be trapped in a contradiction. In other words, one may employ deontological criteria if and only if teleological criteria do not apply.

their desire to assimilate the whole world into their selves. This relation to the unconditioned imposes upon their sense of being a moral imperative—an ought-to-be—that provides an ontological basis for discovering how to reach the perfect form of individualization that we call human and the perfect form of participation we call community. For Tillich, the pursuit of individuality in community provides a moral norm for human beings.

The self-world polarity is examined more closely in Tillich's discussion of the unity of love, power and justice in both personal and group relations. Since estrangement from the essential unity of being is the central feature of human existence, love is the reunion of the separated. The form in which love is realized in society, the structure of its presence, is justice—not simply a proportional or distributive justice, but a theonomous form of justice, which for Tillich is both creative and transforming. It involves giving to each its due, as well as also making possible through its inspiration of creative acts the reunion of the separated.

The ultimate ground and source of justice, as well as love and power, is being-itself, to which Tillich gives the name God. However, Tillich argues that God, as the ground of being and the goal of existence, can be identified neither with essence or existence. If God were simply the essence of being, then God could not achieve self-transcendence and fulfill the role of power of being. If God were an existing being, then God would be threatened by nonbeing. Since neither is possible in Tillich's view, he concludes that God must be beyond the distinction between essence and existence; God must be being-itself. The ground of being, Tillich insists, is not itself an instance of the ontological categories.

This separation of the nature of the ontological categories from the character of being-itself is consistent with the overall distinction Tillich draws between philosophy and theology. According to Tillich, the knowledge of revelation (the purview of theology) does not conflict with ordinary knowledge (the purview of philosophy) about the structures of nature and history or about the nature of human beings and their relation to one another, because theology and philosophy employ different sources and norms. Because the ontological basis of Tillich's theory of justice is within the realm of ordinary knowledge, it is open to the scrutiny of any reasonable person. The ultimate source of the moral imperative, however, is the ground of being, which transcends the realm of ordinary knowledge. For Tillich, the moral imperative is given by what is truly ultimate and is disclosed to the faith by which we are grasped. While philosophical analysis can describe the content of justice, the moral imperative emerges from an apprehension of the essential character of humanity, which is grounded in what gives meaning to life. As we shall explore in the next chapter, this means of locating the moral imperative complicates the common pursuit of justice in a context of pluralism.

The title of John Rawls's seminal 1973 treatise on justice is *A Theory of Justice*, which suggests, with appropriate restraint, that his theory may be one of many such theories. In his later works, especially *Political Liberalism* and "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," Rawls further limits the scope of his theory of justice. It is designed for modern constitutional democracies, which are characterized by a persistent, more or less permanent pluralism. Such societies are constituted by rational citizens engaged in seeking their own individual goods as determined by their own

privately held, thus diverse and often conflicting, comprehensive schemes. According to Rawls, only a theory of justice that is both non-universal and non-teleological could be relevant to such societies. Within this context, democratic governments must discover the common ground present among its citizens. For this common ground to emerge, and for an overlapping consensus about justice to develop, the conception of justice must be distinguished from all reasonable comprehensive schemes and be accepted by persons who hold those schemes.

Rawls stands firmly in the liberal tradition of political philosophy, a tradition committed to the essential understanding of human beings as free to choose their own individual conceptions of the good, and a tradition thus often confounded (and at times stymied) by the challenge, within a radically pluralist political context, of describing both an arena and a set of rules for achieving moral consensus. Rawls seeks to formulate principles of justice acceptable to all who affirm that a pluralism of comprehensive views should be legitimate. For the individual citizens themselves, then, a theory of justice will be acceptable only if it satisfies their moral interest in 1) pursuing their individual good as they understand it, and in 2) being reasonable, which given Rawls's analysis, means seeking to cooperate with the adherents of other comprehensive views. The challenge for such a theory is to win an overlapping consensus—not to show all the citizens involved that any idea they all share is true, but only that they have reason to accept it.

Unlike comprehensive theories, Rawls's theory does not state what justice requires in all situations, or how all of society's institutions could be organized to achieve justice. Moreover, the overlapping consensus may be achieved based on an

individual's moral or religious reasons that, from a philosophical point of view, are inadequate or have been discredited. The goal is not for individuals in their roles as human beings to accept ideas about justice as true, but only for them, in their roles as citizens within the political system, to accept the ideas. According to Rawls, these ideas about justice are latent within the basic political, social and economic institutions of democratic societies and stand independent of any particular comprehensive understanding of moral, religious, or philosophical values or ideals. As Rawls puts it, they are "intuitive ideas that, because they are imbedded in our society's main institutions and the historical traditions of their interpretation, can be regarded as implicitly shared" (PL 173).

As I will attempt to show in chapter 4, even if a group of citizens reaches an overlapping consensus about justice based on their own comprehensive commitments, they would not necessarily agree that the principles of justice thus derived are wholly independent of their commitments. The claim that justice is independent of any conception of the good requires a conception of the good that no theory of justice could support. Rawls's insistence that his principles of justice are freestanding, that is, independent of the comprehensive claims that constitute the overlapping consensus, cannot be supported. A theory of justice established independent of an ontological basis ultimately involves the denial of comprehensive claims generally.

My thesis is that Alfred North Whitehead's metaphysics extends Tillich's ontological basis for a theory of justice, the principles of which thereby legitimate, as does Rawls, a plurality of comprehensive views. In other words, Whitehead's thought helps to articulate a conception of justice that is both ontologically established and

relevant to modern situations of pluralism. More specifically with respect to Tillich's thought, if Tillich understood God to be the chief exemplification of the self-world structure, rather than the unique exception to it, then Tillich and Whitehead's views about justice would turn out to be, subtleties aside, largely compatible. With respect to the proper constitution of the public order, Tillich's moral imperative of individual-in-community and Whitehead's implied theory of justice based on maximizing creativity drive toward the same end. Hence, the turn from Tillich to Whitehead is largely for the sake of completing Tillich's account of justice by providing an adequate theistic backing. Similarly, the turn from Rawls to Whitehead is for the sake of articulating the appropriate and necessary role of comprehensive views in considerations of justice, even in modern constitutional democracies.

IV. THE METAPHYSICS OF EXPERIENCE IN WHITEHEAD

At the outset of a dissertation that proposes to examine the thought of Alfred North Whitehead as an adequate basis for a theory of justice, it seems necessary to address the obvious: Whitehead never gave an address or wrote an article about ethics, much less justice.[10] Victor Lowe, author of *Understanding Whitehead*, claims that Whitehead disliked the subject of ethics—a claim that, arguing from the absence of any systematic treatment of ethics from a thinker whose fundamental metier was

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[10] Daniel Wayne Metzler, "Essay on Whiteheadean Ethics" (Emory University Press, 1987). In his introduction, Metzler details this fact using both primary and secondary sources. My brief summary here is indebted to him.

systematic thought, appears regrettably accurate.[11] Whitehead certainly loathed

moralistic arguments, an antipathy illustrated by what John Cobb called Whitehead's

rejection of "the overrigorous pursuit of righteousness."[12] Whitehead himself put it

this way: "Good people of narrow sympathies are apt to be unfeeling and

unprogressive, enjoying their egotistical goodness… This type of moral correctitude

is, on a large view, so like evil that the distinction is trivial" (RM 95).

Nonetheless, there is another way to interpret the absence of a specific,

systematic focus in Whitehead on ethics generally or a theory of justice in particular.

To the extent that Whitehead's entire system of philosophy constructs a conceptual

frame whereby all elements of experience can be graded in importance, Whitehead's

thought is wholly devoted to developing an ethical perspective. The overarching

endeavor of Whitehead's exercise in speculative philosophy is, as he famously put it,

"to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which

every element of our experience can be interpreted" (PR 3). If successful, this system

of ideas will bring "the aesthetic, moral, and religious interests into relation with those

concepts of the world which have their origin in natural science" (PR xii).

Metzler rightly points out that metaphysics is metaphysics and not ethics,

which is to say that metaphysical ideas alone cannot determine what is morally good

or right. But, he goes on to note, metaphysics does seek to discover and express those

ultimately general factors that are indispensably relevant to the analysis of any

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[11] Victor Lowe, *Understanding Whitehead* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972) 111.

[12] John Cobb, *A Christian Natural Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965) 125.

experience whatsoever.[13] Metaphysical principles are absolutely general; Whitehead insists that nothing in the world of our immediate experience can take "a holiday from their sway" (PR 4).[14]

Whitehead constructs the comprehensive basis of his philosophical approach through what he terms the ontological principle, which specifies that nothing exists except the experience of subjects, variously termed actual occasions or actual entities. To search for a reason, according to Whitehead, is to search for one or more actual entities, apart from which there is bare nothingness.

All that becomes actual does so in the process of making uniquely definite relations to all other entities whatsoever. Two consequences follow from this principle that anything actual is an instance of process. First, nothing can wholly determine the being of something else. If actualization requires self-determination, then a completely other-determined actuality is impossible. In this sense, freedom is a strictly universal principle. In part, what something is results from its own decision.[15] Second, every

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[13] Metzler, "Essay on Whiteheadean Ethics" 9.

[14] The question of whether Whitehead's approach leaves him susceptible to a charge of foundationalism is not one I will deal with at length. It is my judgment, however, that a convincing case can be made that it does not. Nowhere does Whitehead argue that his observations about the nature of our experience are self-evident or self-justifying. Indeed, his "speculative scheme" is developed through a process of "imaginative generalization," in which significant features of the historical world are employed as analogues for the analysis of the nature of everything. Whitehead himself puts the situation this way: "Philosophers can never hope finally to formulate…metaphysical first principles. Weakness of insight and deficiencies of language stand in the way inexorably. Words and phrases must be stretched towards a generality foreign to their ordinary usage, and however such elements of language be stabilized as technicalities, they remain metaphors mutely appealing for an imaginative leap…no language can be anything but elliptical, requiring a leap of the imagination to understand its meaning in its relevance to immediate experience" (PR 13).

[15] Thomas Auxler relates this principle to human existence in his essay *The Process of Morality*, which cites Plato in the *Sophist* and Aristotle in *Metaphysics* as holding, along with succeeding thinkers in the Western philosophical tradition, that reason is central to the pursuit of the highest good for human life and that it is a mistake to transform reason into a supposedly neutral instrument capable of promoting any end. Rather, reason is central to the process of evaluating norms

actuality is determined, in part, by the actualities in its immediate past. To be actual is to be internally related to those past events.

As I will detail in due course, the essence of Whitehead's conception of morality lies in the relation between the one and the many. Given that everything actual is a free response to other actual things, that is, other free responses, a fully human actuality is an active subject of process, not merely a passive object. Moreover, human actualities have the potential for greater value or importance insofar as the world to which they relate gives them greater freedom. This is, in Whitehead, the ontological ground for a conception of individuality and community. The community is best when it maximizes the freedom of all, and individuals make the most of their opportunities when they seek to contribute to such a community. Accordingly, politics should be democratic, such that justice is pursued through a political process in which all are free and equal.

Like Tillich, Whitehead's metaphysics include a divine ground for justice, but in a way that makes the source of the moral imperative an instance of, and not beyond, the metaphysical categories. The resulting principles of justice are therefore consistent with the practice of democratic pluralism, because they can prevail given only that all members of a community, whatever their comprehensive views, share a commitment to reason and persuasion. In this way, Whitehead's metaphysics can support a

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for experience, one criteria for which is the value of autonomy: "What makes human beings special, and what needs addressing, is the power of coming to decisions autonomously. It is not enough that people come to the *right* conclusion; they must come to it in their own ways and for reasons they can appreciate. Consequently we find in Greek ethics a heavy emphasis on deliberation as a process of forming judgments" Thomas Auxter, "The Process of Morality," in *Hegel and Whitehead* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 221-22.

principle of justice that is at once ontologically based and relevant in contexts of

pluralism.

CHAPTER TWO

PAUL TILLICH: THE COMPREHENSIVE BASIS OF JUSTICE

Ethics is the science of man's moral existence, asking for the roots of the moral imperative, the criteria of its validity, the sources of its contents, the forces of its realization. The answer to each of these questions is directly or indirectly dependent on a doctrine of being… There is no answer in ethics without an explicit or implicit assertion about the nature of being (LPJ 72).

According to Tillich, the search for the basic meaning of justice, as well as of love and power, must be carried out as part of the search for the basic meaning of all concepts that are present in the human cognitive encounter with the world. Tillich presupposes a world that a rational human mind can grasp by the intuition of its essential structures. The elaboration of this self-world structure is the work of ontology, which asks not about particular beings or about the meaning of being for those particular beings, but about being as such, about the structures which are presupposed in any encounter with reality, and about the character of everything that is in so far as it is. As we shall see in due course, Tillich uses this ontological structure as the basis of an understanding of justice that is both highly developed and extensively relevant to the decisions and actions within human existence. As a principle or structural element or category of being, justice has an ontological basis.

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Tillich's most systematic discussion of justice appears in his 1954 work *Love, Power, and Justice*. Here, as Ronald H. Stone notes, Tillich unites reflection on justice with two concepts that had been the focus of his scholarly attention for many years, love and power. Tillich attempts to "find a way between realists, who would reduce justice to the meaning of power, and idealists, who would assert the demands of justice without reference to power." In historical terms, he seeks "to overcome the dichotomy in Protestant ethics between justice and love without collapsing them into each other."[1]

In this chapter, we will examine Tillich's understanding of the tasks of philosophy and theology, which introduces the philosophical question about the structure of being. The structure of being is the focus of what Tillich calls ontological analysis, which begins with the originative polarity, the self-world correlation, and proceeds by examining in turn the polar ontological elements that constitute the structure, the conditions of existence under which the structure is threatened by non-being, and the categories of being and knowing through which the mind grasps and shapes reality. What becomes apparent through this ontological analysis, according to Tillich, is the demand that essential being imposes on being under the conditions of existence, namely, that we become what we actually are—the moral imperative. This experience of moral obligation is unconditional because it is rooted in the essential nature of humanity and the other essential structures of reality. The moral imperative, simply put, is that we become persons in the encounter with others in a community of

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[1] Ronald H. Stone, *Paul Tillich's Radical Social Thought* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1980) 120.

persons. The principles of moral action that enable us to fulfill this mandate are love and justice: love is the drive to reunite what has been separated, and justice is the form adequate to the reuniting work of love.

The aspect of Tillich's conception that I shall seek to modify is the relationship between God, as ground of being and source of the moral imperative, and the basic structure of being of which God is the ground. What I will suggest is that an understanding of the depth and ground of being as part of being, rather than apart from it, would make the source of the moral imperative accessible by means of ordinary knowledge. In other words, if Tillich understood God to be the chief exemplification of the self-world structure, rather than the unique exception to it, then Tillich's account of justice as the moral imperative of individuality-in-community would not only have an adequate theistic backing, it would also be accessible to reason and thus relevant in contemporary contexts of pluralism. In order to understand how Tillich conceives of the relationship between what he calls the basic structure of being and the meaning of that structure to human beings, we turn to an examination of his method of correlation.

I. THE METHOD OF CORRELATION

As a philosopher and a theologian, Paul Tillich stands in the broad Augustinian tradition of Christian Platonism. John Herman Randall points out that Tillich has learned well the lesson of the *Symposium*: the object of knowledge and the object of

love are the same, and knowledge is ultimately a participation in true being.[2] Tillich's

concern with existence is ultimately his reaffirmation of the Platonic doctrines of *eros*

and participation. This affirmation does not commit Tillich to a natural theology,

however. In his view, no one can argue from the character of the world to the

existence of God, nor is God a being whose existence is such that it demands proof.

Even so, the line dividing philosophy from theology is not neatly drawn. Tillich

describes the relationship this way:

> Philosophy asks the ultimate question that can be asked, namely, the
> question as to what being, simply being, means…. Philosophy
> primarily does not ask about the special character of the beings, the
> things and events, the ideas and values, the souls and bodies which
> share being. Philosophy asks what about this being itself…. This makes
> the division between philosophy and theology impossible, for,
> whatever the relation of God, world and man may be, it lies in the
> frame of being; and any interpretation of the meaning and structure of
> being as being unavoidably such has consequences for the
> interpretation of God, man and the world in their interrelation.[3]

Philosophy is fundamentally an exercise in ontology: it deals with the structure

of being in itself and undertakes an ontological analysis of that structure. In Tillich's

words, philosophy is *"that cognitive approach to reality in which reality as such is the

object"* (I 18). Reality as such, Tillich goes on to explain, is not the whole of reality

but the structure which makes reality a whole and thus a potential object of

knowledge. These structures, along with the related categories and concepts, are

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[2] John Herman Randall, "The Ontology of Paul Tillich," in *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, ed. Charles Kegley (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1982), 268.

[3] Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948) 85.

presupposed in the cognitive encounter with every realm of reality. The philosopher's

attitude is appropriately impartial:

> The philosopher tries to maintain a detached objectivity toward being
> and its structures. He tries to exclude the personal, social, and historical
> conditions which might distort an objective vision of reality. His
> passion is the passion for a truth which is open to general approach,
> subject to general criticism, changeable in accordance with every new
> insight, open and communicable (I 22).

The task of theology, in contrast, is to assess the meaning of being not as far as

it is, but as far as it is for us. The basic attitude of the theologian includes a

commitment to the content being explicated. Theologians are not detached from the

object about which they ask questions, but examine the object, which indeed

transcends the character of being an object, with an attitude of "passion, fear, and

love" (I 23). Tillich adds, "This is not the *eros* of the philosopher or his passion for

objective truth; it is the love which accepts saving, and therefore personal, truth" (I

23). For this reason, Tillich insists that theology is an existential undertaking. The

theologian "is involved—with the whole of his existence, with his finitude and his

anxiety, with his self-contradictions and his despair, with the healing forces in him and

in his social situation" (I 23). Theology characterizes our real existence in all its

concreteness, in all its accidental elements, its freedom and responsibility, in its

failure, and in its separation from its true and essential being.

The relationship between philosophy and theology is thus characterized by

both continuity and discontinuity:

> Philosophy and theology are divergent as well as convergent. They are
> convergent as far as both are existential and theoretical at the same
> time. They are divergent as far as philosophy is basically theoretical

and theology is basically existential… Philosophy, although knowing the existential presuppositions of truth, does not abide with them. It turns immediately to the content and tries to grasp it directly. In its systems it abstracts from the existential situations out of which they were born…. It asks for truth itself… This is its freedom.[4]

Instead of asking for "truth itself," theology asks about the truth for us. More specifically, systematic theology uses what Tillich calls the method of correlation: "it makes an analysis of the human situation out of which the existential questions arise, and it demonstrates that the symbols used in the Christian message are the answers to those questions" (I 64). Tillich goes on to make clear that the answers are dependent on the revelatory events in which they appear.

The Christian message provides the answers to the questions implied in human existence. These answers are contained in the revelatory events on which Christianity is based and are taken by systematic theology *from* the sources, *through* the medium, *under* the norm. Their content cannot be derived from the questions, that is, from an analysis of human existence. They are "spoken" *to* human existence from beyond it (I 64).

Tillich distinguishes his method of correlation from three other methods of relating the contents of the Christian faith to human spiritual experience, each of which he judges inadequate. The supernaturalistic method of correlation completely overlooks the matter of human reception, taking the Christian message to be a sum of revealed truths that must recreate (that is, create anew) the human situation before the message can even be received. This method is inadequate because it suggests that human beings can receive answers to questions that, because of human fallenness, they are not able to ask. The humanistic method takes the opposite approach, deriving

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4 Ibid., 88-89.

the Christian message from the natural state of humanity, all the while unaware that human existence itself is the question, not the answer. Revelation, Tillich insists in response, is spoken to, and not by, humanity. The third method, which Tillich terms the dualistic method, attempts to build a supranatural structure on a natural substructure. It tries to express the relation between the human spirit and the divine spirit "by positing a body of theological truth which man can reach through his own efforts or, in terms of a self-contradictory expression, through 'natural revelation'" (I 65). The so-called arguments for the existence of God are the most prominent instance of the approach used by natural theology.

Tillich's own approach begins not with divine revelation but with human reason, which is the means by which the objective intelligible structure of being is abstracted from the conditions of existence. In classical terms, this human reason is *logos*: the structure of the mind that enables the mind to grasp and transform reality. Tillich distinguishes two concepts of reason, the ontological and the technical. The latter is called deliberative reason—the capacity for reasoning that calculates means and ends. Ontological reason is capable of participating in the universal *logos* of being. It is both subjective and objective; it both grasps reality and shapes it. The grasping element of reason "has the connotation of penetrating into the depth, into the essential nature of a thing or an event, of understanding and expressing it." The shaping function transforms the material that has been grasped "into a Gestalt, a living structure which has the power of being" (I 76). The shaping function of ontological reason points to the dimension of depth:

The depth of reason is the expression of something that is not reason but which precedes reason and is manifest through it. Reason in both its objective and subjective structures points to something which appears in these structures but which transcends them in power and meaning…. In the cognitive realm the depth of reason is its quality of pointing to truth-itself, namely to the infinite power of being and of the ultimately real, through the relative truths in every field of knowledge. In the aesthetic realm the depth of reason is its quality of pointing to "beauty-itself," namely, to an infinite meaning and an ultimate significance, through the creations in every field of aesthetic intuition. In the legal realm, the depth of reason is its quality of pointing to "justice-itself," namely, to an infinite seriousness and an ultimate dignity, through every structure of actualized justice" (I 79).

As the structure of the mind and reality, reason becomes actual in the processes of being, existence, and life. Because, as Tillich puts it, "being is finite, existence is self-contradictory, and life is ambiguous" (I 81), actual reason participates in these changing characteristics of reality, moving through ambiguities, conflicts, and finite categories of being. In the process of life, the structural elements of reason move against each other and fall into self-destructive conflicts that cannot be solved based on actual reason. The polarity of structure and depth within essential reason, for example, becomes under the conditions of existence a conflict between autonomous reason (which actualizes structure without depth) and heteronomous reason (which speaks as an outside authority, as it were—but from the depth of reason), producing a quest for a reunion of autonomous reason with its own depth, which is the quest for revelation. In the same way, the conditions of existence cause the static and dynamic elements of reason to become a conflict between absolutism (of either tradition or revolution) and relativism (either positivistic or cyclical), producing a quest for that which is concrete and absolute at the same time, which is also found only in

revelation. Finally, the polarity of the formal and emotional elements of reason

produce a conflict between formalism (the excessive emphasis on cognitive reason,

aestheticism, the structural necessities of justice, and conventions in social and

personal life) and irrationalism (emotion without structure), producing a quest for the

reunion of form and emotions, which can take place only through revelation.

Revelation, Tillich states, is the manifestation of the mystery that is of ultimate

concern to us because it is the ground of our being. More specifically, it "is the

manifestation of the depth of reason and the ground of being. It points to the mystery

of existence and to our ultimate concern" (I 117). As such, revelation is independent

of what science and history say about the conditions in which it appears. We shall

return to the relationship between reason and revelation, especially as it relates to the

relationship between justice and the ground of being. First, however, we turn to an

analysis of those matters which reason can know definitely.

II. ONTOLOGICAL ANALYSIS: THE STRUCTURE OF BEING

> *The child's restless question, "Why is this so; why is that not so?" and
> Kant's grandiose description, in his critique of the cosmological
> argument, of the God who asks himself, "Why am I?" are the same in
> substance although infinitely distinguished in form. Man is by nature a
> philosopher, because he inescapably asks the questions of being" (BR
> 9).*

The mystery of life appears when human reason is driven beyond itself to what

Tillich calls the original fact: there is something and not nothing. As Alistair Macleod

has noted, the experience of the shock of nonbeing must not be confused with the

existential awareness of nonbeing, which Tillich calls anxiety. It is one thing for individuals to be aware that they will die someday, and quite another to be struck by the mysteriousness of the fact that there is a world at all.[5] That is not to say that Tillich is always clear in his language about the source of the ontological shock, but the ontological question, to the extent that is arises from the human awareness of mortality, does so by extension to the question's primary source, which is the fact that there is something rather than nothing.

Macleod helpfully notes three attitudes one might conceivably adopt toward the fact of the world's existence. One could admit the contingent nature of the fact that there is a world, while denying that this fact either requires or admits of explanation. On this reading, the existence of the world is a brute fact, which must simply be accepted. Or one could claim that the existence of the world is not a brute fact at all, but rather a luminous and intelligible fact—a thoroughly rational system, the particulars of which may elude us in practice but are ultimately knowable in principle. Finally, one could hold that the existence of the world must be explained, but the required explanation necessarily eludes the grasp of our intellect. For the advocates of this third view, the existence of the world is a mysterious fact: "it is neither (as on the first view) a merely unproblematic fact which simply has to be accepted, nor (as on the second view) a sheerly intelligible fact. The existence of the world is a problematic fact, but the problem it poses is not susceptible of any solution." In this situation, then,

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[5] Alistair Macleod, *Tillich: An Essay on the Role of Ontology in His Philosophical Method* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973) 104.

although the experience of the fact that there is something rather than nothing seems to require an explanation, none seems available.

Tillich, on Macleod's reading, seems to move between the second and third views. The claim that the shock of nonbeing (occasioned by recognition of the fact that there is something and not nothing) generates the question which is the philosopher's central task to answer suggests that Tillich takes the second view, since the third view rules out the possibility that any answer can be derived from the experience. Yet, Macleod argues, something like the third view seems to be required by Tillich's avowedly technical use of the term "mystery of being," which precludes the possibility of any rational exploration of the mysterious. On this point, Tillich writes:

> In order to safeguard the proper use of the word "mystery," uses which are wrong or confusing must be avoided. "Mystery" should not be applied to something which ceases to be a mystery after it has been revealed. Nothing which can be discovered by a methodical cognitive approach should be called a "mystery." What is not known today, but which might possibly be known tomorrow, is not a mystery (I 121-122).

Whether or not Tillich elsewhere suggests that there can be disclosure of the mysterious in revelation (a question to which we shall return), the disclosure would not remove the mysteriousness of what has been revealed, though revelation does use words that are based on the usual modes of human thought and action in the world. As Tillich puts it, "Ordinary language, which expresses and denotes the ordinary experience of mind and reality in their categorical structure, is made a vehicle for expressing and denoting the extraordinary experience of mind and reality in ecstasy

and sign-event" (I 123). Nevertheless, using the mind and reason as a means of conveying revelatory experience is not the same thing as rational exploration of the mysterious. Macleod concludes: "Tillich's remarks seem unambiguously to rule out the possibility of any rational exploration of the "mysterious."[6]

For Tillich, the question of what it means to be anything at all rises from "the shock of nonbeing," which comes because and when human beings contemplate possible nonbeing, or envisage nothingness: the body of this death. He explains that the Platonic school of philosophy distinguished the nothing which has no relation to being (as in "nothing at all") from the nothing which means that which does not yet have being but which can become being if united with essences or ideas. Christian apologists rejected the latter understanding in favor of the former based on the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. However construed, the dialectical problem of nonbeing—whether as the "not yet" of being or the "no more" of being—is inescapable. It is the problem of finitude, which is being limited by nonbeing. As Tillich puts it, "everything which participates in the power of being is 'mixed' with nonbeing. It is being in the process of coming from and going toward nonbeing. It is finite" (I 189). At the human level, finitude is experienced as an anticipation of the end, the threat of death. As awareness, it is anxiety, which is an ontological concept because it expresses finitude from the inside. Simply put, anxiety is the self-awareness of the finite self as finite.

The experience out of which philosophy is born is the philosophical shock of this recognition, which Tillich codified in three questions posed in *The Protestant Era*:

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[6] Ibid., 106.

"What is the meaning of being? Why is there being and not not-being? What is the structure in which every being participates?"[7] But Tillich is wary of the form of the question "Why is there something, why not nothing?" because it attempts to ask about something about which we can have no knowledge: nothing.

> But in this form the question is meaningless, for every possible answer would be subject to the same question in an infinite regression. Thought must start with being; it cannot go behind it, as the form of the question itself shows. If one asks why there *is* not nothing, one attributes being even to nothing. Thought is based on being and it cannot leave this basis; but thought can imagine the negation of everything that *is*, and it can describe the nature and structure of being which give everything that is the power of resisting nonbeing (I 163).

Macleod observes, *prima facie*, that the initial formulation of the ontological question—why is there something, why not nothing?—does seem to arise quite naturally out of the experience of the shock of nonbeing. Indeed, the point of the question is to demand an explanation that would render intelligible the fact that there is a world, in the face of the fact that there might have been no world at all.[8] This would seem to be the expected question arising in response to the shock of nonbeing. Why, then, does Tillich profess to find difficulties with this formulation of the ontological question? Macleod argues that Tillich's justification would be something like the following. To ask the question "Why is there something and not nothing?" is to ask why there is a world at all.[9] But to ask why there is a world at all is, for Tillich,

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[7] Tillich, *The Protestant Era* 85.

[8] Macleod, *Tillich: An Essay on the Role of Ontology in His Philosophical Method* 109.

[9] Macleod points out that "something" in Tillich's formulation here does not mean, as it normally does, some particular thing the identity of which is not clear. Rather, something refers to the world, where "world" comprises what*ever* is, or *every*thing that is.

to seek an explanation of the existence of "everything that is" in terms of something other than what is. "Since there is *ex hypothesi*, *nothing* over and above 'what is' to serve as a referent in this explanation and since Tillich dismisses the suggestion that 'nonbeing' might account for, or explain, the 'being' of 'everything that is,' he not surprisingly regards the demand for such an explanation as illegitimate."[10]

Tillich's point, on my reading, is this: the question "Why is there something rather than nothing?" cannot be a question that takes absolute nonbeing as a possibility. To the contrary, the power of being cannot be thought away. Hence, the shock of nonbeing is the recognition that any and every particular thing can indeed be thought away, which yields the question: What about beings as such cannot be thought away? That is, what is the most general characterization of how the power of being is expressed in beings? Only by participation in the power of being (or being-itself, or the power of being in everything that is) are finite beings able to emerge from non-being and resist the threat of non-being. All the things that exist, in other words, do so by virtue of their participation in the power of being, or being-itself. The power of being in everything that is, in turn, expresses itself through the structure of what is. Tillich writes:

> Thought is based on being, and it cannot leave this basis, but thought can imagine the negation of everything that *is*, and it can describe the nature and structure of being which give everything that is the power of resisting nonbeing (I 165).

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[10] Macleod, *Tillich: An Essay on the Role of Ontology in His Philosophical Method* 109-10.

Tillich explicitly rejects any demand for a derivation of the world from something beyond, or outside, or other than, the world. For Tillich, "to account for the fact that there is a world at all involves describing the 'structure of being' which gives to 'everything that is' the 'power to resist nonbeing.'"[11]

A. The Self-World Correlation

The place where Tillich begins his examination of the basic ontological structure is the primary dialectic of existence, that of self and world: "Man can oppose himself to every part of his world, including himself as a part of the world" (III 39). Human beings are both centered and able to transcend that centeredness. As free and independent sources of action, they are separate and apart from their world.

In the ontological structure itself, Tillich distinguishes four levels of ontological concepts: the basic ontological structure, the elements which constitute the structure, the characteristics of being which are the conditions of existence (also known as existential being), and the categories of being and knowing. The fundamental articulation of the structure of being is presupposed by the very fact of the ontological question. In order for the question "What is being?" to have meaning, there must already be present a subject which asks the question and an object about which the question is asked. This self-world structure—a human subject encountering an objective world—precedes all other structures, both logically and experientially. In other words, the basic ontological structure is derived from an analysis of this primary

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[11] Ibid., 118.

polar relationship: the experience of human beings who have a world to which they belong. These structural elements are discovered by the self in the self's experience of the objective world, and then are generalized for all being without exception.

For our purposes, it is crucial to note that the place where the structure of being is made manifest to human beings is within themselves.[12] "Man is able to answer the ontological question himself because he experiences directly and immediately the structure of being and its elements" (I 169). This experience occurs within humans themselves, and it gives them an awareness of the conditions of knowing—the structures that make cognition possible. Being is revealed not in the objective world of which the asking subject is made aware, but in the conditions that are necessary for knowing in the first place. "The truth of all ontological concepts is their power of expressing that which makes the subject-object structure possible. They constitute this structure" (I 169). Tillich explains,

> The self-world polarity is the basis of the subject-object structure of reason…. We have described the world as a structured whole, and have called its structure "objective reason." We have described the self as a structure of centeredness, and we have called this structure "subjective reason." And we have stated that these correspond to each other, without, however, giving any special interpretation of the correspondence. Reason makes the world a self, namely, a centered structure; and reason makes the world a world, namely, a structured whole… The function of the self in which it actualizes its rational structure is the mind, the bearer of subjective reason (I 171-172).

In Tillich's view, this epistemological subject-object distinction is absolutely ultimate for all human knowledge. Which is why Tillich insists that ontology cannot

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[12] Randall notes that Tillich finds "being there" (*Dasein*) given to human beings within themselves as following Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*. Randall, "The Ontology of Paul Tillich," 186.

begin with things and try to derive the structure of being from them. The ontological

structure is both logically and existentially prior both to us and to nature, thus nothing

can be explained without invoking this polarity. "It is just as impossible to derive the

object from the subject as it is to derive the subject from the object… The basic

ontological structure cannot be derived. It must be accepted" (I 174).[13]

Romaine Luverne Gardner explains that, in charting this course, Tillich was

attempting to avoid the pitfalls of both the idealism of Fichte and the materialism of

Hobbes. Fichte had counseled, "Attend to thyself; turn thy glance away from all that

surrounds thee and attend upon thine own innermost self. Such is the first demand

which philosophy makes of its disciples."[14] From the starting point within the

innermost self, this perspective requires an irrational—and, according to Tillich,

unsuccessful—leap in order to find a place in the world. Hobbes began with the world

of bodies, space, and motion, from which he attempted no more successfully or

rationally to reach some coherent understanding of the self. One cannot appeal directly

to the natural world in order to frame ontological concepts, according to Tillich,

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[13] Randall notes that Tillich is not always consistent in describing how the basic ontological structure is discovered. "At times he follows Heidegger in looking for the structure of being 'in man.' This is the characteristic method of idealism, as Heidegger has more explicitly recognized since his *Sein und Zeit*. But at other times Tillich, following his own insights rather than another's thought, holds that the structure of being is found *by* man *in* his encounters with the world—that it is not the structure of man, but of man's cooperation with the world, a cooperation of which man is but one pole." Ibid., 188. It seems to me that the second of these alternatives is closer to Tillich's intention. The structure of being lies in the polarity, which is the relationship of cooperation. The only place from which a human being can encounter this structure is, of course, from the subjective side of the polarity. But this does not mean that the polarity can be collapsed into the human who is encountering a world.

[14] Johann Gottlieb Fichte, "First Introduction into the Science of Knowledge," *Sammtlicke Werke I* (Berlin: 1945) 422-436; as quoted by Benjamin Rand, *Modern Classical Philosophers* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1936) 436 and referenced in Romaine Luverne Gardner, "Theonomous Ethics: A Study in the Relationship between Ethics and Ontology in the Thought of Paul Tillich" (Harvard University, 1966) 25.

because human beings are estranged from nature as it exists in other beings. Each can know what the experience of the natural world means to him- or herself, but no one can know what the behavior of other human beings means to them. Which is why one can only begin with the self—not the self in isolation from the world of which it is part, but the self's immediate experience of that world.

The self to which Tillich refers in the self-world polarity refers neither to the human mind or ego but to an individual—be it an individual human being, a non-human organic being such as an animal, or even, by analogy, something which is part of the inorganic realm, such as an atom (I 169). What sets one self apart from all other selves is the simple fact that each is distinct from everything else in the universe. (Tillich uses the term "self" in two different ways: as a general ontological term, designating all things, and as a term within the specific ontology of human existence.) The issue, as Tillich puts it, is not whether selves exist. Rather, the issue is our awareness as human selves of self-relatedness, which is an original phenomenon that both logically and temporally precedes all questions of existence, one in which the contrast between a subjective self and an objective world is not yet apparent. In this experience of self-relatedness, there is only an awareness of an experience of a self as having a world to which the self belongs. It is in this awareness that human beings experience directly and immediately the structure of being and its elements (I 169).

Individual selves vary in terms of their awareness of the world outside themselves and their ability to assimilate the content of their world into themselves. In this sense, centeredness suggests both a going out from the self and a return to the self, a self acting on the world and being acted upon by it. In his discussion of the self-

integration of life in volume III of the *Systematic Theology*, Tillich explains that

human beings are the highest living being.

> The criteria are the definiteness of the center, on the one hand, and the
> amount of contents united by it, on the other. These are the criteria for
> the higher or lower rank of life. They decide the establishment of the
> animal dimension above the dimension of the vegetative. They decide
> that the dimension of inner awareness surpasses the biological and is
> surpassed by the dimension of the spirit. They decide that man is the
> highest being because his center is definite and the structure of its
> content is all embracing. In contrast to all other beings, man does not
> have only environment; he has world, the structured unity of all
> possible content (III 36).

In the first volume, Tillich has already made clear that world is not simply the

sum total of all beings, but rather a structure or a unity of manifoldness (I 170).

Human beings, as such, have a world at which they look, from which they are

separated and to which they belong. Yet they are never bound completely to their

environment, but grasp and shape it according to universal norms and ideas.

"Language, as the power of universals, is the basic expression of man's transcending

his environment, of having a world. The ego-self is that self which can speak and by

which speaking trespasses the boundaries of any given situation" (I 171). It is the

interdependence of the ego-self and the world that provides the basic ontological

structure and implies all others.

B. The Ontological Elements

Tillich's second level of ontological analysis examines the ontological

elements that make up the basic structure of being. Like the basic structure itself, these

elements are polar: individuality and universality (or participation), dynamics and form, and freedom and destiny. Each of the ontological elements is meaningful only in relation to its corresponding polar opposite. The first term in each of the polarities of being expresses the separation of being, its power to be something for itself, and the second term expresses the belongingness of being, its character as being part of the world. Again, these distinctions are discovered by the self in the self's experience of the objective world, then the distinctions are generalized for all being without exception.

As an ontological element, individualization is a quality that both constitutes and characterizes everything: "It is implied in and constitutive of every self, which means that at least in an analogous way it is implied in and constitutive of every being" (I 175). A leaf, for example, participates in the natural forces and structures that act upon it and are acted upon by it. In the case of human beings, in which the individualization is complete, the individual is a self who participates in a world. Through the rational structure of mind and reality, this individual self participates in the environment. Although the environment of a particular human being is relatively small, on a cosmic scale each human participates in the universe, because the universal structures, forms and laws are open to every person, and through them every person participates in "the remotest stars and the remotest past. This is the ontological basis for the assertion that knowledge is union and that it is rooted in the *eros* which reunites elements which essentially belong to each other" (I 176).

Although individualization and participation are interdependent on all levels of being, only in human beings can individualization reach the perfect form of the completely centered self, which can occur because there are no limits to the manifold richness of the world which the humans assimilate, and because there is no limit to the definiteness of the center from which they can grasp the contents of their world. When individualization reaches this perfect form, which we call a human person, participation also reaches the perfect form called communion, which is the participation of one person in another completely centered and completely individual self. This participation is neither optional nor accidental; no individual self can exist without other individual selves, the unconditional resistance of which enables the person to discover him- or herself in the first place. Tillich is adamant on this point: there is no person without an encounter with other persons.

This ontological polarity, according to Tillich, solves two problems that have long dogged Western civilization. It counters nominalism, in which only the individual has ontological reality and knowledge is an external act of grasping and controlling things. And it counters realism, which argues that only the essential structures of things, the universals, are the really real. With individualization and participation as ontological elements, Tillich insists both that individuals are real, and that they participate in the universal structure that is one with, and not a second layer of reality behind, empirical reality.

More importantly for our purposes, Tillich's formulation of the moral imperative draws upon this polarity when it demands that we become in actuality what we are potentially: a person in a community of persons. Furthermore, since human

beings can become persons only by entering into communion with other persons, the nature of their communion is a matter of serious moral concern. Because the moral demand is concerned with human beings developing their fullest potentiality, moral actions are always a triumph of centeredness over disintegrative forces that would weaken the center or restrict its power.

The second elemental polarity emerges from the fact that to be something means having a form, which is that element of the structure of being "which makes a thing what it is, is its content, its *essentia*, its definite power of being" (I 178). For example, says Tillich, the form of a tree is what makes it a tree—both giving it the general character of treehood as well as the special and unique form of an individual tree. The something to which form is given Tillich somewhat unhappily (he calls the concept "problematic") terms dynamics, which is the *me on*, the potentiality of being, or the power of being as opposed to nonbeing. Tillich notes that this dialectical concept has appeared as the *Urgrund* of Bohme, the will of Schopenhauer, the will to power of Nietzsche, the unconscious in Hartmann and Freud, the *elan vital* of Bergson, and the strife in Scheler and Jung (I 62, n.19). None of these concepts should be taken literally, according to Tillich, but each points symbolically to that which cannot be named. "If it could be named properly, it would be a formed being beside others instead of an ontological element in contrast with the element of pure form" (I 179).

In immediate human experience, the polarity of dynamics and form appears as the polar structure of vitality and intentionality. Vitality, Tillich says, is the power that keeps a living being alive and growing—the creative drive of the living substance in

everything that lives toward new forms. Intentionality means living in tension with something objectively valid, namely, the rational structure of objective reason actualized in a life-process. In this sense, Tillich says that one could call form "rationality," but rationality means having reason, not actualizing it. Alternatively, one could call it "spirituality," but spirituality means the unity of dynamics and form in the moral and cultural actions of human beings. "Therefore, we recommend the use of the term 'intentionality,' which means being related to meaningful structures, living in universals, grasping and shaping reality" (I 180). Vitality and intentionality are the basis of both self-transcendence and self-preservation.

In his discussion of the multidimensional unity of life, Tillich speaks of the possibility—indeed, the necessity—of restoring the term "spirit" to denote "the unity of life-power and life in meanings, or in condensed form, the 'unity of power and meaning'" (III 22). It is this unity toward which the polarity of vitality and intentionality point. As Tillich says, "The act in which man actualizes his essential centeredness is the moral act. Morality is the function of life by which the realm of the spirit comes into being. Morality is the constitutive function of the spirit" (III 38). We will explore these matters more closely when we turn to Tillich's explication of the moral imperative.

The third ontological polarity is the polarity of freedom and destiny, in which, as Tillich says, the description of the basic ontological structure reaches both its fulfillment and its turning point, making existence possible by "transcending the essential necessity of being" (I 182). Tillich admits that destiny is an unusual choice as freedom's counterpart, given that one ordinarily speaks of freedom and necessity.

However, he explains, necessity is a category, not an element, and its contrast is possibility, not freedom. "Man experiences the structure of the individual as the bearer of freedom within the larger structures to which the individual structure belongs. Destiny points to this situation in which man finds himself, facing the world to which, at the same time, he belongs" (I 182-183).

Unlike many theologians and philosophers, especially those who subscribe to some version of the opposing determinist or indeterminist views of freedom, Tillich insists that freedom is not the freedom of a function called the will.

> Both conflicting parties presuppose that there is a *thing* among other things called the "will," which may or may not have the quality of freedom. But by definition a *thing* as a completely determined object lacks freedom. The *freedom* of a *thing* is a contradiction in terms. Therefore, determinism always is right in this kind of discussion; but it is right because, in the last analysis, it expresses the tautology that a thing is a thing (I 183).

William Rowe acknowledges the tendency of philosophers both to make a substance or thing out of the will and to attribute freedom directly to the will. These tendencies, he agrees, must be avoided. Careful philosophers view the will as a power or capacity of the mind, soul, or person to decide things, and as such the question is not whether the will itself is free but whether the person is free in his or her willing. "To have free will is to have power over one's will, to have power to will something and power not to will that thing. To lack free will is to be subject to necessity in one's willings; it is to lack the power not to will what one wills."[15]

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[15] William L. Rowe, "Analytic Philosophy and Tillich's Views on Freedom." (paper presented at the God and Being: The Problem of Ontology in the Philosophical Theology of Paul Tillich Symposium, Frankfurt, 1988), 203-04.

Rowe goes on to say that, in his view, Tillich's conclusion about determinism and indeterminism is right, but not necessarily for the reason Tillich cites. The main problem is not, as Tillich would have it, that both sides of the controversy view the will as a thing, it is that both ultimately assume only one sort of cause of an event, namely, some other event (or set of events) that occurred earlier and is related by a law of nature to the event which is its effect. The difference between the two is that the determinist locates the causal event within an earlier act of will within the agent (usually referred to as the agent's motives and circumstances), while the indeterminist, who believes such chain-of-events causation destroys freedom, denies this form of causation but admits no other, hence our acts of will are without cause, and thus appear to be accidental, random events.[16]

Rowe himself suggests a return to an older idea of causation, sometimes called substance- or agent-causation, which holds that acts of will that are free are caused by the agent and not by earlier events. As Rowe puts it, "We are responsible for our acts of will because we ourselves freely cause them."[17] This view was developed in some detail by the 18th century Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid, who accepted the determinist's claim that every event has a cause but denied that every event has an event-cause. "But, on Reid's theory, they are not caused by prior events, as the believers in necessity from Hobbes to Hume maintained. Rather, free acts of will are caused by the agent, the person whose acts they are."[18]

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[16] Ibid., 205.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., 205-06.

This view of human freedom, to which Rowe as a self-identified analytic philosopher also subscribes, bears a striking relationship to the view of freedom held by Tillich, who identifies human freedom with the power of the personal center of a human being to act. Free acts are indeed determined: by the centered totality of the person. But Tillich does not believe, as would a determinist, that free acts are determined by the desires, motives, beliefs, etc—the particular parts—of the person that are united into the whole that makes up the centered self of the person. Such a view is untenable, in Tillich's judgment, because "it is impossible to derive the determinacy of the whole, including its nonseparated parts, from the determinacy of isolated parts. Ontologically the whole precedes the parts and gives them their character as parts of the special whole" (I 184). Rowe helpfully summarizes Tillich's view of freedom as follows:

> A centered self is a whole made up of parts which, as isolated from the whole, are causally determined by earlier events and circumstances. These causally determined parts, however, when united into the whole which is the centered person, are subject to the influence of the whole. I take this to mean, in part, that our desires, the strength of various motives, etc. can be modified by the centered self. The centered self, therefore, although limited by whatever desires and motives come together in the self, is free in that often it can modify their force and outcome. The causally determined parts of the centered self constitute our destiny. But the whole is not simply a function of the causally determined parts. It has a limited power to influence the parts, and in that power resides the freedom of the self.[19]

The freedom of human beings is the freedom of a completely centered, rational person. This freedom is experienced as deliberation (the act of weighing arguments

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[19] Ibid., 208.

and motives), decision (the reaction to the weighing by cutting off all possibilities but one), and responsibility (the obligation of the person who has the freedom to respond when questioned about his or her decisions).

Unlike Reid, who believed that freedom is unique to beings who have will and intelligence, freedom and destiny are ontological elements for Tillich, thus they necessarily characterize everything that is, including inanimate objects such as sticks and stones. But even Tillich acknowledges that stones, for example, do not deliberate about what they do or make decisions, and thus cannot be held responsible for what happens when they fall and hurt someone after being thrown into the air. Tillich's response to this dilemma is to say that there is a feature of stones that resembles the feature of freedom found in human beings, which he calls spontaneity. As centered whole—selves, in Tillich's conception—stones react spontaneously, that is, of their own accord, to the forces that are brought to bear upon them. But, as Rowe points out, freedom is the ability to respond to external forces in ways that are not determined either by those forces or by the facts about us that are beyond our control.[20] Stones certainly react to forces that play upon them, but it is not clear that or how they are free *not* to react.

Rowe's point, following Reid, seems to address a different sense of what constitutes freedom than Tillich is here trying to press home. Rowe's main concern appears to be about whether or not a choice is available to a given being—such as a human or a stone—concerning its reaction or lack of reaction when an outside force presents itself. In this sense, Rowe is right: a stone cannot *not* hit someone in the head

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[20] Ibid., 209.

when thrown on the proper trajectory. Even though a stone has no choice about

whether to react, however, the particular reaction that it does have is not wholly

determined by the one who throws it, but also has something to do with what the stone

is in its centered self. Simply put, a larger stone will have a greater impact, all other

things being equal, than a smaller stone, and that difference is mainly about the stone,

not the thrower. While the concept applies more easily to humans than to stones,

Tillich's conception of spontaneity is designed to point toward those internal

characteristics of each individual being that contribute to the outcome of any external

event.

Tillich's point becomes clearer in his focus on the polarity, analogous to

freedom and destiny, of spontaneity and law. An act is spontaneous if it originates in

the acting self; a reaction is spontaneous if it comes from a being's centered and self-

related whole. This is true, he insists, not only of human beings, but also of inorganic

things that react according to their individual structures. What makes spontaneity

possible is law—the presence of the structural determinateness of things and events.

While the term law is derived from the social sphere and designates an enforceable

rule by which a social group is ordered and controlled, natural laws are applied

universally to nature, because they are based on the rational structure not just of

human beings and society, but also of everything. As such, they are unconditionally

valid.

> Nature does not obey—or disobey—laws the way men do; in nature
> spontaneity is united with law in the way freedom is united with
> destiny in man. The law of nature does not remove the reactions of self-
> centered *Gestalten*, but it determines the limits they cannot trespass.
> Each being acts and reacts according to the law of its self-centered

structure and according to the laws of the larger units in which it is included… The laws of nature are laws for self-centered units with spontaneous reactions. The polarity of freedom and destiny is valid for everything that is (I 186).

Tillich also makes reference to the implications of this polarity in his discussion of the dimension of the spirit as it relates to the psychological realm. Each thought aiming at knowledge is constituted by conscious and unconscious sense impressions, traditions, and experiences, as well as volitional and emotional elements. This material makes up the content of thought. In order to transform the material of thought into knowledge, it must be processed according to logical and methodological criteria, a process carried out not by any of the elements of thought, but by the personal center of the thinker. "The transcendence of the center over the psychological material makes the cognitive act possible, and such an act is a manifestation of spirit" (III 27).

The same process occurs, according to Tillich, in a moral act. A large amount of material—drives, inclinations, desires, experiences, traditions, authorities, relations, conditions—is present in the psychological center. But, Tillich says, the moral act is not "the diagonal in which all these vectors limit each other and converge" (III 27). Rather, it is the centered self that actualizes itself as a personal self by transcending the elements of the situation, and exercises the freedom to deliberate and decide. "Such freedom is united with destiny in such a way that the psychological material which enters into the moral act represents the pole of destiny, while the deliberating and deciding self represents the pole of freedom, according to the ontological polarity of freedom and destiny" (III 28).

C. The Challenge of Existence

In the third level of ontological concepts, Tillich expresses the characteristics of being that are the conditions of existence, or the power of being to exist—what he calls existential being, as distinguished from essential being. This duality captures Tillich's form of the contrast between the ideal and the actual, between potentiality and actuality, or between the powers and their operation.

For example, while the finite self faces a world, the infinite individual has the power of universal participation. In the same way, human vitality is united with an intentionality that is essentially unlimited, and human freedom, though finite, is involved with an all-embracing destiny. "All of the structures of finitude force finite being to transcend itself and, just for this reason, to become aware of itself as finite" (I 190).

The relationship between finitude and infinity is different from that of the other polar elements, however. Infinity, as a directing rather than a constituting concept, directs the mind to experience its own unlimited potentialities, but it does not in itself establish the existence of an infinite being. Infinity, as Tillich puts it, is a demand, not a thing. The human mind keeps endlessly transcending the finite realities of existence, yet remains bound to the finitude of the individual, which bears it along. Even so, the power of infinite self-transcendence points to the fact that human beings belong to that which lies beyond non-being, namely, being-itself.

> The fact that man is never satisfied with any stage of his finite
> development, the fact that nothing finite can hold him, although
> finitude is his destiny, indicates the indissoluble relation of everything
> finite to being-itself. Being-itself is not infinity; it is that which lies

beyond the polarity of finitude and infinite self-transcendence. Being-itself manifests itself to finite being in the infinite drive of the finite beyond itself (I 191).

The awareness of finitude leads to anxiety—an ontological quality, not a psychological state, in which human beings are aware of their estrangement from that to which they properly belong. Though finite and limited by nonbeing, nonetheless human beings are aware of the fact that they belong to being. In *The Courage to Be*, Tillich refers to anxiety as the "existential awareness of non-being" and the "natural anxiety of man as man" (CTB 33). As we noted earlier, although anxiety and fear have the same ontological root, fear is directed by human beings toward a particular object. The object in question can be faced, analyzed, attached, and/or endured. In other words, one can act on fear, and in so doing participate in it, even if the participation takes the form of struggle against it. In this way, through an act of courage, one can meet the object of fear—the fact that it is an object makes participation possible—and take it into one's self-affirmation. "Courage can take the fear produced by a definite object into itself, because this object, however frightful it may be, has a side with which it participates in us and we in it. One could say that as long as there is an *object* of fear, love in the sense of participation can conquer fear" (CTB 36).

The same is not true with anxiety, precisely because anxiety has no object, or as Tillich says, the object of anxiety is the negation of every object. More specifically, anxiety is "ultimately rooted in the fact that as finite beings we are exposed to annihilation, to the victory of non-being in us."[21] While particular fears can be

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[21] Paul Tillich, "Existential Analyses and Religious Symbols," in *Four Existential Theologians*, ed. Will Herberg (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1958), 312-13.

conquered, anxiety as part of existence as existence can never be eliminated, because participation in the object of our anxiety, and the courageous struggle against it, and the conquest of love over it, are not possible. There is no help afforded human beings who, as human, experience anxiety.

Might the source of the threat to which anxiety is the response be the unknown, the indefinite possibility of an actual threat, rather than threat of nothingness itself? If so, anxiety would essentially be the fear of the unknown, an explanation of anxiety that Tillich judges insufficient. There are, after all, innumerable realms of the unknown, each realm specific to the individual, many of which can be faced with no anxiety at all. When anxiety is present, however, the anxious subject is driven to identify or establish objects of fear, such as pain, rejection by a person or group, or the moment of dying. Anxiety strives to become fear, because human beings know how to respond effectively to fear: with courage. When anxiety cannot be made into fear, however, when it cannot be attached to an object or an event, it is an unknown of a special type: the one that cannot ever be known, because it is nonbeing (CTB 37). Awareness of this unknown produces anxiety precisely because this unknown is a threat to the meaning or significance of our being.

The human mind is not only, as Calvin has said, a permanent factory of idols, it is also a permanent factory of fears—the first in order to escape God, the second in order to escape anxiety; and there is a relation between the two. Facing the God who is really God means facing also the absolute threat of nonbeing. But ultimately the attempts to transform fear into anxiety are vain. The basic anxiety, the anxiety of a

being about the threat of nonbeing, cannot be eliminated. It belongs to existence itself (CTB 39).

Within the context of his discussion of anxiety, Tillich makes an important specification of his view that "thought must start with being" and "cannot go behind it" (I 163), namely, that nonbeing is dependent on the being it negates. This means that being has ontological priority over nonbeing, which is to say that negation is not possible without a prior affirmation to be negated. It also means that nonbeing has no qualities of its own, except in relation to the being that is negated. In addition, Tillich's contention that anxiety is an ontological quality and not merely a psychological state foreshadows his argument concerning the ontological basis of the moral imperative. Tillich's defense of his position rests upon the validity of the self-world correlation, in that anxiety is an ontological concept because it expresses finitude from the "inside." The self that is aware of itself, and the self looking at its world (including itself), are equally significant for the description of the ontological structure. Simply put, anxiety is the self-awareness of the finite self as finite—as existing in the face of the threat of nonbeing.

The fourth level of ontological concepts contains what Tillich calls the categories of being and knowing. Each of the categories of being and knowing—time, space, causality, and substance—expresses both a union of being and nonbeing as well as a union of anxiety and courage. They are the forms in which the mind grasps and shapes reality, but the forms are not merely logical forms which determine discourse, and thus only indirectly related to reality itself; they are ontological in nature, and thus present in everything. The categories reveal their ontological character through their

relation both to being and nonbeing. As such, the categories are forms of finitude, and each category expresses the duality of existence—as a union of being and nonbeing, as well as a union of anxiety and courage—that prepares the way for the theological question, the question of God.

As the central category of finitude, time unites the anxiety concerning the temporal nature of existence with the courage of a self-affirming present, which is created by time through its union with space. However, to have a space means to be subject to the loss of that space, which poses the question of whose power has caused the thing or event to come into being in the first place. "Where have I come from?" is the resulting question, according to Tillich. "Causality expresses by implication the inability of anything to rest on itself. Everything is driven beyond itself to its cause, and the cause is driven beyond itself to its cause, and so on indefinitely" (I 196). In contrast to this sense of contingency, the category of substance "points to something underlying the flux of appearances, something which is relatively static and self-contained" (I 197). Taken together, these four aspects of finitude express the union of being and nonbeing in everything finite. "They articulate the courage which accepts the anxiety of nonbeing" (I 198).

To put the matter in summary form, human finitude is a situation which one confronts the possibility, as Tillich says, "of losing one's ontological structure and, with it, one's self" (I 201). But while this loss is a possibility, it is not a necessity. The anxiety of finitude need not only lead to the despair of destruction, but can also call forth the courage by which human beings respond to the demand that they become existentially what they already are in essence.

III. THE MORAL IMPERATIVE

The moral imperative is the demand to become actually what one is essentially and, therefore, potentially. It is the power of man's being, given to him by nature, which he shall actualize in time and space. His true being shall become his actual being—this is the moral imperative (MB 20).

The moral imperative emerges as a consequence of the anxiety human beings suffer because of their awareness of their finitude, which becomes their despair at being estranged from the source of their being. In the process of life, the potential threat of disruption to the structure of being actually takes place, and human beings confront what Tillich calls the structure of destruction, in which the polar elements move against and annihilate each other, disrupting the polarity between a centered self and a structured world. The ontological polarities are disrupted as well: under the control of hubris and concupiscence, freedom rejects the objects provided by destiny and distorts itself into arbitrariness, relating to an indefinite number of contents, as destiny is distorted into mechanical necessity. Dynamics becomes distorted into a formless urge for self-transcendence, driven by a ceaseless yet unfulfilled longing for the new, while form, once separated from dynamics, becomes mere external law, an oppressive legalism devoid of creativity. At the same time, as human beings are cut off from participation, they suffer the loneliness of being shut within themselves and, through loss of individuality, become an object among objects, without a self.

In every way, the consequences for human beings of estrangement from their source of being are dire. The threat of nonbeing becomes actual, and their sense of being determined by finitude is complete.

He is given over to his natural fate. He came from nothing, and he returns to nothing. He is under the domination of death and is driven by the anxiety of having to die… Under the conditions of estrangement, anxiety has a different character, brought on by the element of guilt. The loss of one's potential eternity is experienced as something for which one is responsible in spite of its universal tragic actuality (III 66-67).

This final stage in the human predicament, according to Tillich, is the state of despair: to be without hope, caught in a situation from which there is no exit. Yet despair is not characterized by the oblivion of non-existence; rather, it is a state of unceasing and inescapable conflict between, on the one hand, what one potentially is and therefore ought to be and, on the other hand, what one actually is in relation to freedom and destiny. "The pain of despair is the agony of being responsible for one's existence and of being unable to recover it. One is shut up in one's self and in the conflict with one's self. One cannot escape, because one cannot escape from one's self" (II 75).

The separation from which despair emerges—the separation of what one could be from what one is—becomes the basis of Tillich's ontological concept of life, which is the actualization of potential being, the becoming of whatever it is that one has the power to become. When something actualizes itself, of course, it becomes subject to the conditions of existence, such as finitude, estrangement, and conflict, which is why life for Tillich is always an ambiguous mixture of essential and existential elements. Nonetheless, life is a process, a "centrally intended movement ahead," in which potential being is actualized in all the dimensions of life: organic, inorganic, psychological (the dimension of inner awareness), and spiritual (the dimension of the personal-communal).

The elements of this process are three-fold: self-identity, self-alteration, and return to the self—a process grounded as always in the basic self-world ontological polarity. The three elements of the process, in turn, make up the three functions of life, each of which operates in relation to one of the ontological polarities. Tillich summarizes how these elements and functions relate both to the polarities and to the concept of life:

> Thus, with the process of actualization of the potential, which is called life, we distinguish the three functions of life: self-integration under the principle of centeredness, self-creation under the principle of growth, and self-transcendence under the principle of sublimity. The basic structure of self-identity and self-alteration is effective in each, and each is dependent on the basic polarities of being: self-integration of the polarity of individualization and participation, self-creation on the polarity of dynamics and form, self-transcendence on the polarity of freedom and destiny. And the structure of self-identity and self-alteration is rooted in the basic ontological self-world correlation (III 31-32).

A moral act, according to Tillich, is whatever constitutes the self as a completely centered person. Put another way, those actions are moral which contribute to one's self-integration, and those actions are immoral which bring about the disintegration of the self. The fundamental moral problem is how our essential being—our true being as human—can become our actual being. Obligation, which expresses the unconditional command that lies at the root of the moral imperative, emerges from the fact that estrangement and separation are existential realities in human life.

A. The Experience of Moral Obligation

According to Tillich, the basis of the moral imperative is our human experience of an obligation to become actually what we are essentially and, therefore, potentially. As Romaine Gardner and others have demonstrated, Tillich takes care not to commit the naturalistic fallacy of distinguishing between what is and what ought to be, then asserting that the source of our oughtness lies in our essential nature.[22] Rather, Tillich moves from a sense of what is obligatory to a sense of what is natural or essential in the following way. In a situation of ultimate moral seriousness, we experience obligation and somehow understand that this demand, which even has the character of a command, is our true self or essential being. We further recognize that no such experience of obligation would occur if we were not estranged from our true being. Once we realize that our true being (or essential nature) is the content of our sense of oughtness, we naturally inquire in our more reflective moments about the nature of this true being. Our essential nature, therefore, is the content of our sense of oughtness, but this content cannot be what it is without a prior sense of obligation.

For Tillich, any act in which a human being actualizes his or her essential centeredness is a moral act. Morality is not concerned with obeying divine or human laws, but with "the function of life in which the centered self constitutes itself as a person; it is the totality of those acts in which a potentially personal life process becomes an actual person" (III 38). The first presupposition of this conception of

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[22] This brief summary of Tillich's implicit defense against the naturalistic fallacy is indebted to Gardner, "Theonomous Ethics: A Study in the Relationship between Ethics and Ontology in the Thought of Paul Tillich" 190-91. Cf. George A. Lindbeck, "Natural Law in the Though of Paul Tillich," *Natural Law Forum* VII (1962): 86-88.

morality is the potentially total centeredness of the one whose life is actualized under the dimension of spirit, which means having at the same time, face to face with the self, a world to which the self belongs as a part. Human beings live in an environment, but they have a world—a structured whole of infinite potentialities. Because humans transcend the merely environmental quality of their surroundings, they have the potential to be completely centered.

The second presupposition of morality is that, because human beings have a world that they face as totally centered selves, they can ask questions and receive answers and commands. This implies both a freedom from the merely given environment in which they exist, and a freedom for the norms that determine the moral act through freedom. "These norms express the essential structure of reality, of self and world, over against the existential conditions of mere environment" (III 39). Freedom, in other words, is the openness to norms of unconditional validity, which express the essence of being, but freedom is also the ability to respond to those norms, an ability which makes the individual responsible.

But the question remains, as Tillich puts it: "How does man become aware of the ought-to-be in his encounter with being? How does it happen that he experiences the moral commands as commands of unconditional validity?" (III 40). The source of oughtness, Tillich responds, lies in the ego-thou relation, in which a person who is already and is not yet a person encounters another person in the same condition, and both are constituted as real persons. Put another way, a person facing the world has the whole universe as the potential content of his or her centered self. This sense of the world as infinitely open to becoming content for the self is the structural basis for the

human desire to "win the whole world," the endlessness of libido in the state of estrangement. It is also evidence of what Tillich elsewhere calls concupiscence, in which an individual, because he or she is separated from the whole, desires to be reunited with the whole—the desire which is the root of love in all its forms. "The possibility of reaching unlimited abundance is the temptation of man who is a self and has a world" (II 52).

But, Tillich goes on to say, there is one limit to this attempt to draw all content into the self, and that is the other person. "The other self is the unconditional limit to the desire to assimilate one's whole world, and the experience of this limit is the experience of the ought-to-be, the moral imperative… Personal life emerges in the encounter of person with person and in no other way" (III 40). In terms of the functions of life, the self-integration of each person as a person takes place in a community, where the continuous mutual encounter of centered self with centered self is both possible and actual.

The means through which human beings experience the ought-to-be in relation to the experience of the other is through conscience. As mediated by conscience, this sense of what the self ought to be is not contingent upon the particular circumstances at hand. The moral imperative is unconditional, according to Tillich, and the conscience is "the channel through which the unconditional character of the moral imperative is experienced" (MB 30). The presence of conscience both points towards and makes perceivable an objective structure of demands on the self, as well as representing to the self the most subjective self-interpretation of personal life (PE 152). The work of the conscience has a theoretical side, which brings to bear

consciousness of one's own self as an independent self, an ego. It also works in a

practical way by judging, accusing, and sometimes defending the self. Tillich

acknowledges the variety of modern interpretations of the conscience, which include

the emotional-aesthetic emphasis on harmony between the individual and the universe,

the abstract-formalistic emphasis on the duty to be conscientious, and the rational-

idealistic focus on the natural endowment of moral principles. The fundamental

characteristic of conscience, in Tillich's view, is to detect the split between what the

self is and what it ought to be, to judge and pronounce guilty.

Conscience—the still small voice of one's own being, which makes it a moral

violation to contradict one's essential nature—is ultimately an expression of the

relation of a human being to Being-itself. Our essential nature has no obligatory force

save our relation to the meaning of our being, that is, Being-itself. The issue is not just

the structure of (our) being, but its meaning. In spite of the negations of space, time,

causality, and substance, we nonetheless have the courage to be, to assert our

presence. What is the source of this courage? Why do we call it worthy to affirm the

self-world structure? The source of our courage cannot be us or anything in the world.

It must be something to which nonbeing is not a threat, something not conditioned by

the negations of existence.

B. The Moral Imperative as Unconditional

"Why is the moral imperative unconditional, and in which respects can one

call it so, and in which not?" (MB 22). Tillich believes the religious dimension of the

moral imperative—the obligation to become in actuality what we are essentially and therefore potentially—is its unconditional character. While most imperatives experienced by human beings are conditional ("do this, if you wish that to happen"), the imperative to fulfill one's own nature is a moral demand that Tillich has demonstrated is intrinsic to one's own being. But why, Tillich asks, is the imperative therefore unconditional? "Do I not have the right to leave my potentialities unfulfilled, to remain less than a person, to contradict my essential goodness, and thus destroy myself?" (MB 24). Human beings, as free moral agents, should have the freedom of self-contradiction, in which case the moral imperative is unconditional only if a person chooses to affirm his or her essential nature, having which choice renders the imperative conditional.

Tillich's response is to point to the human experience of despair, in which the silent voice of our own being denies us the right to self-destruction and commands us to become actually what we are essentially. This command, Tillich says, emerges from an awareness of belonging to a dimension that transcends—and thus is not conditioned by—our own finite freedom and our ability to negate ourselves. The unconditional character of the moral imperative is rooted in the essential nature of human beings, that is, beings who constitute their humanity by virtue of their relations to their world and, by extension, to the ground of the existence of their world. God or Being-itself is the ground of meaning and being; there can be no moral imperative independent of the meaning of our being or the source of our courage. Our essential nature cannot be fully understood without the relation to the Unconditioned.

As Tillich states, the efforts to deny the unconditional character of the moral imperative have been many and vigorous. If, for example, one conceives of a hierarchy of values that pertain in the world, placing religious values above moral and legal values at the top of the pyramid, the scheme must be initially set in place by a valuating subject, which poses the question of how values that are relative to a valuating subject or group can be separated from values that are valid by their very nature. If such absolute values exist, which are independent of a valuating subject, "what is the source of their absoluteness, how can they be discovered, how are they related to reality, what is their ontological standing?" (MB 25). Such questions unavoidably lead to ontology, precisely because values have validity only if they are rooted in reality. "Their validity is an expression of their ontological foundation. *Being precedes value*, but value fulfills being." (MB 26). Human beings may indeed be valuating subjects, Tillich acknowledges, but they must also become the place where special values receive their ontological foundation. "Ethical values are commands derived from the essential nature of man."[23]

One can also deny the unconditional character of the moral imperative by citing the psychological impact of demanding parents, or the threatening commands of a punishing God, either of which, Tillich admits, can evoke the feeling of something unconditionally serious from which there is no escape and with which there can be no compromise. The same argument can be made from a sociological perspective by citing the effect on the human conscience of centuries of internalized customs, traditions, forms of indoctrination and oppression, even education. Over time, these

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[23] Tillich, "Is a Science of Human Values Possible?" 194.

commands become sufficiently internalized that their external origin is neither recognized nor remembered. But, Tillich responds, the structures within which these experiences emerged must be distinguished from the structures which determined their meaning—what Tillich calls the structure of intentionality or the noetic structure. Tillich contends that the meaning of the unconditional that is rooted in being, and thus in what ought-to-be, is not dependent on the psychological and sociological processes that made the discovery of the unconditional demand possible. These processes may provide the occasion for the appearance of the structures of being to which the moral imperative points, but they cannot produce the meaning of the unconditional demand.

For Tillich, the character of the unconditional moral imperative, and the nature of the moral principles that follow, are rooted in the essential nature of humanity and other essential structures of reality. Tillich writes:

> The commandments of the moral law are valid because they express man's essential nature and put his essential being against him in his state of existential estrangement (III 46).

> Every valid ethical commandment is an expression of man's essential relation to himself, to others, and to the universe. This alone makes it obligatory and its denial self-destructive (LPJ 77).

Tillich here insists that moral principles are unconditional in form: they are categorical imperatives. "The fundamental concept of religion," Tillich states elsewhere, "is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, or by an infinite interest, by something one takes unconditionally seriously" (MB 30). This clearly establishes Tillich's fundamental commitment to a moral theory based on an ontology: he insists that all moral principles, including the structure of justice, are rooted in the

essential nature of human beings and their world. As we have previously noted, Tillich

consistently argues that moral principles are rooted in the essential nature of humans

beings and their world only if this nature is taken to include its dependence on that

with which we ought to be ultimately concerned, namely, Being-itself. Jerome Arthur

Stone helpfully suggests that the unconditional element in the content of the moral

imperative could best be described by the term "unlimited responsibility."[24] In the

abstract sense, this responsibility is to acknowledge every person as a person; it

becomes concrete through participation in the other self—not the peculiar

characteristics of the other self, but his or her center. This participation, which

constitutes the moral self and has unconditional validity, is called *agape*.

> The preliminary formal answer, that the unconditional character of the
> moral imperative is experienced in the encounter of person with person,
> has now become embodied in the material answer, that it is *agape*
> which gives concreteness to the categorical imperative (III 45-46).

Agape involves listening and looking at the concrete situation in all its

concreteness, including the deepest motives of the other person. It includes giving to

everyone we encounter the right to demand that we acknowledge them as a person. It

also includes reuniting those who are estranged by guilt through forgiveness, thus

fulfilling the intrinsic claim of every human being to be reaccepted into the unity to

which it belongs. These demands, in Tillich view, are unconditional in character: there

are no bounds, nor are there conditions, which can be placed on the demands another

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[24] Jerome Arthur Stone, "A Tillichian Contribution to Contemporary Moral Philosophy: The
Unconditional Element in the Content of the Moral Imperative," in *Being and Doing: Paul Tillich as
Ethicist*, ed. John J. Carey (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 70.

self can make on a person. "Love unites the unconditional character of the formalized moral imperative with the conditional character of the ethical content" (III 273).

C. The Imperative to Become a Person

His true being shall become his actual being—this is the moral imperative. And since his true being is the being of a person in a community of persons, the moral imperative has this content: to become a person. Every moral act is an act in which an individual self establishes itself as a person (MB 20).

Tillich's description of what it means to constitute oneself as a person follows from his discussion of the ontological polarity of individualization and participation, as well as his discussion of the self-integration of life. In terms of the ontological elements, a person can be understood as an individual who has reached the perfect level of participation in the life of other persons which Tillich terms communion (I 176). In terms of the self-integration of life, a person can be understood as a completely centered self or a potentially centered self whose complete centeredness has been actualized in freedom through destiny (III 38).

The issue of what it means to be a person in a community of persons is further focused in Tillich's discussion of "The Person in a Technical Society," in which he emphasizes both the necessity of preserving one's individuality by partial non-participation in the objectifying structures of a technical society, while at the same time preserving the person as person by withdrawing into an encounter with the ground of everything personal.[25] In other words, each person must find a balance

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[25] Tillich, "The Person in a Technical Society," *The Protestant Era* 153.

between resisting social conformity in order to preserve individuality and recognizing that the character of a person as such can only be formed in community.

The particular danger faced by individuals in a technical society, in Tillich's view, is becoming merely a *homo faber*, an industrial maker of things. If this happens, the individuals will lose their status as persons because only their industrial function is actualized, in isolation from their social, theoretical, moral, and religious functions. As Tillich puts it, "As soon as one function is separated from the others and put in control over the whole, the person is subjected to this function and through it to something which is not itself. It *becomes* this function" (PTS 148). If individuals have only one function relating them to the rest of society, they lose their quality of being a person and become depersonalized. The same result pertains, especially in Western technical society, when societal forces stifle individuality and enforce conformity. In this case, persons are "adjusted" to the demands in production and consumption not by being commanded by society, but by society providing those things that make individual creativity superfluous.

The result of this dynamic is that human beings lose their power as human and become things. Things also are deprived of their powers and made into objects, without any subjectivity of their own. "For the sake of their technical use things are deprived of their inherent meaning. The world as a universal machine is the myth of modern man, and his ethos is the elevation of the personality to the mastery of this machine" (PE 136). But in seeking to transform the world into a thing and master it, human beings are forced to adapt themselves to the laws of the machine and thus become merely a part of it, a cog. To prevent this outcome, human beings must resist

conforming to technical society and assert their creative freedom—not the freedom to control a world of human and mechanical objects, but the freedom as a person to be confronted by another person. Only in this encounter of one person with another can personality arise. We now turn to an examination of the terms on which this encounter takes place.

IV. PRINCIPLES OF MORAL ACTION

When human beings experience an unconditional sense of obligation, they do so because their existence as finite beings is estranged from their essential being. In the experience of this ontological reality, individuals impose upon themselves an unconditional demand: become actually what you are essentially and therefore potentially. What is it that each individual is, essentially? A person in a community of persons: become that, and you will actually be what you essentially are. This mandate, Tillich admits, simply affirms the unconditional character of morality, irrespective of what the specific demand might be, and however it might be determined by historical and personal conditions. But the question of the ethical content of the moral imperative—the question of what one must do—is not adequately answered by the formal demand that we become what we essentially are, which is persons. What we need are "principles, which are at the same time abstract and concrete, so that support for moral decisions can be derived from them. Are there such principles of moral action? If so, how can they be related to the ever changing conditions of existence?" (MB 31). Tillich identifies two such principles; moral decisions based on these

principles will fulfill the obligation to become a person by acknowledging every

potential person as a person. The principles are love and justice. Love is the drive to

reunite what has been separated, and justice is the form adequate to the reuniting work

of love.

Before examining more closely the particulars of Tillich's analysis of the

relationship among the concepts of love, power, and justice, we first note the strategy

Tillich uses in approaching this matter.

> None of the three concepts, love, power, and justice can be defined,
> described and understood in their varied meanings without an
> ontological analysis of their root-meanings. None of the confusions and
> ambiguities in the use of the three concepts can be removed, none of
> the problems intrinsic in them can be solved without an answer to the
> question: How are love, power and justice rooted in the nature of being
> as such? (LPJ 7).

In this passage, Tillich implicitly rejects the sort of conceptual analysis that

Alistair Macleod says would be the usual approach to clarifying the meaning of words,

which would involve scrutinizing the ways in which the words are actually used in the

contexts in which they have an application.[26] Although Tillich believes that a special

examination of these concepts is necessary ("no analysis and no synthesis in any of the

spheres in which they appear can avoid referring to them in a significant and often a

decisive way"), he also contends that such an inquiry is almost impossible because no

one is an expert in all the realms in which the three concepts play an outstanding role

(LPJ 1). Thus the clarification of the meaning of the terms love, power, and justice

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[26] Macleod, *Tillich: An Essay on the Role of Ontology in His Philosophical Method* 132ff.

must be carried out not by appeal to their meanings as actually used in various contexts, but by a search for their root-meanings.

> Therefore, one must ask whether there is a root meaning in each of these concepts*, determining their use in the different situations to which they are applied*. Such a basic meaning would *precede in logical validity* the variety of meanings which could be derived from it. Therefore, the search for the basic meaning of love, power and justice individually must be our first task…Their elaboration is the work of ontology. Ontology is the way in which the root meaning of all principles and also of the three concepts of our subject can be found (LPJ 1-2, italics added).

But why, Macleod understandably wonders, is an investigation of the root meanings of the words love, power, and justice necessarily an ontological investigation? What does the clarification of these concepts—even if such a clarification requires scrutiny of their root meanings—have to do with the investigation of the nature of being?[27] When Tillich formulates the ontological question at the outset of *Love, Power and Justice*, he asks what structures are common to everything that is, to everything that participates in being. He notes that the early philosophers could not speak about the nature of being without using words like love, power, and justice or their synonyms, which in Tillich's mind lends credence to his contention that, as he put it, "our triad of terms points to a trinity of structures in being itself" (LPJ 1). This is why, for Tillich, there must be a root meaning for each of the terms which precedes in logical validity the variety of uses that can be found: each has a given place—that is, one specific place, not a variety of places or a movable place— in the structure of things.

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[27] Ibid., 147.

For his part, Macleod finds implausible Tillich's claim that none of the three concepts can be defined or understood without an ontological analysis of their root meanings, in part because Macleod believes that conceptual analysis through scientific etymology makes such an approach unnecessary, and thus unwarranted. But Macleod's quarrel with Tillich plays on a larger stage. Concerning Tillich's view that the philosopher's task is the clarification of concepts (such as love, power and justice, for example), Macleod asserts that Tillich is both correct and mistaken. Tillich is correct to insist on conceptual clarification and also right to view such clarification as a characteristically philosophical task. But Tillich is mistaken when he "allows his fixed hostility to what he calls 'nominalism' and his flirtation with the delusive charms of etymology to induce him to propose ontological solutions to merely conceptual problems."[28]

Nonetheless, Macleod rightly acknowledges that Tillich's approach is of a piece: "As Tillich himself believed, the ontological cast of his system is not incidental to his system: to object to its ontological cast is to object to the system."[29] More specifically, Tillich's approach is of a piece with his argument that the moral imperative finally depends on the relation of human existence to the Unconditioned, to Being-itself. Macleod's objection is not a solitary voice, however; many philosophers have objected to the ontological enterprise and still do. The critique by analytic philosophers of any approach that relies on metaphysics has been thoroughgoing. A general response to that critique is not within the purview of this exploration, though

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[28] Ibid., 155.

[29] Ibid.

the issues involved will figure prominently in the analysis of John Rawls's attempt to forge a non-metaphysical theory of justice.

A. Love: A Striving for Reunion

"Life is being in actuality and love is the moving power of life" (LPJ 25).

What can be said fundamentally about the nature of being? Tillich responds that being is power: the power of being to establish all things, as well as the power to conquer nonbeing. Life—the process in which the power of being (in its inclusive sense as the ground of being) is made manifest—is the process in which the potentialities of existence are actualized. The fundamental dynamism of being, then, is to overcome separation through reunion, which is what Tillich calls love. The original—that is, created or essential—structure of being which is good always suffers some degree of disruption by acts of self-contradicting human freedom—sin, in traditional theological language—in the process of actualization. The result of this disruption is the alienation or estrangement of human beings from the ground of their being, from themselves, and from the world.

Since estrangement from the essential nature of being is the central feature of human existence, it follows that love is the central principle in a theonomous—sacred and just—interpretation of history. Tillich defines love in its ontological sense as the reunion of the separated. Thus "the encounter of social groups is an encounter in which the reunion of the separated is the *telos*, just as it is the person-to-person

encounter" (MB 45). The form in which love is realized in society, the structure of its

presence, is justice—not simply a proportional or distributive justice, but a

theonomous form of justice, which for Tillich is both creative and transforming. It

does, of course, involve giving to each its due, but it also makes possible through its

inspiration of creative acts the reunion of the separated. In other words, justice is both

the calculation of a just distribution and what Tillich calls the "Gestalt of grace."

Tillich's ontological analysis of love attempts to counter the view of love

primarily as a human emotion. Instead, Tillich shows what the diverse qualities of

love have in common and demonstrates his view of love's role in the basic structure of

being and the process of life. In his terms, love is the drive toward the reunion of what

has been separated. The concept of reunion, Tillich points out, presupposes the

separation in existence of what belongs essentially together:

> Unity embraces itself and separation, just as being comprises itself and
> non-being. It is impossible to unite that which is *essentially* separated.
> Without an ultimate belongingness no union of one thing with another
> can be conceived. The absolutely strange cannot enter into a
> communion. But the estranged is striving for reunion (LPJ 25).

This striving explains, on an ontological level, how it is possible for

individuals, each with an indivisible and impenetrable center, to be united. Love

reunites that which is self-centered and individual. Were it not for an essential (i.e.

ontological) unity between the individual selves, no reunion would be possible. On the

other hand, given the fact of their existential separation (i.e., estrangement), no

reunion would be possible without the motive force of love. Both the fact of

separation of individuals and their essential belongingness are necessary to explain love's role in the process of life as the drive toward reunion.

B. Power: The Quest for Fulfillment

Throughout his discussion of the various qualities of love, Tillich emphasizes that love, as the power of being, drives toward an increase of power—the actualization of one's potentialities—through union. But this increase in power on the part of one individual always takes place to the benefit—and never the expense—of the other individuals toward whom the union drives and in relation with whom the power of the individual's being is increased.

> Everything living, in an encounter, appears as a union of remaining within itself and advancing beyond itself, for this is the very basis on which rests the possibility of any encounter. The greater the strength— to advance beyond itself without losing itself—the greater is the might with which a living thing encounters; the greater is its spatial, temporal, and inner tension. How great it is, is decided in the encounter itself, in the reciprocal advance and retreat (IH 182-183).

Human beings, by virtue of their subjective reason, have the greatest potential power: "The completely centered, self-related and self-aware being, man, has the greatest power of being… His centeredness makes him the master of his world" (LPJ 44). Thus, the process of life, according to Tillich, is a continual encounter of power with power, in which beings drive toward the fullness of their power and reality in union with each other, and thus toward the maximum extent to which the potential of each can become actual. As made evident by this drive toward reunion, the potential of life can only be made actual through material, cognitive, and personal union. As

Tillich says, "the *appetitus* of every being to fulfill itself though union with other beings is universal" (LPJ 33). It is in the encounter with other beings that each being achieves a form, or definite power of being, and through this form, the being manifests its inherent power of being, which appears in a general form as might.

> Might, as a general term embracing nature and man, appears in the force of a wave rushing into the land and ebbing; as well as in the unfolding strength of a tree, which overshadows others until it is itself overshadowed; in the prominent position of an animal in the herd, which another will perhaps soon contest; in the impression of the adult on the small child and the mutual dependence of the adult on the child. Might belongs to everything that advances upon us, that gains authority, that is dominant—perhaps only to retreat the next instant and give way to something more dominant (IH 183).

Tillich differentiates the operation of power—the external force of one being upon another—based on the kind of effect it has. When the resistance of the other being is broken down in a way that preserves its own identity yet its resulting movement does not involve its own active or spontaneous support, the power is called force. When the influence on a being involves its spontaneous resistance to the agencies operating on it, the power is called compulsion or coercion. The use of power can also result in the destruction of the other being (LPJ 46-47). If a thing or being does not preserve its identity with another, it is destroyed; its centeredness is broken by the form of power known as violence.

In the realm of the spirit, Tillich shows that power can be directed by meaning, with either minimal compulsion or the lack thereof.[30] Some powers—conditioned

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[30] Charles Donald England, "Power and Value: A Study of Two Views of Responsibility." (PhD diss., University Of Chicago, 1963). England explores this issue in substantial detail, both in Tillich's thought and in Whitehead's.

social effects such as, say, mathematical natural science or Hegelian philosophy—
have social effects because they express deeply hidden human life tendencies. Cultural
forms can also have great power to express the inherent dynamics of life. But in all
forms of power, the spirit attempts to express the tension by which life is dynamic,
that is, the real interest of life in moving toward the higher fulfillment of existence.
"Spirit is power, grasping and moving out of the dimension of the ultimate… It
worked through man's total personality, and this means, through him as finite
freedom" (LPJ 120).

Under the conditions of existence, however, with its mixture of essential and
existential elements, love may drive toward an increase of power and being in a way
that fails to reunite the separated and thus actualize what is potential. In other words,
the desire to increase power and being, and the desire to reunite what has been
separated can themselves become separated in the ambiguities of life. For example, in
what Tillich terms the ambiguity of sacrifice, a person may surrender him- or herself
for the sake of union; the surrender may bring about the actualization of greater
potential for both individuals, or it may not. "The love of this kind is desire to
annihilate one's responsible and creative self for the sake of participation in the other
self" (III 43). Life is ambiguous precisely because the two desires of love—for the
actualization of one's potential (which leads to an increase in power) and for the
reunion of the separated (the essential and the existential elements)—sometimes
become separated and move in different directions. In this case, the essential aim of
love is thwarted.

C. Justice: The Form Love Takes

For the aim of love to be fulfilled, it must take a form that is adequate to the depth of the reunion toward which it drives. The particular polarities within which Tillich's theory of justice takes shape are the polarities of ontology and history. Tillich develops an ontology that presupposes a determinant world that a rational human mind can grasp by the intuition of its essential structures. As we have seen, the task of ontology is to analyze the structure of essential being—the structure that makes both experience and reflection upon that experience possible in the first place. The interplay between ontology and history captures in the realm of social ethics the fundamental dialectic in Tillich's thought between the essential structure of being and its actualization under the conditions of existence.

In Tillich's thought, love fulfills its aim by taking the form of justice—a relation that raises the question of the relation between these two concepts. Joseph Betz notes five possible ways to relate love and justice.[31]

1. There is no such thing as true altruistic love, and justice alone exists.

2. Love is taken to contradict justice.

3. Love is one with justice.

4. Love is primary and justice is derived.

5. Justice is primary and love is derived.

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[31] Joseph Betz, "The Relation between Love and Justice: A Survey of the Five Possible Positions," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 4 (Fall 1970).

In his discussion of these relations, Betz identifies Rawls as exemplar of the first relation and Tillich as exemplar of the third. Betz, who wrote based on Rawls's early article "Justice as Fairness," notes Rawls's contention that justice is "the elimination of arbitrary distinctions and the establishment, within a practice, of a proper balance between competing claims." This language of competition and of competing claims is, in Betz's view, without question the language of selfishness—love of self, not love of another. Furthermore, Rawls's theory assumes that justice is the result of human convention and is not dependent on the nature of things. This convention yields a unanimity of "self-forwarding agents," which is not unlike the unity of spirit that exists when individuals are united in love. But these self-forwarding agents are united not by love but by mutual selfishness; they are rational agents who agree to the same standards others submit to because they can intelligently predict the dire consequences that may accrue to them if they do not.[32]

For Tillich, love is indeed one with justice, but the relationship is neither additive nor one of complete identity. Love is an intrinsic aspect of justice, and justice provides the means by which the labor of love is brought to concrete completion.

> Justice is expressed in principles and laws none of which can ever
> reach the uniqueness of the concrete situation. Every decision which is
> based on the abstract formulation of justice alone is essentially and
> inescapably unjust. Justice can be reached only if the demand of
> universal law and the demand of the particular situation are accepted
> and made effective for the concrete situation. But it is love which

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[32] Founding justice on self-love does have the dubious advantage for action, according to Betz, of assuming only the worst about human nature and thus not being disappointed or stymied when one encounters the worst. Betz concludes, ironically in light of Rawls' recent work: "In founding justice on self-love, this approach tends to keep moral considerations out of politics. Indeed, it would rather link politics with economics for it is in economic activity that man is believed to show himself as he really is."

creates participation in the concrete situation. It would be completely
wrong to say that love must be added to justice if the uniqueness of the
situation is to be reached. For this would mean that justice as such is
impossible. Actually, the situation shows that justice is just because of
the love which is implicit in it (LPJ 15).

This understanding of justice is based upon the recognition that everything

which has being makes an intrinsic claim for justice and must be evaluated according

to whether these claims are adequate to the ground of being on which they are based.[33]

The more a particular being—a person, a tree, or a nation—can include the contents of

being within itself without disrupting its own center, the greater its intrinsic power.

Obedience to justice enhances the power of being of all who (or which) participate in

justice—it increases life. Disobedience to justice, in contrast, diminishes and destroys

life.

Precisely what, essentially and ontologically, is the power that effects justice

under the conditions of existence? Love, according to Tillich, is the central and motive

principle of justice and, as such, is the moving power of life: it reunites what has been

separated. In other words, justice is the form which love takes as it emerges within

human communities under the conditions of existence. But the actualization of the

principles of justice often contradicts the ontological structure, with the result that the

forms of justice in which love expresses itself are ambiguous. That is, the unity of

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[33] Kodzo T. Pongo, "Paul Tillich's Theory of Justice." (PhD Diss., University of Chicago,
1991). His work makes a significant contribution to understanding Tillich's theory of justice, but his
interests in considering Tillich's theory are substantially different from mine. The most helpful
assessment of Tillich's theory of justice, from the perspective of this project, has been J. Mark Thomas,
"Paul Tillich's Neoclassical Theory of Justice," in *Being and Doing: Paul Tillich as Ethicist*, ed. John J.
Carey (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988). My own summary here is indebted to Thomas.

ontology and history is incomplete; the union of the structure of being and the concrete human situation is ambiguous.

In formal terms, ambiguity in the actualization of the principles of justice results when the polarities of self and world, which constitute the ontological structure, are pulled apart. Self and world, which essentially belong together in creative and dynamic tension, are separated under the conditions of existence. This separation, needless to say, results in alienation and destruction. The ontological poles tend to become independent of one another, and the structure of the part comes to be viewed as the structure of the whole. Individualism, to cite the most relevant example, tends to actualize itself at the expense of participation or community. Yet to spurn one ontological pole in favor of the other is not simply to abrogate the world in favor of the self, or vice-versa. It is to lose both poles, completely and simultaneously. Justice, on the other hand, is the form existence takes when self and world are held together in creative balance—in a tensive unity.

The destructive ambiguities in the actualization of justice are overcome, under the conditions of existence, by a theonomous structure of grace, which brings to bear the mediating principles of adequacy, community, equality, and liberty. The power of this move to reunite is the power of the very ground of being: the power of love.

> [Love] is the reality of that which the law commands, the reunion with one's true being, and this means the reunion with oneself, with others, and with the ground of oneself and others (III 274).

> The spiritual situation in which this condition is overcome, in which reality again becomes a symbol of the divine ground of being, where all spheres of life, even the economic, show this depth, where nothing is

fundamentally unholy, where holy knowledge and holy acts are one: this is what we call theonomy.[34]

Justice is the form in which the ground of being actualizes itself under the conditions of existence. As such, justice is not "a social category removed from ontological inquiries, but it is the category without which no ontology is possible" (LPJ 55).

Because life is ambiguous, however, individuals need a principle which can guide them in concrete situations to make choices that will move them toward reunion with themselves, with others, and with the ground of being, thereby serving the goal of actualization. For Tillich, justice is this basic moral principle; it is an absolute moral norm that, together with love, is capable of specifying rationally (though not infallibly) what is right and what is wrong. Justice honors the right of every being not to have his or her own power of being sacrificed, save for the sake of a union that brings greater power of being, and thus greater good. Tillich's analysis of justice, both in its principles and its levels as they relate to love, establishes principles which can mediate between the demands of love in its abstract formulation and the concrete situations of moral decision making. Tillich puts it this way:

> On the basis of an ontology of love, it is obvious that love is the principle of justice. If life as the actuality of being is essentially the drive toward the reunion of the separated, it follows that the justice of being is the form which is adequate to this movement. The further principles to be derived from the basic principle mediate between it and the concrete situation in which the risk of justice is demanded (LPJ 57).

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[34] Tillich, "Die philosophische und religiöse Weiterbildung des Socialismus," in Gesammelte Werke (1924) 2:130, quoted by Terence O'Keeffe, "Ethics and the Realm of Praxis," in *Being and Doing: Paul Tillich as Ethicist*, ed. John J. Carey (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 104-05.

According to Tillich, there are four principles of justice that perform the mediation between the drive of love and the concrete situation.[35] The first is the principle of adequacy: the adequacy of the form to the content. Human family structures, laws, traditions, and institutions have a tendency toward self-continuation beyond the point of their adequacy, remaining in force long after the concrete situations for which they were adequate have changed. Thus they no longer provide a relevant form in which the creative encounters of power with power are possible and a definite power of being results. This tendency is demonstrated both by the conservatism of human social and cultural institutions, as well as by the way the present-day ontogeny of an organism reflects vestigial traces of its phylogeny, e.g., the human appendix. Justice becomes injustice when, in the face of changing conditions of existence, it ceases adequately to guide love's creative reunion of what has been separated.

Love is the element of justice that is sensitive to the demands of a particular time and place, to the ever-changing history of a centered self who is driving toward actualization. Law, in contrast, is not sensitive: it is always abstract in relation to the uniqueness of a given situation, and it always attempts to impose itself upon situations as if every one were identical. "Law never reaches the here and now of a particular situation," which is why "every moral decision demands a partial liberation from the stated moral law" (III 47). Love as *agape* is able to apply itself differently to the particularities of each situation and provide guidance as to how a decision might best

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[35] These principles are enumerated in LPJ 57-62.

be made. In this sense, "the law of love is the ultimate law because it is the negation of law; it is absolute because it concerns everything concrete" (I 152).

The second principle of justice is equality. "In what respect does justice include equality? There is *one* unambiguous answer: every person is equal to every other, in so far as he is a person" (III 80-81). Whether the person is an actually developed personality or a mentally diseased one, both demand to be acknowledged as persons by the principle of justice incarnate in them. This equality is unambiguous, as are its implications: "equality before the law in all those respects in which the law determines the distribution of rights and duties, chances and limitations, goods and burdens, and in just returns for obedience to or defiance of the law, for merit or demerit, for competence or incompetence" (III 81).

Unfortunately, while the logical implications of the principle of equality are unambiguous, the particulars of its concrete application are not. As Tillich himself concedes, the principle of equality may well be implicit in every law, in so far as the law is equally valid for equals. "But the question is: who are the equals? In what sense is equality meant?" (LPJ 58). In the past, whether in Plato's *Republic* or in most of the history of the Christian tradition, large groups of human beings—women, slaves, non-citizens, non-landowners—have been excluded from full humanity and thus from the corresponding protection of the principle of equality. Justice was based on a cosmic hierarchy, and the principle of equality was applied to equals on the same ontological level, whether inside or outside the human community.

But the principle of equality can also be applied to every human being by pointing to the possession of reason by everyone who, as Tillich says, "deserves the

name" human. But this strategy also encounters significant ambiguity, because even if all human beings are equal with respect to their potential rationality, this potentiality must be actualized if real equality is to be created under the conditions of existence. In the process of actualization, however, innumerable differences appear—in the given nature of the individual and thus in social opportunity, in creativity, in all aspects of the individual's power of being. These differences, in turn, entail differences in the individual's social power and consequently in his or her claim for distributive justice. Although these differences are functional and not ontological, they nevertheless prevent the achievement of an egalitarian system of society.

In each concrete situation under the conditions of existence, the individuals who are present embody the ground of being to some degree, and to that degree bear an intrinsic claim for justice. But the nature of this claim relative to a particular individual, Tillich explains, can be rather diverse:

> It is one thing if he is posited on a grade of a hierarchical stairway and
> he expects to receive the justice which fits his grade. It is another if he
> is considered a unique and incomparable individual and he expects a
> special justice which is adapted to his particular power of being. It is
> still another if he is considered a potential bearer of reason and he
> expects the justice which is claimed by his dignity as a rational being in
> different states of development. In all these cases, equality is present,
> but a qualified equality, never an egalitarian one (LPJ 60).

What is decisive in each situation, regardless of the nature of the appeal to the principle of equality and thus to justice, is only that the human being in question be considered as a deliberating, deciding, responsible person. Which is why, Tillich concludes, a more effective means by which to achieve the demand for equality is through understanding the principle of personality—the third principle of justice.

The content of the principle of personality is "the demand to treat every person as a person," rather than being objectified or reified as a thing. This claim both includes and circumscribes the relation of justice to freedom, whether freedom is understood as the inner superiority of the personal over enslaving conditions in the external world, or freedom from the enslavement of the personal center. In contrast to the notion that spiritual freedom is possible even in situations of physical bondage, the principle of personality advocates the removal of enslaving conditions, an effort motivated by the awareness that adverse political and social conditions can prevent spiritual freedom for all or most people. For each person to be a person—the demand imposed by the principle of personality—the freedom of political and cultural self-determination is essential. The name for this latter form of freedom is liberty, which is the fourth principle of justice.

The ontology of love, in Tillich's analysis, gives the answer to the questions of freedom and equality posed by concrete situations both within and without liberal democracies. Justice, as the form of the reunion of the separated, "must include both the separation without which there is no love and the reunion in which love is actualized" (LPJ 62). For this reason, the principles of equality and liberty are usually allied with some principle of community, variously termed fraternity, solidarity, or comradeship. How to array these various principles in concrete situations is a problem that is dependent, in Tillich's judgment, on both the qualities (or levels) of justice and the relationship of justice to power and love.

Tillich insists that "the basis of justice is the intrinsic claim for justice of everything that has being" (LPJ 63). Yet each being has a different intrinsic claim: that

of a tree is different from that of a person. The difference in the claims is based on the difference in the forms in which the ground of being actualizes itself. If the claims are adequate to the ground of being on which they are based, the claims are just. This intrinsic claim to justice is the basis of the second form of justice, which Tillich terms proportional or tributive justice and is constituted by attributive, distributive, and retributive justice. In short, justice gives to everything proportionally what it deserves, positively or negatively, according to its special power of being. "Attributive justice attributes to beings what they are and can claim to be. Distributive justice gives to any being the proportion of goods which is due to him; retributive justice does the same, but in negative terms, in terms of deprivation of goods or active punishment" (LPJ 64).

In concrete situations, however, the claims of intrinsic justice, which are based on the dynamic element in the actualization of being and thus can never known beforehand, often conflict with tributive justice, which calculates distribution according to previously fixed proportions. When this happens, Tillich says, justice demands the resignation of justice: proportional justice resigns and gives way to what Tillich terms transforming or creative justice. The criterion on which creative justice is based is the ultimate intrinsic claim for justice in that being, which is fulfillment within the unity of universal fulfillment, the religious symbol for which is the kingdom of God.

Put another way, the "absolutely valid formal principle of justice in every personal encounter" is "the acknowledgement of the other person as person" (LPJ 80). When this principle is applied to concrete situations, however, its formal adequacy is

not clear. Sometimes the acknowledgement of the other person is performed as an external act, with what Tillich calls "cool objectivity," (MB 38) rather than as an actual participation in the center of the other self. The basic issue here is that the formal principle of justice, when expressed in its tributive and distributive forms, often emphasizes the static and inflexible dimension of justice, rather than its dynamic and creative role. Again, love provides the dynamic balance to the formal principles of justice: "Love shows what is just in the concrete situation" (LPJ 82)

In a particular situation, it becomes clear why Tillich conceives of the self—whether an individual self or a group of selves—in terms of a balance of power. The power of a self over its constitutive elements is not assigned by Tillich to an independent faculty, however, but is understood to reside in the stabilized balance of the hierarchically ordered elements. "In this balance some elements prevail, others are subordinated but not effective. Self-control is the activity of the centered self in preserving and strengthening the established balance against disruptive tendencies" (LPJ 52). In his discussion of "Life and the Spirit," Tillich distinguishes between three function of life: self-integration, self-creativity, and self-transcendence. The self-constitution of life is governed by the principles of individualization and participation; the structural centeredness of human beings is actualized in personality through self-integration. The meaningful growth of life is governed by the principles of dynamics and form; through self-creativity, the dynamic creativity of human life is actualized in the cultural spheres of *theoria* and *praxis*. The principles of freedom and destiny govern the sublimation of life toward that which is ultimate; in religious self-

transcendence, the inherent dignity and potential greatness of humanity may take on the quality of holiness.

In the process of self-integration, a manifoldness of world content is drawn into the centered self structure by the receptive and reactive functions. Beings vary, according to Tillich, according to the definiteness of their center and the embracingness of the structure that unites the content within itself. Because human beings have both a completely definite center and a world (the structured unity of all possible contents), they are the highest of all beings. In terms of the self as a stabilized communal spirit of the whole, the primary political question is that of securing the unity of the group, with its tensions of power, demands for justice, and binding communal spirit. The primary challenge in this respect is that of overcoming the tendencies opposing unity and securing the unity by means of the consent and demand of the ruled together with the authority and force of the rulers.

V. JUSTICE AND THE GROUND OF BEING

The power of Tillich's theory of justice, in my judgment, is generated by the elegance with which he forges a formal structure of justice that is relevant to the existential ambiguities of our historical context. We have seen that, for Tillich, moral principles are based upon the essential structure of human nature and of reality itself, which is being-itself, or the ground of being, or God. This raises the question of the relationship between moral and theological claims. Glenn Graber poses the question by asserting that an identity between the human and the divine is "one of Tillich's

basic theological premises; and it follows from it that man's real nature, which is the covert subject of all moral principles, and God, the subject of all theological judgments, are *ontologically identical*."[36] Tillich himself seems to suggest as much when he says: "The ontological and the theological are in one point identical: both deal with being as being. The first assertion to be made about God is that He is Being-itself" (LPJ 107).

Terence M. O'Keeffe rightly dissents from Graber's view that, according to Tillich, human nature and God are ontologically identical. It is true that Tillich always understands morality as fundamentally ontological, as he clearly states.

> There is no way to distinguish valid values from mere valuations other than to show the root of a value in the structure of being itself. Pragmatic tests…lead into ontology if the criteria are derived nonpragmatically. The question…"Is a science of human values possible?" is identical with the other question: Is an ontological approach to values possible? My answer is that it is, and even more, it has always been done within the limits of ontology as such.[37]

But it does not follow, O'Keeffe rightly asserts, that essential human nature and God are ontologically identical. If ontology is the study of the basic structure of being and all its elements, then God, as the ground of being, must be distinguished from that of which God is the ground. Put another way, "being" in the phrase "ground of being" must be distinguished from "being" in the phrase "being-itself." For Tillich, the material content of the moral law is given by our essential nature, but the formal

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[36] Glenn Graber, "The Metaethics of Paul Tillich," in *Being and Doing: Paul Tillich as Ethicist*, ed. John J. Carey (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 37.

[37] Paul Tillich, "Is a Science of Human Values Possible?" in *New Knowledge in Human Values*, ed. Abraham Maslow (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 192.

feature of moral principles (their unconditional character) expresses a relation to the Unconditioned, that is, to Being-itself, and thus constitutes the link between ethics and religion. If our essential nature were independent of the unconditional imperative that expresses our relation to Being-itself, then the notion of an essential nature would have no content.

Tillich makes clear in the first volume of the *Systematic Theology* that God is "the ground of the ontological structure of being without being subject to the structure itself" (I 262, 265). The relation is not one of identity but of participation: "Being-itself infinitely transcends every finite being. There is no proportion or gradation between the finite and the infinite… On the other hand, everything finite participates in being-itself and its infinity" (I 263).[38]

A. The God of the Philosophers and the God of the Prophets

Nonetheless, Tillich does muddy the water. In his article "Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality," Tillich asserts that the God of the philosophers and the God of the Bible is the same: "Against Pascal I say: The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the God of the philosophers is the same God" (BR 82). As Victor Nuovo points out, it is not entirely clear precisely what Tillich meant by this assertion beyond a general assertion of the ultimate unity or identity of biblical religion and

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[38] O'Keeffe adds, parenthetically, "I do not wish to commit myself to the view that philosophical sense can be made of Tillich's notions of "being-itself," of "participation in being-itself," and so forth. I only wish to assert that, in Tillich's terms, it is incorrect to posit "ontological identity" between God and essential human nature." O'Keeffe, "Ethics and the Realm of Praxis," 59.

philosophical theology.[39] One possible meaning of this assertion, which Nuovo

acknowledges Tillich would find unacceptable, is that the 'is' in the statement "The

God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the God of the philosophers is the same God"

is the 'is' of identity. Nuovo explains the consequence of such an understanding:

> What Abraham and his descendents say about God, who has revealed
> himself to them, is, if true, true also of the God whose nature and being
> the philosophers have discovered through their physical and
> metaphysical reflection. And what the philosophers have discovered
> about God is, if true, true also of the God of Abraham. Also, on this
> interpretation, we may assume that whoever would make such a
> statement must believe that much, if not all, that prophets and
> philosophers say about God is true. He must believe that the prophets
> and philosophers about whom he speaks know enough about their God
> to know what they are talking about…and he may justify this belief by
> claiming, in the one instance, that God has disclosed himself to the
> prophets in a special way, and, in the other, that God does not hide
> himself from philosophers who honestly seek him.[40]

Tillich's understanding of the identity statement differs substantially from this,

as Nuovo goes on to point out. Tillich asserts not that the God of the Bible is the same

being or the same object as the God of the philosophers, but rather that what the

descendents of Abraham say about God means the same as what the philosophers say

about God. In other words, the identity is not of a being known by different

descriptions, but the "identity of contrary meanings or trains of thought or contrary

traditions and systems of thought which, in any ordinary sense of the word, have no

object."[41] While the assertions of both honest philosophical theologians and genuine

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[39] Victor Nuovo, "Fables of Identity," in *God and Being: The Problem of Ontology in the Philosophical Theology of Paul Tillich*, ed. Gert Hummel (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), 30.

[40] Ibid., 31.

[41] Ibid., 33.

prophets about God are equally true, their mode of reference is fundamentally different.

Tillich's method for establishing this identity—he refers to it as one of analysis and synthesis—moves deductively from a surface analysis of doctrinal conflicts inward to the deepest metaphysical depths of our being, where we examine the states of consciousness of which the conflicts are an expression. On the surface are the apparent beliefs about the proper objects of reflection for prophets and philosophers; at the depths live the attitudes and structures of consciousness. When both the content and modality of consciousness appear completely opposed as ultimate concerns (e.g., faith and doubt), Tillich moves toward a synthesis which concludes that, as ultimate concerns, the God of the philosophers and the God of the Bible are the same.

In his reflections, Tillich makes a number of key assumptions. He assumes that the principles of biblical religion and philosophical ontology are the original contents of consciousness, and as such are basic to all human thought and experience, and that they constitute the two classes of the contents of the mind, the concrete-personal and the abstract-personal. Their apparent dividedness is due not the dividedness of their object, however, but to the tragic fate of human thought about ultimate things. Upon proper reflection, however, it becomes clear that biblical religion and ontology are related, at the depths, as faith is related to doubt: each is present at the heart of the other. Biblical religion expresses ontology's faith, and ontology expresses biblical religion's doubt. "The philosopher has not and has; the believer has and has not. This is the basis on which ontology and biblical religion find each other" (BR 62).

Nuovo helpfully summarizes Tillich's argument in the following way. 1) The philosopher's doubt is a state of ultimate concern. 2) The prophet's faith is a state of ultimate concern. 3) Therefore, since both the philosopher's doubt and the prophet's faith are states of ultimate concern, they are equal or structurally identical—that is, formally the same but with different contents. 4) Because the two ultimate concerns imply each other, neither the prophet nor the philosopher, each of whom already has an ultimate concern, can avoid appropriating the ultimate concern of the other. 5) Since each ultimate concern demands an exclusive right of dominion within the human mind, the two ultimate concerns are incompatible and thus cannot exist alongside one another in a single human consciousness. 6) Therefore, a synthesis of the two ultimate concerns—faith and radical doubt—is necessary, though conceptually problematic.

For his part, Nuovo understandably finds Tillich's insistence on a synthesis of faith and doubt—therefore of the God of the philosophers and the God of the Bible— less than convincing. Nuovo's analysis focuses on what Tillich has identified as the structural or formal identity between the attitude of faith and the attitude of ontological doubt. This formal identity does not necessarily require, or even suggest, that the philosopher and the prophet are therefore open to embracing the content of each other's ultimate concern. Nor does this identity require one to believe that, from the inmost point of their respective ultimate concerns, each ultimate concern implies the other.

Biblical religion and ontology also appear to differ on the issue of personalism: god is personal, and being is not. All religion emanates from an encounter with the

holy, to which religious consciousness represents its relation as personal. Through its representation of the divine-human encounter, biblical religion exemplifies the purest form of this relation not only because it discloses the universal norm of personal existence, but also because it contains the criterion by which all religious content is to be judged. While the object of religion's ultimate concern is a personal god, the object of ontology's (no less) ultimate concern is impersonal being. But Tillich, in contrast, assumes that the ontology expressed in synthesis with biblical religion is not just one philosophical view among others, but is, as Nuovo puts it, "the source and origin of philosophical inquiry as such, a universally human intention that informs all philosophical questioning."[42]

Simply put, Tillich believes that morality depends upon religion, or, more precisely, upon biblical religion. Here Tillich's commitment to the method of correlation becomes problematic, especially as it plays itself out in the relationship between reason and revelation. Recall that, for Tillich, "revelation is the answer to the questions implied in the existential conflicts of reason" (I 147). As such, it unites the elemental polarities of reason—structure and depth, static and dynamic, formal and emotional—which have fallen into self-destructive conflicts under the conditions of existence. We have already seen that, for Tillich, revelation is the manifestation of the mystery that is of ultimate concern to us because it is the ground of our being. It is a special and extraordinary manifestation that removes the veil from something mysterious—something impossible to express in ordinary language, because to do so would be to misunderstand the nature of the mystery, to desecrate it.

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[42] Ibid., 35.

In addition, "whatever is essentially mysterious cannot lose its mysteriousness even when it is revealed… Revelation does not dissolve the mystery into knowledge. Nor does it add anything directly to the totality of our ordinary knowledge, namely, to our knowledge of the subject-object structure of reality" (I 109)

> The genuine mystery appears when reason is driven beyond itself to its "ground and abyss," to that which "precedes" reason, to the fact that 'being is and nonbeing is not' (Parmenides), to the fact that there is *something* and not *nothing*…. The positive side of the mystery—which includes the negative side—becomes manifest in actual revelation. Here the mystery appears as ground and not only as abyss. It appears as the power of being, conquering nonbeing. It appears as our ultimate concern. And it expresses itself in symbols and myths which point to the depth of reason and its mystery (I 110).

Tillich makes clear that actual revelation invariably comes to someone in a concrete situation of concern: there is no revelation in general. Revelation grasps either a person or a group, but usually a group through an individual person, and only in that concrete context does the revelation have revealing power. Tillich also makes clear that, though revelation is the manifestation of the mystery of being for the cognitive function of human reason, the specific context of revelation and the means of revelation—sign-events he calls ecstasy and miracle—indicate the special character of the knowledge that comes through revelation. Since the knowledge of revelation is inseparable from the context of revelation, it cannot be added to our store of ordinary knowledge: "Knowledge of revelation does not increase our knowledge about the structures of nature, history, and man." (I 129). If a claim is made in the name of revelation concerning these matters, "it must be disregarded, and the ordinary methods of research and verification must be applied." (I 129).

> If revealed knowledge did interfere with ordinary knowledge, it would destroy scientific honesty and methodological humility. It would exhibit demonic possession, not divine revelation. Knowledge of revelation is knowledge about the mystery of being to us, not information about the nature of beings and their relation to one another. Therefore, the knowledge of revelation can be received only in the situation of revelation, and it can be communicated—in contrast to ordinary knowledge—only to those who participate in this situation (I 129).

The ground of revelation—though not its cause, in the categorical sense—is the ground of being manifest in existence (I 155). The ground of revelation "is neither a cause which keeps itself at a distance from the revelatory effect nor a substance which effuses itself into the effect, but rather the mystery which appears in revelation and remains a mystery in its appearance" (I 156). The religious word for the ground of being, hence the ground of revelation as well, is God.

B. The Transcendent Ground of the Moral Imperative

For Tillich, the meaning of our being—the unconditional obligation to become in actuality what we are essentially—is derived from a source that necessarily transcends the structure of our existence. This means that while the content of a theory of justice can be described through ontological analysis, the ground of justice cannot. The issue, then, is not whether the insights of faith as described by Tillich are able to respond adequately to the moral aim, but whether, given a pluralist political context, the moral imperative as described by Tillich is accessible to ordinary knowledge as well.

Whatever else it may mean that "the ontological and the theological are in one point identical," (LPJ 107) Tillich makes it clear that it does not mean that God is an instance of the ontological categories. If God were such an instance and hence a being, according to Tillich, then God would also be subject to the categories of finitude. The God who can answer the human question of finitude and confront the threat of nonbeing must transcend the limitations of finitude, yet also be its creative ground. Insofar as it exists, the world participates in God but is infinitely transcended by God.

The theological answer to the question posed by existence, according to Tillich, is that God can be identified neither with essence nor existence. If God were simply the totality of essential being, then God could not achieve self-transcendence and fulfill the role of ground of being. If God were an existing being, then God would be threatened by nonbeing. Since neither is possible, God must be beyond the distinction between essence and existence; God must be Being-itself. The ontological distinctions of essence and existence, of potentiality and actuality, of dynamics and form, and of freedom and destiny—these are not distinctions within Being-itself.

Tillich speaks often of God as being, as living, as creating, and as related—that is, as the source of life, as the ground of creativity, and as the one in whose life all relations are continually present. Yet Tillich also speaks of the "unapproachable character of God" (I 271) and "the impossibility of having a relation with him… God cannot become an object of knowledge or a partner in action" (I 271). When Tillich speaks of God as living, creating, and relating, he insists that the language is symbolic. John Lansing correctly notes that, for Tillich, "the fact that finite beings participate in

the divine ground makes symbolic language about God possible. The fact that God

transcends finitude makes symbolic language about God necessary."[43]

This is the crux of Tillich's insistence that God lies beyond the distinction

between essence and existence: he wishes to make clear that God transcends finitude,

and he wants to safeguard the divine life from the ravages of time and history. The

distinctions Tillich employs in his conception of the relation between being and its

ground pose a crucial issue for his theory of justice, especially as it relates to the

source of the moral imperative. If, for example, God participates in the creation of a

just action by God's presence as love—as a persuasive force which calls for the action

to hold in creative tension the ontological polarities, then precisely what sort of

relationship does "participate" imply if, as Tillich insists, God stands at an ontological

remove from the world where essence becomes actual under the conditions of

existence? Furthermore, in his discussion of theonomous morality, Tillich states that,

although the essential unity of morality, religion, and culture is destroyed under the

conditions of existence, an unambiguous though fragmentary reunion is possible in the

processes of life under the impact of the divine Spirit (III 266). The effect of the

Spiritual Presence enables the self-creative and self-integrative elements of morality to

once again become self-transcendent, the effect of which Tillich calls theonomous or

transmoral morality. A philosophy, he goes on the explain, is theonomous when it is

free from external influences and when the impact of the Spiritual Presence is

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[43] John W. Lansing, "A Philosopher and a Theologian Compared: Tillich and Whitehead on God," in *Philosophy of Religion and Theology*, ed. P. Slater (1976), 99.

effective in it. The same is true of a theonomous ethics: it occurs when the ethical principles and processes are described in light of the Spiritual Presence.

The larger question is whether the source of the moral imperative is accessible to some or to all, and by what means. Tillich believes that theonomous ethics can occur only in light of the Spiritual Presence, which comes only as ultimate concern within the concrete context of a particular religious tradition, whether Jewish, Christian, Greek, or Buddhist. In one way, this specification is less contextual than it seems, as Tillich explains.

> But this argument disregards the fact that even the seemingly autonomous research in philosophy in general and in ethics in particular is dependent on a tradition which expresses an ultimate concern, at least indirectly and unconsciously. Autonomous ethics can be autonomous only with respect to scholarly method, not with respect to its religious substance. There is a theonomous element in all such ethics, however hidden, however secularized, however distorted. Theonomous ethics in the full sense of the phrase, therefore, is ethics in which, under the impact of the Spiritual Presence, the religious substance—the experience of an ultimate concern—is consciously expressed through the process of free arguing and not through an attempt to determine it. Intentional theonomy is heteronomy and must be rejected by ethical research. Actual theonomy is autonomous ethics under the Spiritual Presence (III 267-268).

Put another way, "revelation is not information, and it is certainly not information about ethical rules and norms" (III 268). Even so, revelation is that without which theonomous ethics cannot be expressed. Tillich points toward an experience that is not conditioned by a particular context of thought about reality. As Dorothy Emmet puts it, Tillich wants to define a frame of reference in which

something "is always important, always relevant, and which makes a demand on us which would leave no more to be said."[44]

This same unconditioned element of experience emerges in Tillich's discussion of what he calls the depth of reason. Throughout, Tillich insists that the unconditional demand is inseparable from the depth of reason and, correspondingly, the unconditional character of the moral imperative is inseparable from our relation to the ground of being. By analyzing the categorical structure of reason, Tillich explains, human beings discover the finitude in which they are imprisoned. "The only point at which the prison of finitude is open is the realm of moral experience, because something unconditional breaks into the whole of temporal and causal conditions. But this point is nothing more than a point, an unconditional command, a mere awareness of the depth of reason" (I 33-34). However, this awareness of the unconditioned is not the same as seeking an unconditional quality in what we may hold to be important, Emmet says. "It is more like a haunting claim which cannot be identified with that of any *object* whatsoever, and is connected with what Tillich calls 'the ground of our being.'"[45]

The depth of reason, Tillich says, precedes (in the metaphorical sense) reason and is manifest through it, as the substance of the rational structure, or Being-itself made manifest in the *logos* of being, or the creative ground in every rational creation, or the abyss, or the infinite potentiality of meaning and being. As we observed earlier,

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[44] Dorothy M. Emmet, "Epistemology and the Idea of Revelation," in *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, ed. Charles W. Kegley (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1982), 238-39.

[45] Ibid., 240.

Tillich believes this quest for the depth of reason can only be satisfied through revelation. However, it is not clear why this is necessarily true. Either the ground of being is part of the self-world structure, in which case reason can function effectively to ask questions both about the mystery of existence generally (accompanied by moments of numinous astonishment) and the nature of human life in particular. Or the ground of being is not part of the self-world structure, in which case it is not accessible to reason—which is the means by which we deliberate and make decision in all aspects of our individual and communal lives. What I will suggest in chapter 4 is that is that an understanding of the depth and ground of being as part of being rather than apart from it will make the moral imperative accessible to ordinary knowledge. More specifically, if Tillich understood God to be the chief exemplification of the self-world structure, rather than the unique exception to it, then his account of justice as the moral imperative of individuality-in-community would not only have an adequate theistic backing, it would also be relevant in contemporary contexts of pluralism.

Such an accommodation, I suggest, is also consistent with Tillich's conception of love as the ultimate ethical principle. "Love, *agape*, offers a principle of ethics that maintains an eternal, unchangeable element, but makes its realization dependent on continuous acts of creative intuition" (MB 88). Love is an unconditional command that has the power to break through all other commands, which is why it can be the solution to the question of ethics in a changing world. "*Love alone can transform itself according to the concrete demands of every individual and social situation without losing its eternity and dignity and unconditional validity*. Love can adapt itself to every phase of a changing world" (MB 89). Ethics in a changing world must be

understood as the ethics of the *kairos*, the right time. Because love is the presence of

the unconditional command, there is no higher principle than love by which ethics can

be defined. Justice, in turn, is the means by which love's labor is brought to concrete

completion.

> It is life itself in its actual unity. The forms and structures in which love
> embodies itself are the forms and structures in which life is possible, in
> which life overcomes its self-destructive forces. And this is the
> meaning of ethics: the expression of the ways in which love embodies
> itself, and life is maintained and saved (MB 95).

CHAPTER THREE

JOHN RAWLS: JUSTICE IN CONTEXTS OF PLURALISM

Martha Nussbaum begins her essay on John Rawls and the history of ethics with this declaration:

> John Rawls is the most distinguished political philosopher of our century. Furthermore, his work and teaching are responsible for much of the other fine work currently being done in this subject: for he revitalized the field and renewed its confidence, after positivism, challenging its value as practiced, had reduced it to a narrow type of linguistic and conceptual analysis.[1]

Because of Rawls's indisputable role as the premier modern advocate of a procedural conception of justice, any current attempt to consider a theory of justice must come to terms with his work. Rawls's initial volume, *A Theory of Justice*, is an estimable work; in the appropriate words of Robert Paul Wolff, it may well be the most distinguished product of the entire liberal tradition of political philosophy in the past two centuries.[2] Even so, the elegance of Rawls's argument has not made his theory of justice impervious to a number of significant objections.

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[1] Martha C. Nussbaum, "Conversing with the Tradition: John Rawls and the History of Ethics," *Ethics* 109 (January 1999): 424.

[2] Robert Paul Wolff, *Understanding Rawls: A Reconstruction and Critique of a Theory of Justice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977) 210. Wolff further asserts that Rawls's proposal for a bargaining game as a means of constructing a *via media* between utilitarianism and intuitionism is "one of the loveliest ideas in the history of social and political theory" (16). Wolff goes on to comment,

The title of John Rawls's seminal 1973 treatise on justice is *A Theory of Justice*, which suggests that his theory may be one of many such theories. In his later works, especially *Political Liberalism* and "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," Rawls further limits the scope of his theory of justice. It is designed for modern constitutional democracies, which are characterized by a persistent, more or less permanent pluralism. Such societies are constituted by rational citizens engaged in seeking their own individual goods as determined by their own privately held, thus diverse and often conflicting, comprehensive schemes. According to Rawls, only a theory of justice that is both non-universal and non-teleological could be relevant to such a society. Within this context, a democratic government must discover the common ground present among its citizens. For this common ground to emerge, and for an overlapping consensus about justice to develop, the conception of justice must be separated from all reasonable comprehensive schemes and be accepted by persons who hold those schemes.

Rawls stands firmly in the liberal tradition of political philosophy, a tradition committed to the essential understanding of human beings as free to choose their own individual conceptions of the good, and a tradition thus often confounded (and at times stymied) by the challenge, within a radically pluralist political context, of describing both an arena and a set of rules for achieving moral consensus. Rawls seeks to formulate principles of justice acceptable to all who affirm that a pluralism of

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parenthetically, that although it may seem odd to describe a philosophical idea as lovely, "mathematicians are accustomed to applying terms of aesthetic evaluation to abstract ideas, and Rawls's theory is, in my judgment, a simple, elegant, formal maneuver, embedded in and nearly obscured by an enormous quantity of substantive exemplification." Despite the loveliness of Rawls's idea, however, he does not, in Wolff's judgment, thereby seek the principles of justice in the right way.

comprehensive views should be legitimate. For the individual citizens themselves, then, a theory of justice will be acceptable only if it satisfies their moral interest in 1) pursuing their individual good as they understand it, and in 2) being reasonable, which given Rawls's analysis, means seeking to cooperate with the adherents of other comprehensive views. The challenge for such a theory is to win an overlapping consensus—not to show all the citizens involved that any idea they all share is true, but only that they have reason to accept it.

Unlike comprehensive theories, Rawls's theory does not state what justice requires in all situations, or how all of society's institutions could be organized to achieve justice. Moreover, the overlapping consensus may be achieved based on an individual's moral or religious reasons that, from a philosophical point of view, are inadequate or have been discredited. The goal is not for individuals in their roles as human beings to accept principles of justice as true, but only for them, in their roles as citizens within the political system, to accept the principles as reasonable. According to Rawls, these principles about justice can be worked out by appeal to ideas about justice that are latent within the basic political, social and economic institutions of democratic societies and stand independent of any particular comprehensive understanding of moral, religious, or philosophical values or ideals. As Rawls puts it, they are "intuitive ideas that, because they are imbedded in our society's main institutions and the historical traditions of their interpretation, can be regarded as implicitly shared" (PL 173).

I will argue that Rawls's insistence that his principles of justice are freestanding, that is, independent of the comprehensive claims that constitute the

overlapping consensus, cannot be supported. Even if a group of citizens reaches an overlapping consensus about justice based on their own comprehensive commitments, they would surely not agree that the principles of justice thus derived are wholly independent of their commitments. The claim that justice is independent of any conception of the good implies a conception of the good that no theory of justice could support. A theory of justice established independent of an ontological basis ultimately involves the denial of comprehensive claims generally.

In this chapter, I shall first locate John Rawls within the traditional of political liberalism, paying particular attention to his conception of reason and the operation of rational choice. Then I shall examine what Rawls calls the original position, from which emerge two principles of justice as articulated in *A Theory of Justice*, followed by an assessment of the critical response to his theory, which focused on Rawls's presentation of the metaphysics of choice, as well as his way of dealing with the problems of moral motivation and privacy. In response to his critics (or, as Rawls would have it, to correct an internal problem in his theory), Rawls revised his theory so that it was, at least in his view, political but not metaphysical. But questions remained nonetheless—about the relationship between the right and the good, about the status of moral and religious views, about what Rawls calls the fact of reasonable pluralism, and about the ideal of public reason and the role of political discourse. This chapter will conclude by arguing that Rawls's conception of political liberalism, in a laudable and successful effort to take pluralism seriously, does so by articulating a theory of justice that can only be understood as a comprehensive conception.

I. THE TRADITION OF POLITICAL LIBERALISM

John Rawls stands in a tradition of thinkers who have taken as their chief mandate the articulation of a political philosophy that supports the constitutional values of freedom, equality, and toleration. The Catholic moral philosopher David Hollenbach has succinctly summarized the major assumptions of the position that has come to be widely referred to as "political liberalism."[3] Contemporary interpreters of liberalism:

1. Take as the fundamental norm of moral society the right of every person to equal concern and respect.

2. Are committed to organizing the basic political, economic, and social structure of society in a way that will insure that society is a fair system of cooperation between free and equal persons.

3. Are especially sensitive to the pluralism of modern moral and political life. Because free and equal persons hold different and sometimes conflicting philosophical, moral, and religious convictions about the full human good, an effort to implement a comprehensive vision of the good society through law or state power is excluded. Such an effort would violate some person's equal right to concern and respect. This perspective is summarized by affirming that the right is prior to the good.

4. Because persons cannot be said to deserve the circumstances of their birth, such as special talent or economic advantages, the tendency of these circumstances to lead to disproportionate outcomes must be counteracted by appropriate societal intervention.

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[3] David Hollenbach, "Liberalism, Communitarianism, and the Bishops' Pastoral Letter on the Economy," *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1987): 21, quoted in Ronald F. Theimann, *Religion in Public Life: A Dilemma for Democracy* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1996) 75.

From this brief and schematic summary, it is clear that contemporary liberal political theorists continue in the tradition of classic liberalism, which developed from an essential claim about self-ownership. The insistence of the U.S. Constitution on the equality of all human beings notwithstanding, the priority of the right to the good indicates a commitment to the priority of liberty to utility in the pluralist American democracy. Unless there is a clear and overriding threat to the common welfare, no individual's liberty should be constrained by a particular conception of the good.

Within this context, the central challenge for political theorists and the institutions they design is the inescapable presence in our society of moral pluralism. The concept of governmental neutrality insists that our public institutions treat competing notions of the good equitably, not demonstrating preference for any particular moral belief and thereby transcending what has been called "the untidy realm of moral discord."[4] But it is less than clear—here we see the first intimations of one facet of the metaphysical issues which will occupy Rawls—that one can best defend liberty (if one can defend it at all) from, as it were, a neutral corner. Thiemann states the issue with precision:

> Surely the case for liberty is not enhanced by the assertion that governmental decisions must be...independent of any conception of the good life, or of what gives value to life. Rather, the case for the primacy of liberty depends on a particular conception of "what gives value to life," a conception that liberals believe essential for the well-being of a pluralistic democracy.[5]

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[4] Ibid., 96.

[5] Ibid., 79. He quotes, in the text cited here, Ronald Dworkin, "Liberalism," *A Matter of Principle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press): 191.

We shall examine this issue at some length in due course. At this point, it is sufficient to note that Rawls stands firmly in the liberal tradition of political philosophy, a tradition committed to the essential understanding of human beings as free to choose their own individual conceptions of the good.[6] Within this broad stream of liberal political thought, however, Rawls begins at the outset to define a new place to stand. Brought up short by the apparent impasse between utilitarianism and intuitionism, he attempts to forge a conception of justice that carries forward the strengths of each, yet leaves behind their shortcomings.[7] For its part, utilitarianism preserves a belief in the fundamental value of human happiness and specifies a useful procedure by which ethical questions can be answered and a principle by which questions of social policy can be settled. However, utilitarianism remains unable to explain how rationally self-interested pleasure maximizers could be motivated to prefer, in terms of their individual actions, the general happiness of all to that of their own. Nor is utilitarianism able to avoid the sometimes socially abhorrent implications of its own founding principle. Intuitionism, on the other hand, asserts that each person possesses a rational moral intuition. This strength of this assertion is eroded, however, by the absence of any structure of practical reason. Nonetheless, in its best light,

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[6] This concept too is fraught with entanglements of a potentially metaphysical sort, given the question of whether individuals are actually free to choose their own comprehensive moral frames (and thus can only be related to it in some non-essential way) or whether they are somehow essentially constituted either by that choice or by that frame of which they have by chance become a part.

[7] See chapters two and three of Wolff, *Understanding Rawls: A Reconstruction and Critique of a Theory of Justice*.

intuitionism does define the right independently of the good, making right a

fundamental moral notion.

Rawls responds to this impasse by attempting to find common ground between

the two, or at least preserve the best insights of each as he moves forward.[8] He begins

with a bare-bones—that is, narrow and morally neutral—conception of human agency,

then proceeds to use a version of the social contract to give a procedural interpretation

to the notion of an autonomous self as a basis for evaluating principles of justice. In

other words, Rawls wishes to formulate a moral principle that is so minimal and so

natural that every rationally self-interested agent who aspires to have any morality at

all could without hesitation acknowledge as binding upon him- or herself. Not

surprisingly, as Wolff notes, this is almost exactly the claim made by Kant for his

Categorical Imperative in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*.[9] Rawls's

strategy is to introduce the now well-known bargaining game, in which individuals,

from behind a veil of ignorance as to their actual place in the game, accede in this

original position to two principles of justice, which together constitute the heart of

what Rawls calls a conception of justice as fairness.

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[8] Thomas Nagel identifies Rawls's distinctive appropriation of intuitionism, which usually describes the attempt "to capture the moral sense by summarizing our particular moral intuitions in principles of maximum generality, relying on further intuitions to settle conflicts among these principles. This is not what Rawls means. He intends rather that the underlying principles should possess intuitive moral plausibility of their own, and that the total theory should not merely summarize but illuminate and make plausible the particular judgments that it explains." Norman Daniels, *Reading Rawls: Critical Studies on Rawls's "A Theory of Justice"* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989) 2.

[9] Wolff, *Understanding Rawls: A Reconstruction and Critique of a Theory of Justice* 17.

II. INITIAL STRATEGY: THE TWO PRINCIPLES OF JUSTICE

Rawls wishes to formulate a moral principle that every rationally self-interested agent could acknowledge as binding. By rational, Rawls means that he or she can be assumed to pursue their individual ends intelligently. This is not to say that we can know what ends they will pursue, for rational agents have the capacity both to choose the most effective means to a particular end, and also to balance the final ends themselves. It simply means that people have the capacity to embrace a conception of the good and know how to reach it.

The heart of Rawls's concept of justice as fairness is the notion of the original position, which is located behind what Rawls calls a veil of ignorance. Rawls asks what principles of justice a representative group of people would choose if their context of choice denied them certain types of knowledge which might bias their decision: who exactly they were in the society, what positions they held, to which generation they belonged—any specific knowledge of their life's goals and plans. The principles they chose would thus, presumably, be fair; that is, they would not favor any one group or individual in a society. They would know, however, that they did have a life plan that was rational, which is to say that they would want more rather than less of the basic goods of life. They would also know that the society in question was subject to the conditions of justice, in that it involved both conflict and cooperation and the latter could prevail. The original position is thus what Rawls refers to as an Archimedean point, in that the individuals in that position are, as it

were, temporarily freed from the wants and interests that they already have, so that they can more fairly assess the principles that govern our social system.

What would persons in this position choose as principles in terms of which the structures of justice could be evaluated? The following version of the two principles proposed by Rawls, taken from *Political Liberalism*, reiterates with only minor changes what is found in *A Theory of Justice*.

1. Each person has an equal claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic rights and liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme for all; and in this scheme the equal political liberties, and only those liberties, are to be guaranteed their fair value.

2. Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions: first, they are to be attached to positions and offices open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they are to be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society (PL 5-6).

According to Rawls, the persons in the original position would specify a principle of equal liberty: each person is entitled to the greatest total amount of basic liberty, consistent with an equal amount for everyone else. The principle of equal liberty thus distributes basic liberties equally. This principle is lexically first; it cannot be modified in view of subsequent consideration, such as economic gain. Put more specifically, basic rights such as the freedom of religion and the liberty of conscience cannot be bargained away in order to achieve social or economic advantage.

The second principle specifies that social and economic inequalities should be distributed to the greatest advantage of the least-well-off person and attached to offices and positions open to all under fair conditions of equal opportunity. An

increase in wealth by one individual or group is justified not merely by showing that no one else was harmed by the increase, but by showing that others, especially the disadvantaged, were actually helped in the end by the greater wealth. Rawls argues that people in the original position would choose this principle because they would follow the maximum rule: always maximize the minimum possibility. In less elegant terms: if I do not know beforehand which piece of the pie I will end up with, then I will do my best to divide up the pie fairly.

As a device of imaginative representation, however, the original position is intended to capture both the sense in which people are equal (hence the ignorance of specific circumstances) and the sense in which, for the purposes of thinking about justice, they are free (hence the ignorance of their own conceptions of the good, that is, their views of how they should live their lives). At first glance, this device seems eminently logical: if justice is indifferent to the vicissitudes of birth and talent, so too should it be indifferent to the particular conceptions of the good held by people within the society. However, on closer scrutiny, the approach seems less compelling. When set alongside each other, talents and life goals seem similar to each other in the sense that some of each are clearly more valuable than others. At the same time, these two classes of goods differ from each other in that one cannot choose one's talents; one can, at least in the society Rawls would have us imagine, choose one's life goals. Yet "if one believes that some ways of life are better, worthier or more valuable than others, why should one hold that it makes sense to ignore those beliefs when it comes

to thinking about justice?"[10] It makes sense only if one believes, as Rawls presumably does, that it is more important that people be free to make their own choices than that they make good choices.[11]

Another way to describe the situation is that the only possibility for moral consensus on the subject of justice (short of what Dombrowski refers to as the antediluvian hope that all persons will convert to a single comprehensive doctrine)[12] is to try to reach agreement by means of a fair contract whereby comprehensive beliefs are not held to be mere prejudices, but are the raw materials out of which the overlapping consensus is constructed. This approach implies that any given comprehensive view is insufficient grounds for coercing those who do not share it. Dombrowski argues that "the point to the abstraction entailed in the original position is not only to purge ourselves of unreasonable prejudices, although it is at least that, it is also meant to avoid enforcing a system of justice based on our own reasonable prejudices on others who have different, albeit reasonable, prejudices of their own."[13]

This strategy, as legitimate as it may seem within the context of the liberal tradition as a whole, raises important questions. To put the matter succinctly: if the good is a constituent part of neither the individual who chooses it nor the world in which it is pursued, where can one locate a notion of the good which is more than a

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[10] Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992) 6.

[11] This point does not depend upon a clear delineation of what in particular constitutes a good choice, only on the minimal understanding that, within a frame of reference relevant to moral decision-making, some choices are better than others.

[12] Daniel A. Dombrowski, *Rawls and Religion: The Case for Political Liberalism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001) 6.

[13] Ibid.

momentary caprice? If Rawls is successful in isolating the good from both the world and from the individual in this way, and it is not clear that he can legitimately accomplish either, does the good as a positive, much less normative, concept continue to exist at all?

III. THE CRITICAL RESPONSE TO *A THEORY OF JUSTICE*

While the response to Rawls's early thought was overwhelmingly positive, several strands of critical assessment gathered under the umbrella of what is now called the communitarian critique of liberalism. Muhall and Swift have specified four of the most persistent of these themes.[14] First, liberal political theorists in general, and Rawls in particular, conceive of individuals as distinct from their conceptions of the good in a manner that fails to correspond to the way in which they actually seek these ends or goals. No one can step back from the particular values he or she holds and change them for new ones; each of us is made to be the people we are in part by the way of life we endorse. Second, communitarians maintain that the contract approach to political theory, of which Rawls is the preeminent modern example, relies on the mistaken view that people's values and goals are formed independently of or prior to their relation to society, which contract theorists understand as the outcome of negotiation among individuals whose ends are already established. Third, Rawls's emphasis on rationality and his description of the original position as an Archimedean point suggest that he seeks conclusions that apply universally and cross-culturally—

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[14] Mulhall and Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* 11-25.

regardless of whether all people have an overriding interest in making choices about their ways of life. A fourth issue involves the possibility of making judgments about the relative value of various choices. Does the emphasis on the maximum possible freedom of each to choose his or her own end mean that such choices are merely arbitrary expressions of preference? Or can one value highly the freedom to choose ends, while still maintaining that some choices are better than others, and that reason can help people discriminate between more and less worthy ways of life?

These are substantial and troubling questions—both in terms of the design of Rawls's original argument, as well as the form of his argument for it. Is Rawls actually committed to the conception of an unencumbered and antecedently individuated individual who is prior to society, and thus to the belief that moral commitments are little more than subjective expressions of preference? Does he seek an inappropriately (for his purposes) universal or comprehensive conception of justice, which relies upon a commitment to a particular conception of the good? These questions would eventually lead Rawls to revise his theory in order to forge a conception of justice that was, as he put it, political and not metaphysical. In order to understand why Rawls was led to revise his theory, we turn to an examination of three specific issues: choice, moral motivation, and privacy.

A. The Metaphysics of Choice

Michael Sandel's 1982 volume *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* argues that Rawls's deontological liberalism provides an inadequate (and at times philosophically

inconsistent) foundation for moral reasoning. Deontological liberalism, the essence of which Rawls captures in his expression that the right is prior to the good, asserts that a pluralist society, made up of individuals each with his or her own conception of the good, is best structured when it is governed by principles which do not themselves presuppose any particular conception of the good. These governing principles are justified not because they maximize the totality of good or advance a particular notion of the good; they are justified because they are conform to the concept of right, which Rawls following Kant maintains is both independent of and prior to the good.

It is fundamental to Kant's conception of the self that human beings are essentially characterized not by the particular aims, interests and notions of the good that they choose to pursue, but by their capacity for autonomous action—not the ends chosen, but the capacity to choose that is thereby presupposed. What really matters about a human being, therefore, is in place long before the person decides what matters to him or her. Because the human subject is prior to its ends, so the right to choose the good is prior to any particular conception of the good. This view of the person is the problem with liberalism, argues Sandel, principally because the conception of a choosing self, which remains independent of the desires and ends it may have at a given moment, is incompatible with fundamental theories of virtue. "Freed from the sanctions of custom and tradition and inherited status, unbound by moral ties antecedent to choice, the liberal self is installed as sovereign, cast as the author of the only obligations that constrain."[15]

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[15] Michael Sandel, "Freedom of Conscience or Freedom of Choice?" *Articles of Faith, Articles of Peace*, edited by James Davison Hunter and Os Guiness (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1990), cited in Theimann, *Religion in Public Life: A Dilemma for Democracy* 100 note 5.

Choice creates a single-pole moral universe populated by autonomous agents who acknowledge only those values, ends, and obligations that they freely choose to accept.[16] This fundamental emphasis by Rawls on the human being as an autonomous chooser of ends presupposes, according to Sandel, a commitment that can best be described as metaphysical, because it makes claims not about how people should be treated, but about the essential nature of human subjectivity—how it is formed and fixed, and what its boundaries are. The problem is this: if a person's goals are chosen by her, then presumably there must be a her which exists as an antecedently individuated subject prior to the act of choosing. If so, then the essential identity or constitution of a person cannot be the result of her choice of ends.

If this metaphysical picture of the self is imbedded in the original position, as Sandel thinks it is, then several causes for concern emerge.[17] First, the view of a person's goals as chosen from a veritable menu of possible options by an autonomous and antecedently individuated self and related to (and thus presumably detachable from) the individual by a (mere) exercise of will is, within the context of the tradition of moral and political thought, hardly neutral or uncontroversial. Moreover, this setting of life goals involves neither self-discovery nor self-scrutiny, and the ends that happen to be chosen can never become integral to the identity of the chooser. This leads to a way of thinking about life that, at least at the level of experience, is at best counterintuitive. Sandel writes:

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[16] Ibid., 100.

[17] These appear in Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). They are also summarized in Mulhall and Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* 50-55.

One consequence of this distance is to put the self beyond the reach of experience, to make it invulnerable, to fix its identity once and for all. No commitment could grip me so deeply that I could not understand myself without it. No transformation of life purposes and plans could be so unsettling as to disrupt the contours of my identity. No project could be so essential that turning away from it would call into question the person that I am. Given my independence from the values that I have, I can always stand apart from them; my public identity as a moral person is not affected by changes over time in my conception of the good.[18]

Furthermore, just as Rawls's conception of the self puts each individual's identity "beyond the reach of experience," it also commits Rawls to an impoverished understanding of political community. Liberal theory can aspire to what Sandel terms community in the cooperative sense, in which unencumbered selves are free to join voluntarily with others to advance their private ends or enjoy communal sentiments. But because relationships with other human beings can never be an ingredient in the identity of antecedently individuated selves, society can never become a community in the constitutive sense. "The unencumbered self," Sandel insists, "...cannot belong to any community where the self itself could be at stake. Such a community would engage the identity as well as the interests of the participants, and so implicate its members in a citizenship more thoroughgoing than the unencumbered self can know."[19] In other words, community can never itself become a constitutive good.

This issue—the one generative of the title "communitarian"—is a focal concern for Sandel, because it precludes Rawls from understanding the political

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[18] Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* 62. See also Mulhall and Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* 51.

[19] Sandel, "Freedom of Conscience or Freedom of Choice?" 175-183 cited in Theimann, *Religion in Public Life: A Dilemma for Democracy* 101 note 10.

community as a complex of relations with which individuals might identify and through which they might develop and refine their sense of who they are. Rather, Rawls appears to be committed to thinking of political community as a scheme for producing and distributing mutually advantageous benefits among mutually disinterested individuals, who can never know "a good in common that we cannot know alone."[20]

Daniel Dombrowski thinks Sandel (along with McIntyre and others) overstates the individualist element in Rawls position. While the parties *in the original position* are rational and mutually disinterested, this does not imply that *in real life* they are individualists who are interested primarily in wealth, prestige, and domination. The motivation of persons in the original position differs from that of person in real life, Dombrowski insists.[21] Indeed, the two principle of justice proposed by Rawls require each individual to consider fairly the rights and claims of others. As Rawls states in *A Theory of Justice*:

> The combination of mutual disinterest and the veil of ignorance
> achieves the same purpose as benevolence. For this combination of
> conditions forces each person in the original position to take the good
> of others into account. In justice as fairness, then, the effects of good
> will are brought about by several conditions working jointly. The
> feeling that this conception of justice is egoistic is an illusion fostered
> by looking at one of the elements of the original position (TJ 148).

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[20] Ibid., 102 note 12.

[21] Dombrowski, *Rawls and Religion: The Case for Political Liberalism* 44-45.

The matter can be put simply: individuals who have an interest only in themselves cannot exhibit effectively the principles of justice, because the principles imply a great deal of mutuality or reciprocity.

The present discontent among the citizens of this nation, Sandel states in a more recent article, is the result of a shift in recent decades away from the formative or civic aspects of our political life, to an emphasis on the procedural elements of our republic, which are less concerned with cultivating virtue than with enabling individuals to choose their own values. He concludes: "The public philosophy by which we live cannot secure the liberty it promises, because it cannot inspire the sense of community and civic engagement that liberty requires."[22] If Sandel is right, and I think he mostly is, then the principal cause of this discontent is a meager moral foundation, which rests on an inadequate, perhaps because inadvertent, metaphysics.

B. The Problem of Moral Motivation

In his 1981 volume *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre takes aims at the same issue in Rawls's original position, but he does so from a different vantage point.[23] The reason contemporary moral and political culture within liberal democracies is in such a state of confusion, in MacIntyre's judgment, is that they are plagued by arguments between individuals who hold opposing moral positions on non-trivial issues. The

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[22] Michael J. Sandel, "America's Search for a New Public Policy," *The Atlantic Monthly* March 1996, 58.

[23] The following discussion is endebted to Theimann, *Religion in Public Life: A Dilemma for Democracy*. See also Mulhall and Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians*.

worry is not about the mere presence of these arguments; the worry is that they cannot, as least as presently construed, be brought to any rational conclusion, because the moral positions as represented are fundamentally incommensurable.

Why is this the case? We have noted previously that the moral hallmark of modern liberalism is the centrality of choice: autonomous agents within a liberal culture affirm only those values, ends and obligations which they for their own reasons freely choose to accept. But MacIntyre argues that choice, particularly in cases where fundamental beliefs are at issue, cannot provide a sufficient basis for the adjudication of competing claims. If the only evidence we can present to buttress a particular choice is the fact that we have freely chosen, then moral disagreement becomes little more than a contest of self-assertion on matters of personal preference.

> If we possess no unassailable criteria, no set of compelling reasons by which we may convince our opponents, it follows that in the process of making up our own minds we can have made no appeal to such criteria or such reasons. If I lack any good reasons to invoke against you, it must seem that I lack any good reasons. Hence it seems that underlying my own position there must be some non-rational reason to adopt that position.[24]

By extension, if the reason for adopting the position is non-rational, then it cannot be communicated effectively to another autonomous individual, and modern politics becomes, in MacIntyre's turn of phrase that is both metaphorically adequate to the experience of most modern liberals and historically appropriate to liberalism's Hobbesian undercurrent, "civil war carried on by other means." For Rawls, this

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[24] Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) 8.

realization comes as no surprise. The essence of making a moral judgment is precisely the willingness publicly to express personal feelings and attitudes.

Yet our personal preferences, MacIntyre insists, are in fact neither idiosyncratic nor self-chosen. They emerge within a tradition, which MacIntyre understands as a mode of understanding the overall importance and worth of a particular way of life. Because life practices vary from person to person and time to time, so will the shape of this quest for the good life.

> But it is not just that different individuals live in different circumstances; it is also that we all approach our circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity. I am someone's son or daughter, someone else's cousin or uncle; I am a citizen of this or that city, a member of this or that guild or profession; I belong to this tribe, that clan, this nation. Hence what is good for me has to be what is good for one who inhabits these roles. As such I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectation and obligations. These constitute the given of my life, my moral starting-point. This in part is what gives my life its moral particularity.[25]

Any moral theory that aspires to rationality and objectivity, insists MacIntyre, must begin by locating individuals within an overarching and nested set of inherently social matrices. The failure to recognize how human beings can be and are constitutively attached to this generative tradition "entails an inability to give a coherent account of the circumstances necessary to achieve *any* kind of human good (whether communal in content or not), for in the absence of such constitutive

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[25] Ibid., 204-05.

communal framework, the very idea of morality as a rational or intelligible enterprise drops out."[26]

Hence MacIntyre's quarrel with Rawls, for whom "society is composed of individuals, each with his or her own interest, who then have to come together and formulate common rules of life." Because individuals are thus primary and society secondary, "the identification of individual interests is prior to, and independent of, the construction of any moral or social bonds between them."[27] The original position, as a device of representation for thinking about justice, excludes the possibility that society is (or might be) a community united by a shared understanding of the good both for themselves as individuals and for their community as a whole. Rawls's commitment to asocial individualism virtually guarantees that he will not be able to give his theory of justice the rational grounding he seeks, nor can it be a catalyst for political consensus. In the end, according to MacIntyre, it seems as if "we had been shipwrecked on an uninhabited island with a group of other individuals, each of whom is a stranger to me and all the others."[28]

C. The Problem of Privacy

Alasdair MacIntyre is not the only scholar who is troubled by this gathering of strangers, particularly when Rawls begins his argument by positing precisely the

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[26] Mulhall and Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* 93.

[27] MacIntyre, *After Virtue* 232-33.

[28] Ibid., 233.

opposite. Recall that Rawls contends that the principles that shore up his theory of justice are categorical imperatives following from the sole proposition of a rational mind. That is, any rational human being *qua* human and rational must make the choices Rawls's representative people make from the original position, otherwise they are not rational. To put the same point a different way, Rawls presents the principle of equal liberty and the difference principle as postulates of practical reason.

Yet this is not the only inference one could justifiably make from the sheer fact of rationality; Kant's understanding of the categorical imperative led him to postulate god and immortality, for example. Furthermore, as we noted earlier, deontological and teleological theories of justice must be arranged in serial order. That is, if human existence is such that it has a good which ought to be maximized or a goal which should be pursued, then not to pursue that good or goal, and to set in place one or more deontological criteria instead, would be to deny a principle which has arisen from a consideration of human existence alone. The resulting moral system would be trapped in a contradiction, since one may employ deontological criteria if and only if teleological criteria do not apply. If some other imperative follows from the fact of rationality that includes a teleological moral criterion for human activity, then Rawls is obligated to defer.

Such a case can and has been made. Franklin Gamwell vigorously contests the liberal claim that happiness is strictly private—that no objective criterion exists in terms of which human activity can be evaluated. Such a position is incoherent, on Gamwell's reading, because within any society some provision must be made for the adjudication of competing preferential claims. The provision must be some

comprehensive moral variable of which all possible human actions are local

specifications. The presence of this comprehensive moral variable establishes, in turn,

a formal criterion for a political theory.

Gamwell supports his claim by recalling Gewirth's analysis of the generic

features of human action, which reveals that human agents, in determining which

actions to take, must decide between competing self-understandings. These diverse

self-understandings cannot be other than local specifications of a comprehensive

metaphysical principle in terms of which all society can be evaluated, which Gamwell

calls contingency-in-association. This principle unites both the self who must decide

among contingent self-understandings and the world in association with which these

self-understandings become determinant.[29] Contra Rawls, Gamwell rightly concludes

that the fact of rationality necessarily entails an ontological commitment. Rawls does

not succeed, on this reading, in his attempt to establish an independent basis for

principles of the right prior to any major conception of the good.[30]

Taken together, what these various criticisms suggest is that Rawls's theory in

A Theory of Justice in truth assumed commitments to which liberalism intends to be

neutral. The emphasis by Rawls on human beings as autonomous choosers of ends

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[29] For Gamwell, Whitehead's principle of creativity is the evaluative face of the comprehensive moral variable. A given contingency-in-association can be evaluated by the definiteness of its self-determined unity and the extensiveness of its other-determined diversity. The maximal instance of unity-in-diversity or contingency-in-association is beauty, which establishes the aim of human activity and political association: so act as to maximize unity-in-diversity, or beauty. In the public realm, this aim translates into the task of establishing political systems and associations that maximize human communication. See chapter 6 of Gamwell, *Democracy on Purpose*, especially pp. 282-290.

[30] One discussion of this shortcoming can be found in Charles A. Kelbley, "Freedom from the Good," in *Freedom and Value*, ed. R. Johann (1976).

presupposes a metaphysical commitment, not because it makes claims about how people should be treated, but because it makes claims about the essential nature of human subjectivity. Furthermore, because relationships with others can never be an ingredient in the identity of antecedently individuated selves, society can never become a community in the constitutive sense.

IV. JUSTICE AS FAIRNESS: THE REVISED VERSION

It has become clear, as we have examined the initial presentation of Rawls's view of justice as fairness, that the crux of his argument carries forward the original impetus which gave rise to liberalism generally and the social contract theory in particular: the attempt, as competing religious beliefs and divergent conceptions of the good ensnarled Europe in the post-Reformation religious wars, to overcome those divisions and establish a framework for toleration and justice. Within that radically pluralist setting, the contract theory sought to provide a system of rules that no one would reasonably reject as a basis for informed, unforced general agreement.

Yet, as we have noted, substantial and troubling questions remain—both in terms of the design of Rawls's original argument, as well as the form of his argument for it. The issue is whether the problem is one or the other, or both. In other words, can he reframe his argument in such a way that the conception of justice as fairness remains salient and compelling, yet avoids the appearance of an implicit commitment to claims he explicitly denies?

In subsequent writings, Rawls attempts to do precisely that. "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," "The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus," and *Political Liberalism* do not, at least in Rawls's own thinking, represent a change in the structure or content of his conception of justice as fairness. Rather, he intends to develop a new kind of justification for his doctrine, a justification that he regards as specifically political, as distinct from comprehensive. Because "the aims of a political philosophy depend on the society it addresses" (IOC 1), contemporary political philosophers must take adequate measure of the fact that modern constitutional democracies require what Rawls calls an overlapping consensus on matters pertaining to justice.

The principal reason a political philosophy that contains metaphysical views cannot be useful to a liberal society, in Rawls judgment, is that it will not be properly tolerant of the diversity of ideas and practices present in the culture. Individuals may have private metaphysical reasons for being part of a particular overlapping consensus concerning whether or not a particular set of actions is just, but metaphysics cannot be part of the philosopher's public justification of that particular consensus. Rawls asserts that philosophy as the search for truth about an independent metaphysical and moral order cannot provide a workable and shared basis for a political conception of justice in a democratic society. Both the consensus itself and the justification supporting its usefulness to a particular culture must be developed, he insists, without in any way relying on comprehensive doctrines, or metaphysics.

What exactly does Rawls intend to avoid when, in this new presentation of his conception of justice, he rejects any reliance on metaphysics? For Rawls, metaphysics

has a Hobbesian cast: "doctrines for which an incontrovertible demonstration is not possible."[31] Rawls has in mind a broad notion of metaphysics, which designates the nature of human selves or human existence as such, with the understanding that any such doctrine includes an assertion about what makes human existence good. These comprehensive doctrines can be troublesome because they have the potential of arousing controversy and conflict in the community, and thus exert a centripetal force on the process of providing a shared public basis for the justification of those political and social institutions on which the ongoing stability of the culture depends.

But as he seeks to remove metaphysical justifications from his theory of justice, does Rawls consequently make an already thin theory of justice even thinner by, as it were, likewise dismantling the discipline of political philosophy? If normative ethics must be absent from political theorizing, is the result mere politics? Not according to Rawls.

> Some may think that to ensure stable social unity in a constitutional regime by looking for an overlapping consensus detaches political philosophy from philosophy and makes it into politics. Yes and no: the politician, we say, looks to the next election, the statesman, to the next generation, and philosophy to the indefinite future. Philosophy sees the world as an on-going system of cooperation over time, in perpetuity practically speaking. Political philosophy is related to politics because it must be concerned, as moral philosophy need not be, with practical possibilities...

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[31] Jean Hampton explains further that "for Hobbes, any doctrine is part of 'science' if it cannot be contested because there is a conclusive demonstration of it. Any thesis that cannot be so demonstrated is contestable and thus likely to disturb the peace of the commonwealth unless a sovereign is given authority to decide the matter." Passages in Hobbes which support this point include his "Six Lessons to the Professors of Mathematics...in the University of Oxford" (1656), *Epistle Dedicatory*, in *English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. W. Molesworth (London: John Bohn, 1840), 7:183-84, and *De Homine*, chap. 10, iv-v, pp. 41-43, in *Man and Citizen*, ed. B. Gert (New York: Humanities Press, 1972), cited in Jean Hampton, "Should Political Philosophy Be Done without Metaphysics?" *Ethics* 99 (July 1989): 794 note 9.

>Thus political philosophy is not mere politics: in addressing the public culture it takes the longest possible view, looks to society's permanent historical and social conditions, and tries to mediate society's deepest conflicts. It hopes to uncover, and to help articulate, a shared basis of consensus on a political conception of justice drawing upon citizens' fundamental intuitive ideas about their society and their place in it (IOC 24-25).

Given the nature of our present inquiry, the source of the shared consensus is the critical aspect of this new formulation. Rawls describes the consensus as emerging from a set of fundamental intuitive ideas—not (as the notion of an original position would suggest) of individuals in their role as human beings, but of citizens in their role within a particular political system. This is clearly a shift from the use of rational choice machinery in *A Theory of Justice*, an approach that Rawls now admits was both erroneous and misleading.[32]

Nonetheless, Rawls does recognize that comprehensive schemes play a role in the overlapping consensus, because the good that is sought in the political realm is undeniably an individual good. The highest-order interests that we have as citizens are ones generated in the first instance by each of us as individuals, within the context of our own comprehensive scheme. As Thiemann rightly notes, Rawls does not argue that a democratic government should occupy "an imagined place of neutral transcendence above the fray of contending substantive points of view; rather, such governments must discover the 'common ground' present among those who hold

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[32] "...it was an error (and a very misleading one) to describe a theory of justice as part of a theory of rational choice. What I should have said is that the conception of justice as fairness uses an account of rational choice subject to reasonable conditions to characterize the deliberations of the parties as representatives of free and equal persons; and all of this within a political conception of justice, which is, of course, a moral conception" (JFPM 401 note 20).

diverse and conflicting comprehensive schemes."[33] For this common ground to emerge and an overlapping consensus about justice to develop, the conception of justice must be distinguished from all comprehensive schemes, yet be accepted by persons who hold those schemes.

In other words, citizens in a democratic regime will draw upon their own comprehensive schemes in devising justifications for their support of the fundamental principles of justice. But once they have given their endorsement to a specific set of principles, they will come to recognize that those principles are indeed fundamental, that is, free-standing. Whether, in any given case, the resulting political conception is simply adjunct to a partially comprehensive view or derived from a fully articulated doctrine makes no difference. Individuals decide for themselves how the shared political conception of justice relates to their own comprehensive views. The crucial issue is that, within the political realm, the consensus about justice takes precedence over convictions about comprehensive schemes. In Rawls's own words:

> A society is well-ordered by a political conception of justice so long as, first, citizens who affirm reasonable but opposing comprehensive doctrines belong to an overlapping consensus: that is, they generally endorse that conception of justice as giving the content of their political judgments; and second, unreasonable comprehensive doctrines (these, we assume, always exist) do not gain enough currency to compromise the essential justice (PL 38).

It should by now be clear the political lengths to which Rawls has gone to avoid incurring any debt to metaphysics, either explicit or implicit. In due course, we

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[33] Theimann, *Religion in Public Life: A Dilemma for Democracy* 82. The remark was made in the context of a discussion of the relationship between politics and religion within political liberalism, but the point is equally relevant to the broader relationship between individual comprehensive schemes and the overlapping consensus.

shall ask to what extent he succeeds in his effort to craft a theory of justice that is completely non-metaphysical. But first, we shall examine in more detail the conception of justice which Rawls characterizes as completely political, in order to assess the cost, if any, of denying to his theory of justice any comprehensive ground.

In his two essays "The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus" and "Justice as Political Not Metaphysical," Rawls makes clear that his conception of justice is not meant to be general in its scope. Unlike theories of justice based on comprehensive schemes, his will not state what justice requires in all situations, or how all of society's institutions must be organized if they are to achieve justice. Rather, justice as fairness is intended only for those societies that are characterized by a persistent, more or less permanent, pluralism that could be overcome in most cases only by the oppressive use of state power (IOC 22). This "common predicament" in which modern liberal democracies find themselves is made even more complicated by a moderate scarcity of resources, which in turn requires that the relevant conception of justice distribute resources in a way that allows for a plurality of "conflicting and incommensurable conceptions of the good affirmed" by the members of the society (JFPM 225). Finally, there must also be present numerous possibilities for gain which everyone desires to realize and which can only come from well-organized social cooperation. Into this context of cooperatively motivated pluralism, Rawls places his political conception of justice.

According to Rawls, the distinguishing features of this conception of justice are as follows:

> First, that it is a moral conception worked out for a specific subject, namely, the basic structure of a constitutional democratic regime; second, that accepting the political conception does not presuppose accepting any particular comprehensive religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine; rather, the political conception presents itself as a reasonable conception for the basic structure alone; and third, that it is formulated not in terms of any comprehensive doctrine but in terms of certain fundamental ideas viewed as latent in the public political culture of a democratic society.[34]

Stephen Mulhall helpfully characterizes the respect in which it is appropriate to characterize these three features as political in terms of their subject, their status and their method or source.[35] As we noted earlier, the subject of this conception of justice is not general but political: it applies only to the basic political, economic, and social institutions of society, not to churches, universities, businesses, hospitals and other institutions which are not part of the basic structure. Furthermore, in terms of its status, the acceptance of this political conception—the ideas embodied in the concept of the original position and the principles of justice derived from it—does not rely on any full-blown theories about how people should live their lives. It is intended to stand independent of, and not presuppose, any particular comprehensive understanding of moral, religious, or philosophical values or ideals. This, Mulhall rightly notes, takes us to the heart of the new Rawls. As far as its method or source is concerned, this conception of justice is based on the systematic articulation of "intuitive ideas that, because they are imbedded in our society's main institutions and the historical traditions of their interpretation, can be regarded as implicitly shared."[36]

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[34] Priority of Right, p. 252.

[35] Mulhall and Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* 171-73.

[36] Ibid., 173.

The question that political liberalism as a philosophical stance is meant to answer, as Daniel A. Dombrowski puts it, is this: "How is it possible to have a just society over time composed of free and equal citizens who are divided, sometimes profoundly so, by incompatible comprehensive religious (or philosophical) doctrines that are nonetheless reasonable?"[37] Since the Enlightenment removed Christianity from its position as the prevailing comprehensive doctrine in the West, the vacuum could be filled in one of two ways. Either another comprehensive view, one that addressed both the findings of modern science and the issues of the modern world, could be advanced to replace Christianity; or the assumption could be made that no such doctrine could be found, and the task undertaken to find a procedure for adjudicating the disputes that arise among the defenders of competing comprehensive views, whether those views are religious in nature or not. The problem with the former is that "comprehensive doctrines—both religious and nonreligious—are unreasonable as *political* views because they take the public's political power, in which citizens should have an equal share, to enforce a view concerning which people may very well differ uncompromisingly."[38] This is why, given the persistent presence of a (putatively reasonable) pluralism in modern constitutional democracies, Rawls undertook neither to replace nor deny comprehensive claims, whether religious or nonreligious, but to relegate them to the private realm while defending the role of public reason in political discourse. His goal is not to strike a balance among competing comprehensive claims,

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[37] Dombrowski, *Rawls and Religion: The Case for Political Liberalism* 3.

[38] Ibid., 6.

but rather to formulate a political conception of the principles of justice that is acceptable to defenders of comprehensive doctrines.

Rawls is determined to keep his theory of justice wholly[39] political, precisely because only in that way can he adequately address the fact that modern societies contain a diversity and plurality of conceptions of the good. He insists that a given citizen can believe in the truth of a particular conception of the good and still maintain that its truth is irrelevant or inappropriate to questions of justice. While this does create a chasm between conceptions of the good and conceptions of justice, it does not imply that Rawls succumbs to Michael Sandel's charge that the original position demonstrates liberalism's presupposition of an unencumbered subject, a shadowy self detachable and detached from all its ends. In fact, the original position shows that what is important about people is their capacity to reflect upon and revise their particular attachments and commitments, and one can judge this to be important without also having to believe that people can detach themselves from all their values at the same time. The original position, as recast in *Political Liberalism*, shows that justice must not deny to people the capacity to change their conceptions of the good, that is, individuals as citizens must be assumed to have this capacity, whether in fact all individuals have it or not.

Rawls is willing to give up a great deal in order to insulate his theory of justice from the competing comprehensive claims that persist in the context of pluralism that

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[39] It is tempting at this juncture to substitute "merely" for "wholly," since Rawls's principle motivation for reframing his theory of justice seems to be limiting rather than expanding its domain. Yet merely has a pejorative cast that is inconsistent with my sense of the beauty of Rawls's argument and the obvious need for a theory of justice that is compelling and applicable at least in the political sphere.

he addresses. Mulhall puts it succinctly: "It seems that Rawls wants to allow those affirming the political conception of the person as citizen to believe in comprehensive doctrines involving other, non-liberal, values and commitments, but, in asserting the priority of the political conception, he requires that those comprehensive doctrines be held in a rather less than whole-hearted, one might say a rather liberal, way."[40] In any given political situation, there are comprehensive claims and there are political justifications. The question is how these two are related—if indeed they are related at all.

A. The Right and the Good

In a new chapter appended to the second edition of *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, Michael Sandel distinguishes two different ways in which, for Rawls, the right is prior to the good.[41] First, the right is prior to the good in the sense that certain individual rights outweigh considerations of the common good. Second—this part of the claim prompted widespread debate—the principles of justice that specify our rights do not depend for their justification on any particular conception of the good. The critics of this rights-oriented approach to liberalism have focused on the question of whether rights can be identified and justified in a way that does not presuppose any particular conception of the good.[42] Sandel and other critics of this approach argue

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[40] Mulhall and Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* 178.

[41] Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* 185.

[42] Sandel notes that he and other critics of the rights-oriented approach (such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, Michael Walzer, among others) are mis-labeled as communitarian insofar as the term implies that rights should be based on the values or preferences that are dominant in any given

that, on both philosophical and political terms, justice is relative to the good, not

independent of it.

> As a philosophical matter, our reflections about justice cannot
> reasonably be detached from our reflections about the nature of the
> good life and the highest human ends. As a political matter, our
> deliberations about justice and rights cannot proceed without reference
> to the conceptions of the good that find expression in the many cultures
> and traditions within which those deliberations take place.[43]

The focus of the debate centers on competing conceptions of how individuals

as moral agents are related to their ends and roles—whether we are independent

selves, unbound by antecedent moral obligations and free to choose our own ends, or

whether we are bound to ends that come to us, at least in part, from some other source,

such as nature, God, or our family or cultural traditions. In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls

adopted the voluntarist position based on Kant (stated as "the self is prior to the ends

which are affirmed by it" (TJ 560), which leads him to argue for a framework of rights

that is neutral among ends, because to base rights on a particular conception of the

good would impose on some individuals the values of others, and thus fail to respect

each person's capacity to choose his or her own ends.

The criticism of Rawls's early position focused on his assertion that each

person, as a free and independent agent, is unencumbered by prior moral ties. Sandel,

for example, argues that "certain moral obligations that we commonly recognize—

obligations of solidarity, for example, or religious duties—may claim us for reasons

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community at any given time. Almost none of those who have challenged the priority of the right have
done so on this basis. Ibid., 186.

[43] Ibid.

unrelated to choice."[44] We cannot dismiss this sense of obligation as mere confusion, yet if we are to understand ourselves as free and independent, we cannot be bound by moral ties we have not ourselves chosen. Rawls's response to this criticism in *Political Liberalism* is not to defend the Kantian conception of the person, but rather to assert that the priority of the right to the good does not depend on any thoroughgoing (that is, metaphysical) conception of the person at all.

On what does it depend? Rawls's position rests on a conception of the individual that is narrowly restricted to the political domain, which entails the separation of our public identity as citizens from our loyalties and commitments as private individuals. In their nonpublic lives, Rawls says, people may have loyalties and commitments that "they believe they would not, indeed could and should not, stand apart from and evaluate objectively. They may regard it as simply unthinkable to view themselves apart from certain religious, philosophical, and moral convictions, or from certain enduring attachments and loyalties" (PL 31). But these commitments must be set aside when individuals enter into their public roles as citizens, and any decisions they make or actions they take must be accomplished without reference to their particular loyalties or conceptions of the good.

This strategy requires an additional feature of the political conception of the person, which Rawls stipulates by saying that individuals are, when considered in their public role as citizens, "self-authenticating sources of valid claims" (PL 32). Provided our claims are not unjust, each claim receives its validity as an element of public discourse from the simple fact that we have made it. The source of the claims will

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[44] Ibid., 188.

vary. Some will be based on ancient religious ideals or philosophically sophisticated

conceptions of the common good, while others are mere preferences of the moment or

short-term interests. From our personal point of view, the difference in the status of

these claims may be enormous, but from a political point of view, even claims

founded on duties and obligations of citizenship or religious faith are "merely things

people want—nothing more, nothing less. Their validity as political claims has

nothing to do with the moral importance of the goods they claim, but solely consists in

the fact that someone asserts them."[45] From a political point of view, everyone is thus

unencumbered by moral, religious, and communal obligations. In this sense, Rawls's

political liberalism has the same consequence for an individual's reflections about

justice as his previous comprehensive liberalism; whether in the original position or in

the public sphere, the individual reflects about justice in abstraction from his or her

ends as a person.

While this strategy does serve to keep comprehensive views out of the public

domain, it is not clear that individuals will judge it a viable approach to life either for

themselves as citizens or as private individuals. Sandel asks, "Why should our

political identities not express the moral and religious and communal convictions we

affirm in our personal lives?… Why, in deliberating about justice, should we set aside

the moral judgments that inform the rest of our lives?"[46] Rawls's response concerns

the public political culture of modern democratic societies, in which individuals

understand that the plurality of moral and religious views requires that they not seek to

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[45] Ibid., 192-93.

[46] Ibid., 193.

conform political life to their comprehensive views, as was and is the case in traditional societies. More pointedly, Rawls's response is that this is the only way to have a political community that does not take sides, that is, a political community in which pluralism is affirmed. By implication, at least, Rawls challenges Sandel to demonstrate how one could have a democracy without the coercive imposition of a comprehensive doctrine and thus a denial of pluralism.

In 1980, Rawls wrote that what justifies a conception of justice is not our sense that it is "true to an order antecedent to and given to us, but its congruence with our deeper understanding of ourselves and our aspirations, and our realization that, given our history and the traditions embedded in our public life, it is the most reasonable doctrine for us."[47] By 1993, he was seeking to articulate reasons for supporting a theory of justice that went beyond a reasonable compromise among citizens with conflicting views, though he acknowledges that people initially support the principles of justice for that reason, as well as for reasons drawn from their own comprehensive conceptions. But over time, he believed, as people learned to live in a pluralist society, people would recognize that the virtues of political cooperation and tolerance were "very great virtues" and that "they constitute a very great public good" (PL 157).

With some justification, David Hollenbach insists that toleration is not sufficient.[48] Not only are human beings by their very nature political (a position with which Rawls would not disagree), but also, by implication, privacy is a state of

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[47] John Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," *Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980): 519.

[48] David Hollenbach, "Is Tolerance Enough?" *Conversations* 13 (Spring 1998): 5-6.

privation (a conclusion with which Rawls would probably disagree). Hollenbach is concerned about protecting public discourse of the sort that fosters a larger and more encompassing vision of the common good. Dombrowski rightly defends Rawls by pointing out that Rawls is not prohibiting—indeed, he encourages—critical engagement among citizens who hold different views of the common good. What Rawls does wish to avoid, however, is either the assertion or the denial *in politics* of any religious (or philosophical) comprehensive doctrine that is reasonable.[49]

But social relations are indeed about more than tolerance. The conception of justice as fairness gives a central role to community, in the sense that no one person can do everything she or he is capable of doing, in which case each citizen must select a course of life with the confidence that other citizens will do the rest of what is necessary for life to be lived at a high level. As Rawls describes this cooperative venture, "it is through social union founded upon the needs and potentialities of its members that each person can participate in the total sum of the realized natural assets of humankind" (TJ 272). This leads to the notion of the community of humankind, a social union which Rawls compares to a group of musicians, each of whom could have trained him- or herself to play any instrument in the orchestra as well as anyone else, but instead decides by tacit agreement with the other members of the orchestra to perfect their skills on only one instrument, so as to realized the powers of all in their joint performance. In the same way, Rawls says, only in a social union is the individual complete. "In each case, persons need one another, since it is only in active cooperation with others that any one's talents can be realized, and then in large part by

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[49] Dombrowski, *Rawls and Religion: The Case for Political Liberalism* 71.

the efforts of all. Only in the activities of social union can the individual be complete"

(TJ 523 and PL 204).

Rawls subsequently extends this same principle to include all dimensions of

human activity:

> The development of art and science, of religion and culture of all kinds,
> high and low, can of course be thought of in much the same way.
> Learning from one another's efforts and appreciating their several
> contributions, human beings gradually build up systems of knowledge
> and belief; they work out recognized techniques for doing things and
> elaborate styles of feeling and expression. In these cases the common
> aim is often profound and complex, being defined by the respective
> artistic, scientific, or religious tradition; and to understand this aim
> often takes years of discipline and study. The essential thing is that
> there be a shared final end (TJ 526).

This shared final end, however, is not the (single) consensus good or dominant

end of the society as a whole. Rather, the larger social union (or common good) is

made up of many smaller social unions (or common goods) in which each citizen can

participate as a free and equal member. Each of the individual conceptions of the

good, in turn, is ultimately connected to some comprehensive religious (or

philosophical) doctrine. What is shared, according to Rawls, is not the particular

comprehensive doctrine to which each conception of the good refers, but the common

political life in terms of which each individual develops and shapes a conception of

the good over a lifetime. Dombrowski puts the dynamic this way:

> A shared political life does not necessarily require a shared
> comprehensive (or philosophical) doctrine, nor does it necessarily
> require a Kantian comprehensive autonomy, but only a commitment to

political autonomy in a context where reasonable people seek common ground. Such a search is what justice as fairness is all about.[50]

Rawls's idea of political community—a social union of social unions—is not in his view based on one comprehensive religious or political doctrine. Rather, it is based on an overlapping consensus concerning a shared public conception of justice that enables cooperation among people who subscribe to different, often incompatible comprehensive doctrines. What Rawls describes as the "fair terms" of this cooperation must be carefully specified, however, lest a citizen in the overlapping consensus mistakenly view the terms as fair either because they were laid down by God or some other outside authority distinct from the persons cooperating, or because they are part of an independent moral order of which the citizen has direct personal knowledge. Justice as fairness, in contrast, requires that the terms be established by the citizens themselves in view of what they regard as their reciprocal advantage. "This is because, given the fact of reasonable pluralism, citizens cannot agree on any moral authority, whether a sacred text, or institution. Nor do they agree about the order of moral values, or the dictates of what some regard as natural law" (PL 98). Given this situation, Rawls concludes that "it is only by affirming a constructivist conception— one which is political and not metaphysical—that citizens can expect to find principles that all can accept." They can do this, Rawls insists, "without denying the deeper aspects of their reasonable comprehensive doctrines" (PL 98).

For this reason, people of faith should be motivated to become wholehearted members of a democratic society, even when their own comprehensive doctrines may

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[50] Ibid., 76.

not thrive, and may even decline, under a democratic system of government. If religious individuals view themselves—citizens of a liberal democracy—as free and equal, as well as reasonable and rational, then they must, by implication, view other citizens in the same way, and be open to the possibility that the others may reject the comprehensive views which they themselves firmly believe to be true. When a pluralism of comprehensive views is an irreducible fact, only a reasonable constitutional democracy can ensure that the liberty of some citizens is consistent with the equal liberty of others. In this way, Rawls insists, there is no conflict between democracy and reasonable religious doctrines, as he concludes in the following summary statement from "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited."

> 1) Reasonable persons do not all affirm the same comprehensive doctrine. This is said to be a consequence of the burdens of judgment… 2) Many reasonable doctrines are affirmed, not all of which can be true or right (as judged from within a comprehensive doctrine). 3) It is not unreasonable to affirm any one of the reasonable comprehensive doctrines. 4) Others who affirm reasonable doctrines different from ours are, we grant, reasonable also, and certainly not for that reason unreasonable. 5) In going beyond recognizing the reasonableness of a doctrine and affirming our belief in it, we are not being unreasonable. 6) Reasonable persons think it unreasonable to use political power, should they possess it, to repress other doctrines that are reasonable yet different from their own. (IPRR 804)

However, these affirmations do not address all the issues that emerge when reasonable persons in a democracy not only hold, but also base their public actions upon, comprehensive views. They do not specify whether reasonable people always bracket grave moral questions for the sake of political agreement. Nor do they say whether the fact of reasonable pluralism in modern democratic societies concerning conflicting moral and religious views also applies to questions of justice. Nor do they

indicate whether the prohibition against reference to moral and religious ideals when discussing fundamental political and constitutional questions is an unduly severe restriction that will impoverish political discourse and rule out important dimensions of public deliberation. These are significant issues that require further discussion.

B. The Status of Moral and Religious Questions

In a modern democratic society in which citizens hold divergent and often incompatible views about what constitutes the good life, it is sometimes necessary to bracket moral and religious convictions in order to secure social cooperation based on mutual respect. But, Michael Sandel asks, "what is to ensure that this interest is always so important as to outweigh any competing interest that could arise from within a comprehensive moral or religious view?"[51] Rawls does not claim that the moral or religious views held by citizens are untrue, which would be one possible justification for excluding them, only that the views cannot be considered in any public deliberation. Nor does he claim that the moral or religious views address different issues from those taken up in public discourse; if the subject matter were discrete, as Sandel points out, there would be no reason to exclude them. Yet Rawls insists that political values normally outweigh whatever nonpolitical values conflict with them (PL 146, 155).

Sandel cites two examples in which what he calls grave moral and religious questions bear heavily on political controversies: the debate over abortion rights, and

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[51] Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* 196.

the debate between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas over popular sovereignty and slavery. In the first case, bracketing the moral-theological question of when life begins is a reasonable political solution only if the Catholic Church is wrong about when human life begins. But if the Catholic Church is right that human life in the relevant moral sense does begin at conception, then as Sandel puts it, abortion is tantamount to murder and "the political liberal's case for the priority of political values must become an instance of the just war theory; he or she would have to show why these values should prevail even at the cost of some 1.5 million civilian deaths each year."[52] This is not to suggest, Sandel quickly adds, that the Catholic Church is correct, but only to show that the case for abortion rights cannot be neutral with respect to the moral and religious controversy concerning when human life begins.

In his debate with Abraham Lincoln over the morality of slavery, Stephen Douglas argued that the national policy of the U.S. should be neutral on the issue, since people were bound to disagree. The only hope of holding the country together was to bracket the moral controversy over slavery and respect the right of each state and territory to decide these questions for themselves.[53] The real issue in the controversy, Lincoln responded, is between those who view slavery as a wrong and those who do not view it as a wrong. And, he went on to insist, it is reasonable to bracket the question of slavery only if slavery is not the moral evil he considered it to be. In other words, the debate between Lincoln and Douglas was mostly about whether

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[52] Ibid., 198.

[53] Ibid., 199. He cites Paul M. Angle, ed., *Created Equal? The Complete Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858* (1958), esp. 369 and 374.

to bracket a moral controversy for the sake of political agreement, not about the morality of slavery. Lincoln put the matter of bracketing succinctly: "Is it not false statesmanship that undertakes to build up a system of policy upon the basis of caring nothing about the very thing that everybody cares the most about?"[54]

C. The Fact of Reasonable Pluralism

The presence of grave moral and religious debates illustrate why Rawls asserts what he calls the fact of reasonable pluralism, which simply suggests that in the immediate future we are unlikely to see a high degree of doctrinal consensus on moral and religious matters among citizens who are freely exercising their reason, even if these citizens are highly intelligent and of manifestly good will. This fact of reasonable pluralism is not the same, however, as simple pluralism, or pluralism as such.

The fact of simple pluralism is the fact of disagreement about matters of comprehensive import, regardless of the source or cause of the disagreement. In some cases concerning comprehensive doctrines, citizens disagree because they are ignorant of relevant evidence, fail to adhere to the demands of logic, refuse to assess their own position from a critical point of view, or base their views upon irrational biases or prejudices. These sources of disagreement should, over time, be overcome by citizens of high intelligence and good will.

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[54] Angle, p. 389 in Ibid., 201.

Other sources of disagreement will persist, according to Rawls, because they are the natural consequence of the free and public exercise of human reason. The burdens of judgment—given the complexity of evidence and the challenge of balancing competing normative claims—are such that it is highly unlikely, even over a long period of time, that even the most intelligent citizens of manifest good will achieve significant consensus concerning matters of moral, religious, or philosophical doctrine. The resulting pluralism of comprehensive views, according to Rawls, is a reasonable and persistent feature of life in a democracy. This fact leads him to formulate five criteria which characterize reasonable comprehensive doctrines: 1) they arise from and reflect the use of both theoretical and practical reason to make sense of life experience; 2) they express ways of life, or ways of seeing the world, that are, within the context, consistent with intelligence and good will of those who affirm them; 3) they are more or less consistent and coherent; 4) they can be seen, even to nonbelievers willing to take up the appropriate point of view, as making sense in light of the relevant circumstances; and 5) they do not rely on indoctrination or coercion to sustain or reproduce themselves over time (PL 59).

With respect to the fact of reasonable pluralism as the basis of the priority of the right to the good (as opposed to the Kantian conception of the self as prior to its ends), Rawls views the widespread presence of incompatible yet reasonable comprehensive religious, moral, and philosophical doctrines as "the normal result of the exercise of human reason" in a modern democratic society (PL xvi). Given this level of pluralism among free and equal citizens, if the principles of justice are to

provide a basis for social cooperation among adherents of incompatible views, the principles must uphold the priority of the right to the good.

Even if the fact of reasonable pluralism is true, Sandel counters, this fact alone is not sufficient to establish the priority of the right. The asymmetry depends upon a further assumption:

> This is the assumption that, despite our disagreements about morality and religion, we do not have, or on due reflection would not have, similar disagreements about justice. Political liberalism must assume not only that the exercise of human reason under conditions of freedom will produce disagreements about the good life but also that the exercise of human reason under conditions of freedom will *not* produce disagreements about justice. The 'fact of reasonable pluralism' about morality and religion creates an asymmetry between the right and the good only when coupled with the assumption that there is no comparable 'fact of reasonable pluralism' about justice.[55]

While this is an excellent point, Rawls would likely respond that differences with respect to justice are implied by his idea by public reason. Political liberalism, he says, is a type of theory, and justice as fairness is one instance. This means that, for Rawls, we have grounds to debate views of justice, so long as they are all instances of political liberalism—debate about comprehensive doctrines being impossible.

Even so, modern democratic societies are teeming with disagreements: affirmative action, health care, income distribution, and capital punishment, among other issues. Does this not constitute a reasonable pluralism of views about justice, Sandel wonders? One possible response Rawls might make is to say that these disagreements are about how the principles of justice should be applied, not about

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[55] Ibid., 204.

what the principle of justice should be. Widespread agreement about the importance of the right of free speech, for example, does not necessarily translate into agreement about how that right should be applied to, say, racial epithets or violent pornography.

It is not at all clear, Sandel responds, that all of our disagreements about justice concern the application of principles that we share, or would share on due reflection.[56] Many people share the basic convictions captured by Rawls's difference principle, which insists that only those social and economic inequities are just that improve the condition of the least well of members of society. Libertarians, on the other hand, argue that it may be a good thing to help the less fortunate, but the aid should come from charitable gifts made by individuals, not from mandated government assistance. This debate, Sandel rightly observes, would appear to be about what the correct principle of distributive justice is, and not simply about how to apply the difference principle.

The principle recourse for political liberalism in this dilemma is to assert that libertarian and other such disagreements about distributive justice are not reasonable, that is, they are not the natural consequence of the exercise of human reason under the conditions of freedom. This assertion, Sandel notes, is at odds with liberalism's tolerance of, even generosity toward, differences about the comprehensive issues of morality and religion. In these matters, Rawls does not expect—or even desire—that free discussion among conscientious persons with full powers of reason will yield agreement. "But this spirit of toleration does not extend to our disagreements about justice. Since disagreements between, say, libertarians and advocates of the difference

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[56] Ibid., 205.

principle do not reflect a reasonable pluralism, there is no objection to using state power to implement the difference principle."[57]

Rawls spends much of *A Theory of Justice* arguing this very point: that the difference principle is more defensible as a principle of justice than its libertarian alternative, thus the government need not remain neutral in the face of it. But, Sandel wonders, if moral arguments such as the one Rawls makes in defense of the difference principle enable us to conclude that some principles of justice are more reasonable than others, despite the persistent presence of dissenting views, why cannot citizens seek the same reflective equilibrium in discussions about conceptions of the good? "If it can be shown that some conceptions of the good are more reasonable than others, then the persistence of disagreement would not necessarily amount to a 'fact of reasonable pluralism' that requires government to be neutral."[58] In short, it is not clear why the following prescription in *Political Liberalism*, which Rawls applies to arguments about justice, could not also be applied to moral and religious controversies:

> If sound, these remarks suggest that in philosophy questions at the most fundamental level are not usually settled by conclusive argument. What is obvious to some persons and accepted as a basic idea is unintelligible to others. The way to resolve the matter is to consider after due reflection which view, when fully worked out, offers the most coherent and convincing account (PL 53).

With morality as with justice, Sandel appropriately concludes, the mere fact of disagreement is not evidence of the reasonable pluralism that requires the government

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[57] Ibid., 206.

[58] Ibid., 207.

to remain neutral. Upon due reflection, some moral and religious doctrines may in principle prove more plausible than others, in which case government action may well be warranted. "If the government can affirm the justice of redistributive policies even in the face of disagreement by libertarians, why cannot government affirm in law, say, the moral legitimacy of homosexuality in the face of those who regard homosexuality as a sin?"[59] This situation raises again the question of the basis upon which public arguments about justice are joined.

D. The Ideal of Public Reason

The only way to discover whether disagreements in a pluralist society reflect reasonable but incompatible conceptions of the good or can be resolved by reflection and deliberation is, according to Rawls, to reflect and deliberate about the issue at hand—but only within certain narrowly prescribed limits. In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls describes an ideal of public reason which stipulates that "citizens are to conduct their fundamental discussions within the framework of what each regards as a political conception of justice based on values that others can be reasonably expected to endorse (PL 226). This ideal ruled out the presentation of moral and religious considerations in situations where matters of constitutional essentials and questions of basic justice are at issue. Many critics, including Sandel, have objected to this aspect of Rawls's political conception of justice, arguing that it leaves little room for public debate about the plausibility of competing comprehensive moral views.

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[59] Ibid., 210.

Because religious conceptions are drawn from comprehensive conceptions of the good, about which citizens of pluralistic societies normally do not agree, the ideal of public reason, according to Rawls, specifies that political discourse should be conducted solely in terms of political values all citizens can be reasonably expected to accept and thus on which they agree. Since in a modern constitutional democracy citizens have competing and often incompatible comprehensive views, the priority of the right to the good requires that all such views be excluded from public debates about justice and rights. The litmus test for any public presentation of our personal views, Rawls suggests, is to ask how our argument would strike us if it were presented in the form of a supreme court opinion (PL 254).

This form of the ideal of public reason imposes severe restrictions on public debate, restrictions that Rawls insists are justified because they are essential in a society made up of citizens who hold conflicting comprehensive views, yet have agreed to be governed by principles they all consider reasonable. By limiting public debate to the presentation of ideas that everyone accepts, citizens are able to decide fundamental political questions in a civil and respectful way, even when the issues are related in significant ways to comprehensive views held privately by the citizens. What citizens give up in this scenario is the ability to refer in public debates to what Rawls calls "the whole truth as they see it" (PL 216), in the same way that juries in criminal trials are restricted from access to certain types of evidence, such as evidence that was obtained illegally. Even though such evidence may be a legitimate part of the whole truth, its suppression may advance other, presumably greater, societal goods.

The analogy between public reason and the rules of evidence highlights, as Sandel points out, the moral and political costs in both cases. "Whether those costs are worth securing depends on how significant they are compared to the goods they make possible, and whether those goods can be secured in some other way."[60] In the case of the rules of evidence, we weigh the importance of having a jury decide in light of the whole truth against the importance of the ideals that would be sacrificed—such as the right to privacy—if all evidence were admissible. What it comes down to, in the specific context of privacy rights, is calculating how many guilty criminals go free because the police cannot search homes without a warrant, for example, compared with the loss of privacy by innocent people whose lives would be disrupted by potentially overzealous police officers.

Sandel argues that a similar assessment is necessary when evaluating the restrictions on public reason, asking whether the political values of toleration, civility, and mutual respect are worth sacrificing the values that may arise from a debate that includes reference to comprehensive moral claims. For his part, Rawls insists that a political conception of justice expresses values that normally outweigh all others, although no such comparison is necessary. "We need not consider the claims of political justice against the claim of this or that comprehensive view; nor need we say that political values are intrinsically more important than other values and that is why the latter is overridden. Having to say that is just what we hope to avoid" (PL 157).

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[60] Ibid., 215.

But, Sandel responds, "since political liberalism allows that comprehensive moral and religious doctrines can be true, such comparisons cannot reasonably be avoided."[61]

One passage in *Political Liberalism* suggests that there may be exceptions to Rawls's proscription. In it, Rawls attempts to explain why the abolitionist argument in slavery, though it was religious in character, did not violate the ideal of public reason. Rawls says:

> The abolitionists and the leaders of the civil rights movement did not go against the ideal of public reason; or rather, they did not provided they thought, or on reflection would have thought (as they certainly could have thought), that the comprehensive reasons they appealed to were required to give sufficient strength to the political conception to be subsequently realized…. The abolitionists could say, for example, they supported political values of freedom and equality for all, but that given the comprehensive doctrines they held and the doctrines current in their day, it was necessary to invoke the comprehensive grounds on which those values were widely seen to rest. Given those historical conditions, it was not unreasonable of them to act as they did for the sake of the ideal of public reason itself" (PL 251).

On this point, Rawls adds in a footnote, "This suggests that it may happen that for a well-ordered society to come about in which public discussion consists mainly in the appeal to political values, prior historical conditions may require that comprehensive reasons be invoked to strengthen those values" (PL 251). For his part, Sandel finds it difficult to believe either that the abolitionists opposed slavery on political grounds and simply used religious arguments to win popular support, or that they used religious arguments against slavery as a catalyst for developing a society that was inhospitable to religious arguments. The most reasonable interpretation of the

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[61] Ibid., 216.

abolitionist position, Sandel maintains, is that they "meant what they said, that slavery is wrong because it is contrary to God's laws, a heinous sin, and this is the reason it should be ended. Absent some extraordinary assumptions, it is difficult to interpret their argument as consistent with the priority of the right over the good, or with the ideal of public reason as advanced by political liberalism."[62]

Rawls's basic point seems here to be this: if deliberation about some principle of justice ends with agreement on a political conception of that principle, the use of comprehensive grounds to move the deliberation toward that end is justified. If such agreement is not forthcoming, the use of comprehensive grounds is not justified. Rawls does state, however, that the ideal of citizenship "imposes a moral, not a legal, duty—the duty of citizenship—to be able to explain to one another on those fundamental questions how the principles and policies they advocate and vote for can be supported by the values of public reason" (PL 217). While this stipulation suggests that the explanations should not include comprehensive grounds, Rawls further adds, "This duty also involves a willingness to listen to others and a fair-mindedness in deciding when accommodations to their views should reasonably be made."[63]

Several years later, in his preface to the paperback edition of *Political Liberalism*, Rawls modified his stand on the role of comprehensive grounds in public discourse somewhat, allowing that citizens may propose whatever considerations they like in debates about public policy, including religious considerations, provided they are also prepared "in due course" to offer considerations that comply with public

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[62] Ibid., 214.

[63] Ibid., 216.

reason. This modification does not solve the problem, it seems to me, because it does not address the principal issue joined in the relationship between comprehensive grounds and broadly accepted political ones. If the considerations that comply with public reason are not sufficient to convince the citizens that, for example, slavery is morally abhorrent, then Rawls seems to suggest that comprehensive grounds can precede or temporarily substitute for political ones—but only if, when the time of reckoning comes, the basis of the agreement about the principles of justice is strictly political.

James Sterba argues that a correct interpretation of Rawls's ideal of public reason makes it possible for religion to have much of the role its critics want it to have in public debate.[64] Sterba points out that Robert Audi's view of public reason, while similar in many ways to that of Rawls, allows for a greater role for religious considerations in public debate than the Rawls of the first edition of *Political Liberalism*, but a somewhat more restrictive view than the Rawls of the second edition.[65] Even so, many critics of both argue that religious considerations should play

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[64] James P. Sterba, "Rawls and Religion," in *The Idea of Political Liberalism: Essays on Rawls*, ed. Victoria Davion and Clark Wolf (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 34.

[65] Audi proposes the following six principles: 1) The Principle of Theo-Ethical Equilibrium (Those who are religious should embody a commitment to a rational integration between religious deliverances and insights and secular ethical considerations); 2) The Principle of Secular Rationale (Everyone has a prima facie obligation not to advocate or support any law or public policy that restricts human conduct, unless he or she has, and is willing to offer, adequate secular reasons for this advocacy; 3) The Principle of Secular Motivation (Everyone also has a prima obligation to abstain from advocating a public policy that restricts human conduct unless he or she is sufficiently motivated by some normatively adequate secular reasons); 4) The Institutional Principle of Theo-Ethical Equilibrium (Insofar as religious institutions are committed to citizenship in a liberal democratic society, the institutions is bound by (1) above); 5) The Principle of Ecclesiastical Political Neutrality (Churches have a prima facie obligation to abstain from supporting candidates or laws that restrict human conduct); and 6) The Principle of Clerical Neutrality (Clergy have an obligation to observe a distinction between their personal and professional views, prevent political aims from dominating their professional conduct, or endorsing candidates or laws that would restrict human conduct.) Ibid., 35-36.

an even greater role, in part because the public reasons Rawls and Audi make central
to political discourse are not always available, in which case religious reasons, or other
reasons drawn from our comprehensive conception of the good, turn out to be the only
reasons we have on which to base coercive public policy.

If a public policy could be adequately grounded on reasons everyone can
reasonably be expected to endorse in a liberal democratic society (in Rawls's
formulation) or on reasons that all fully rational and fully informed citizens could
affirm (as Audi puts it), then the ideal of public reason could be upheld without
reference to comprehensive grounds. According to Rawls, these public reasons include
the formal ideal of citizens as free and equal, and the formal ideal of a well-ordered
society (from which, as Sterba rightly notes, little if anything can be derived with
regard to matters of constitutional essential and questions of basic justice[66]), along
with the substantive ideal of the original position, from which his two principles of
justice or something like them can derived. Whether or not the two principles belong
to the public domain as values everyone can reasonably be expected to endorse,
however, Rawls insists that all citizens are required to endorse the ideal of public
reason: "We agree that citizens share in political power as free and equal, and that as
reasonable and rational they have a duty of civility to appeal to public reason, yet we
may differ as to which principles are the most reasonable basis of public justification"
(PL 227).

But, Sterba wonders, "are all citizens in a liberal democratic society, by virtue
of being reasonable and rational, required to endorse the ideal of public reason and

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[66] Ibid., 37.

thus conduct public debate by appealing to values that everyone can reasonably be expected to endorse?"[67] More specifically, is endorsing the ideal of public reason the one act by virtue of which, in a liberal democratic society, one can be judged to be reasonable and rational?

Rawls's ideal of public reason gives to those who hold a minority opinion the right to expect that matters of constitutional essentials and questions of basic justice will be decided in a way that they themselves view as reasonable. In many cases, this will preclude the will of the majority from asserting its will over that of the minority. Furthermore, as Nicholas Woltersdorff rightly maintains, it is not equitable to ask that everyone, in discussing and deciding political issues, refrain from using their comprehensive perspectives. For many religious people, their beliefs include the conviction that "they ought to base their decisions concerning certain fundamental issues of justice on their religious convictions. They do not view it as an option whether or not to do so."[68] Their religion is not a separate dimension of life alongside their social and political existence; in significant respects, their religion is embodied in how their religious convictions take shape in the social and political spheres. If they have to make a choice, Woltersdorff concludes, they will make the most important decisions, such as those concerning constitutional matters and principle of justice, based on their most deeply held convictions, and they will only bracket those convictions for other, more peripheral matters.

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[67] Ibid., 38.

[68] Nicholas Woltersdorff, *Religion in the Public Square* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996) 104.

In Woltersdorff's view, this situation reveals a pattern of misunderstanding by liberals about the impact of the ideal of public reason on religious persons.

> The common pattern is this: the liberal assumes that requiring religious persons to debate and act politically for reasons other than religious reasons is not in violation of their *religious* convictions; likewise he assumes that an educational program that makes no reference to religion is not in violation of any parent's *religious* convictions. He assumes, in other words, that though religious people may not be in the *habit* of dividing their life into a religious component and a nonreligious component, and though some might not be *happy* doing so, nonetheless, their doing so would not be in violation of anybody's religion. But he's wrong about this. It's when we bring into the picture persons for whom it is a matter of religious conviction that they ought to strive for a religiously integrated existence—it's then, especially, though not only then, that the unfairness of the liberal position to religion comes to light.[69]

Woltersdorff's chief concern is a situation in which a religious minority is treated unfairly by the imposition of the will of a nonreligious majority. But the opposite situation—a religious majority imposing its will on a minority, whether religious or not—also poses an issue of fairness, notes James Sterba.[70] If the imposition of the majority opinion on the minority is to be fair under the criteria proposed by Woltersdorff, there must be sufficient reasons accessible to the minority to require acceptance of the imposition, in which case the minority could be held morally culpable for failing to accept it. "For the members of a group cannot morally be required to do something if they cannot come to know and so come justifiably to believe that they are so required. Fairness here requires that reasons be accessible to a minority that are sufficient to require the acceptance of the will of the majority by that

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[69] Ibid., 116.

[70] Sterba, "Rawls and Religion" 40.

minority."[71] This, presumably, is what Woltersdorff has in mind when has says the agreement of the majority must be "fairly-gained and fairly-executed."

Any justification that satisfies this criterion, Sterba argues, would also satisfy Rawls's ideal of public reason, which requires a justification that everyone, religious or otherwise, can reasonably be expected to endorse in a liberal democratic society. This sense of the reasonable in Rawls's conception is neither epistemological (in that endorsement of something can reasonably be predicted) nor morally neutral (endorsement is not required by minimal rationality), but moral (endorsement is required by fair terms of cooperation). This clearly coincides with Woltersdorff's claim that everyone in a liberal democratic society ought to accept the requirements of fair majority rule.[72]

This is not to say that Rawls and Woltersdorff agree about what their ideals require. Woltersdorff wants religious people to be able to base their decisions on religious reasons, and he wants them not be forced to separate what they are committed to religiously from what they are committed to for other reasons. Rawls wants people who are in the minority to have reasons accessible to them for submitting to majority rule. For both conditions to be met, however, the majority is obligated to ensure that sufficient procedural and substantive reasons for going along with the majority are accessible to the minority when considering matters of constitutional essential and questions of basic justice.

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid., 41.

In "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," Rawls points out that reason is public in three ways: it is the reason of free and equal citizens, its subject is the public good concerning questions of fundamental political justice, and "its nature and content are public, being expressed in public reasoning by a family of reasonable conceptions thought to satisfy the criterion of reciprocity" (IPRR 575). The criterion of reciprocity specifies that the exercise of political power is proper only when the reasons offered are sufficient, such that other citizens might reasonably accept them. This does not exclude what Rawls terms potentially "positive reasons for introducing comprehensive doctrines into public political discussion" (IPRR 591). But it does mean that all such doctrines must "support a political conception of justice underwriting a constitutional democratic society whose principles, ideals, and standards satisfy the criterion of reciprocity" (IPRR 608).

> Thus, all reasonable doctrines affirm such a society with its
> corresponding political institutions: equal basic rights and liberties for
> all citizens, including liberty of conscience and the freedom of religion.
> On the other hand, comprehensive doctrines that cannot support such a
> democratic society are not reasonable (IPRR 608-609).

V. POLITICAL LIBERALISM AS A COMPREHENSIVE CONCEPTION

The question that emerges from these considerations is whether the commitments required by Rawls's approach to political liberalism are in fact wholly political. Are the changes in his theory of justice, taken as a whole, sufficient to shift Rawls's argument from being a comprehensive doctrine of liberalism, which would

impose upon its citizens a conception of the good, to being a political understanding of liberalism, which would not?

In his volume *Democracy on Purpose: Justice and the Reality of God*, Franklin Gamwell identifies the catalyst for Rawls's shift to an overlapping consensus as the need to guarantee religious freedom within a democratic context that assumes a plurality of incompatible comprehensive doctrines. Rawls concludes, according to Gamwell, "that nonteleological theories fail when they seek to be universalist, because universal principles of the right cannot be separated from a conception of the comprehensive good."[73] Toward this end, Rawls seeks to separate comprehensive conceptions of the good from a political conception of justice, which includes no universal principles but only practical rules for adjudicating among the diverse and irreconcilable comprehensive doctrines. In this sense, Gamwell notes, the principles of the political conception articulated by Rawls are what he terms freestanding, in that they stand free from any universal (that is, comprehensive) moral ground because they derive solely from historically specific values inherent in the public political culture of a democratic society.[74]

But, Gamwell asks, should the affirmation of the principles of justice as separate from any comprehensive doctrine (that is, politically liberal or freestanding) be stipulated in the constitution of a democracy? Gamwell notes that, all things considered, Rawls implies the constitutional stipulation of political liberalism: "A

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[73] Franklin I. Gamwell, *Democracy on Purpose: Justice and the Reality of God* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2000) 268.

[74] Ibid., 269.

democratic state, then, has the duty to teach that principles for the basic structure of society are independent of any universal moral or political ground, because they are justified *pro tanto* by historically specific values and publicly justified by an overlapping consensus."[75] But, Gamwell rightly observes, this is precisely the sort of substantive judgment that Rawls is trying to avoid.

> But this is the teaching that no universalist conception of justice is necessary in order to validate the principles of justice that should regulate the basic structure, and, in that teaching, the state stakes sides in the disagreement between Rawls and all universalist theories of justice—not only all avowedly teleological theories but also those of Habermas, Gewirth, and Barry. Notwithstanding his turn to a nonuniversalist conception of justice, Rawls cannot maintain an explicit constitutional endorsement of political liberalism, in his sense, without denying legitimacy to all universalist theories of justice. In sum, a substantive prescription has been placed in the constitution. All citizens as political participants should explicitly accept that justice is freestanding and deliberate accordingly. Dissent from this prescription violates the ethics of citizenship.[76]

Rawls is not without recourse in responding to this criticism, as Gamwell readily acknowledges. Rawls could say that a constitutional endorsement of political liberalism issues an invitation to reasonable comprehensive doctrines to become, if they are able, part of the overlapping consensus, and in so doing legitimates those doctrines as part of the wider political discourse. The problem is that comprehensive doctrines by their nature understand themselves as having the final say as to legitimacy, while Rawls recognizes that "in due course proper political reasons—and not reasons given solely by comprehensive doctrines—are presented that are sufficient

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[75] Ibid., 270.

[76] Ibid., 270-71.

to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines introduced are said to support" (PL 783-4). The reason for this stipulation, Gamwell notes, is that Rawls believes separating justice from all conceptions of the comprehensive good is the only alternative to imposing a particular religion or comprehensive doctrine.[77] However, there is another option, according to Gamwell, namely, "that some universal principle or principles can be redeemed in the democratic discourse. The rejection of freestanding principles, in other words, is thoroughly consistent with a commitment to public reason, that is, to argument about all contested political assertions, including principles of justice."[78] Gamwell points out the circular reasoning that thwarts Rawls's position:

> The statement that no universalist conception of justice is valid is itself a statement about what universally is the case, since a universalist conception that is invalid anywhere is invalid everywhere. Hence, those who adhere to freestanding principles of justice could not redeem their theory in a democratic discourse without introducing a statement about principles of justice that purports to be universally true and, thereby, transforming their theory into a universalist one.[79]

In Gamwell's view, Rawls does not succeed in establishing a political conception of justice that, by virtue of being freestanding, safeguards the principle of religious freedom and legitimates diverse comprehensive doctrines. This is not to say, however, that democratic societies and comprehensive views are incompatible. Precisely the opposite is true, Gamwell concludes: "Democratic discourse presupposes

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[77] Ibid., 271.

[78] Ibid., 272.

[79] Ibid., 274.

a comprehensive principle that is universal because the former is prescribed as a meta-ethical presupposition of moral claims and makes no sense in the absence of a moral principle in relation to which the validity or invalidity of moral claims is determined."[80]

Rawls's attempt to accommodate diverse comprehensive doctrines requires that he substantively endorse a conception of the person as citizen, not solely because it is publicly justifiable, but because it is the way one ought to conceive of a person when thinking about justice. The overriding interest each person has is in the freedom to seek his or her own individual good; the subsequent interest all have in common is that others not deprive them of the right to seek it.

In the course of Rawls's thoroughgoing effort to make his theory of justice freestanding, he also fundamentally alters the task of political philosophy, even of philosophy generally. Jean Hampton notes this shift in the following way:

> The upshot of this argument is that the creation of an overlapping consensus in a pluralistic society cannot guarantee, even if members of this society accept toleration, that they do so because they believe it to be intrinsically right. The only argument that a practitioner of Rawls's method can give to one whose metaphysical beliefs do not endorse it as right is that in the circumstances it is instrumentally valuable for achieving peaceful cooperation… In these situations Rawls can either keep his political methodology, in which case he has allowed political philosophy in pluralist societies only the job of articulating a modus vivendi; or he can give to political philosophy the role of arguing in these societies that the principle of toleration is right, in which case he has committed the philosopher to doing metaphysics. There is no intermediate third way."[81]

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[80] Ibid., 276.

[81] Hampton, "Should Political Philosophy Be Done without Metaphysics?" 804.

In Rawls's view, the primary task of the political philosopher is to find metaphysical reasons implicit in each party's belief system to support the consensus. In other words, Rawls is not against metaphysical speculation; he merely sees it as appropriate only to the private realm. It is what one does as an individual pursuing what one takes to be the truth about the world.

But the truth about the world is what those who practice philosophy view as their primary focus, at least for the most part. Rawls wants them instead to develop an overlapping consensus—not to show all the parties involved that any idea they all share is true, but only that they have reason to accept it, perhaps for moral or religious reasons that, from a philosophical point of view, are inadequate. As Hampton puts it, "I am after the idea's acceptance, not a proof of its truth. Am I not behaving as a (mere) politician? Politicians, after all, only want acceptance of ideas they (for whatever reason) are pushing; philosophers are supposed to want truth."[82]

This is an issue of both substance and procedure, for Rawls endorses philosophizing in the Socratic sense in fields such as aesthetics or the philosophy of science, but asks us to replace it with something else when doing political philosophy in a modern constitutional democracy. "It is not merely that we are supposed to eschew metaphysics in this political realm; more fundamentally, we are supposed to eschew attempts at philosophical proof through argumentation that involves commitment to controversial metaphysical premises."[83] The goal is not truth, but

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[82] Ibid., 807.

[83] Ibid., 808.

noncoerced social agreement; not conversion, but consensus; not proof, but persuasion.

The worry is that this sort of political theorizing may not be philosophy at all. Political philosophy indeed plays a vital role in contemporary constitutional democracies: creating the intellectual ground rules upon which people of disparate views can peacefully interact. But the creation of an overlapping consensus is not the only aim that political philosophers should have. They should also engage in the process of evaluating the metaphysical bases upon which each of the parties grounds its agreement with the consensus. This would not violate the principle of toleration, since the philosophers would have contempt neither for the ideas themselves nor for the parties who hold them. Nor would they force others to change their metaphysical commitments if those commitments were shown to be wrongly construed or poorly executed. Indeed, the philosophers themselves should be fully prepared to change their own beliefs if others could present a better argument for an alternate point of view.

In other words, there is a difference between tolerating another's ideas and tolerating another's holding of those ideas. But as long as the guidelines for interaction over fundamental commitments are clearly spelled out and rigorously followed, the results could only extend the domain of the overlapping consensus, not weaken it. But what if the guidelines are not followed? What about the actions of people who are not committed to the truth, but are "true believers" committed to their cause? They attack not only opposing ideas, but also the people—often characterized as infidels or heretics—who hold them. One who is committed to political philosophy in a constitutional democracy must also be committed to remaining intolerant of others'

intolerance. As Hampton puts it, "to attempt to reach consensus with intolerant true believers would be to betray one's belief in the respect that grounds one's very philosophizing."[84]

Even if we accept the constraints Rawls places on the role of political philosophy, however, it nonetheless becomes clear that comprehensive claims cannot ultimately be set aside, even on his terms. Rawls admits that, in affirming a political conception of justice, we may eventually have to assert at least certain aspects of our own comprehensive religious or philosophical doctrine. "This happens whenever someone insists, for example, that certain questions are so fundamental that to ensure their rightly being settled justifies civil strife. The religious salvation of those holding a particular religion may be thought to depend upon it. At this point we may have no alternative but to deny this, and to assert the kind of thing we had hoped to avoid" (IOC 14). It may be that justice begins here, in that moment when the philosopher is also a true believer—a believer in the value of pursuing truth through the kind of philosophical argument that respects equally the disputants who participate in it.

This fundamental commitment to equal respect is grounded in a comprehensive conception of each individual as essentially free to choose his or her own way of life—the freedom that both defines and grounds political liberalism. Without this comprehensive basis, political liberalism loses both its legitimacy and its political effectiveness. As Jean Hampton observes, not only is there no consensus on Rawls's conception of justice in our society, there is also no consensus that all human beings deserve equal respect. Given that modern constitutional democracies are not

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[84] Ibid., 812.

yet societies in which there is widespread agreement that all people should be accorded the same rights and opportunities, philosophers have an obligation to argue with those who deny such respect and try to convince them that they are wrong and thus change their minds. This commitment emerges because "the activity of philosophy is itself based upon substantive metaphysical beliefs about the nature of human beings."[85]

In other words, any theory of justice that remains both relevant and applicable over time must emerge from a belief about the nature of human beings. To equate the presence of an overlapping consensus with the presence of justice is often to mistake coincidence for cause. If one wants a theory of justice that will endure, one must embrace a belief about the nature of things and be willing to argue in public for its validity. We have seen that this is true even for Rawls, who intends his theory of justice to be freestanding. Rawls's overall intentions notwithstanding, political liberalism is convened by a commitment to a certain view of human nature and society—a comprehensive conception based on freedom and choice. Furthermore, even Rawls himself recognizes that justice eventually requires, as he says, that we "assert the kind of thing we had hoped to avoid" (IOC 14). Not everyone hopes to avoid metaphysics, of course. Where Rawls comes reluctantly in the end is precisely the place Paul Tillich begins, as does Alfred North Whitehead, to whose thought we now turn.

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[85] Ibid., 814.

CHAPTER FOUR

ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD:
FREEDOM AS A UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLE

The organizing thesis of this dissertation is that Whitehead's metaphysics provides, as does the theology of Paul Tillich, an ontological basis for a theory of justice, the principles of which legitimate, as does the political philosophy of John Rawls, a plurality of comprehensive views. In other words, Whitehead's thought establishes the basis for a conception of justice that is both ontologically established and relevant to modern situations of pluralism. Whitehead constructs the comprehensive basis of his philosophical approach through what he terms the ontological principle, which specifies that nothing exists except the experience of subjects, variously termed actual occasions or actual entities. To search for a reason, according to Whitehead, is to search for one or more actual entities, apart from which there is bare nothingness. Put another way, all that becomes actual does so in the process of making uniquely definite relations to all other entities whatsoever.

Two consequences follow from this principle. First, nothing can wholly determine the being of something else. If actualization requires self-determination, then a completely other-determined actuality is impossible. In this sense, freedom is a strictly universal principle. In part, what something is results from its own decision.

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Second, every actuality is determined, in part, by the actualities in its immediate past. To be actual is to be internally related to those past events.

Given that final real things are free responses to other actual things, that is, other free responses, a fully human actuality is an active subject of process, not merely a passive object. Moreover, human actualities have the potential for greater value or importance insofar as the world to which they relate gives them greater freedom. This is, in Whitehead, the ontological ground for his conception of individuality and community. The community is best when it maximizes the freedom of all, and individuals make the most of their opportunities when they seek to contribute to such a community. Accordingly, politics should be democratic, such that justice is pursued through a political process in which all are free and equal.

Like Tillich, Whitehead's metaphysics include a divine ground for justice. Unlike Tillich, however, apprehension of this ground is based upon ordinary rather than revealed knowledge, so that both the ground of justice as well as its principles can be established by way of argument. In this sense, Tillich and Whitehead represent alternative approaches to the divine. Either the ground of being is part of the self-world structure, in which case reason can function effectively to ask questions both about the mystery of existence generally (accompanied by moments of numinous astonishment) and the nature of human life in particular. Or the ground of being is not part of the self-world structure, in which case it is not accessible to reason—which is the means by which we deliberate and make decision in all aspects of our individual and communal lives. Put another way, if Tillich understood God to be the chief exemplification of the self-world structure, rather than the unique exception to it, then

the account of justice as the moral imperative of individuality-in-community would not only have an adequate theistic backing, it would also be relevant in contemporary contexts of pluralism.

As we shall see, Whitehead conceives of the divine on precisely these terms, which means that his principles of justice are appropriate for a context of democratic pluralism. They can prevail given only that all members of a community, whatever their comprehensive views, share a commitment to reason and persuasion. In other words, Whitehead affirms pluralism by insisting that the ground of justice—and thus the source of the moral imperative—be based not on revealed but on ordinary knowledge. In this way, Whitehead's metaphysics can support a principle of justice that is at once ontologically based and relevant in contexts of pluralism.

In this chapter, I shall first examine Whitehead's ambivalence concerning ethics and morality, at least in their usual guises, as well as his deep faith in the order of nature and the human ability to understand that order. Toward that end, I shall examine Whitehead's theory of perception, based on which I shall explore his conception of the creative process by which everything that is comes into being. I shall then examine how, based on his understanding of the way many past occasions become one in the present event, Whitehead is able to grade in importance the various possibilities for constituting the present, thereby establishing in principle a criterion of value. The implicit mandate in the perceived order of the universe, namely, to maximize the importance (or value) of the present for the sake of the future, establishes in Whitehead's conception a moral ideal, the public form of which is justice.

I. THE BATTLE CRY OF STUPIDITY AGAINST CHANGE

Any attempt to assess the ethical or moral import of Whitehead's speculative philosophy must begin with an obvious fact: Whitehead's corpus contains no systematic treatment of either ethics (the term seems barely exists in his lexicon) or morality (toward which he is decidedly ambivalent) in the usual sense. The basic idea of morality, in fact, receives a scathing review. "Of course it is true that the defence of morals is the battlecry which best rallies stupidity against change. Perhaps countless ages ago respectable amoebae refused to migrate from ocean to dry land—refusing in defence of morals. One incidental service of art to society lies in its adventurousness" (AI 268).[1]

Even in the places where Whitehead does explicitly address the goal of either conscious human behavior or civilization as a whole, we find few of the usual conceptual suspects. When Whitehead discusses the constituent elements of civilization, for example, we find truth and beauty (two elements of the Platonic trinity), as well as art, adventure, and peace, but little discussion of goodness as such, either in the sense of a *summum bonum* or as the *telos* of all human endeavor.[2]

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[1] John Bunyan Spencer, "The Ethics of Alfred North Whitehead" (The University Of Chicago, 1967). He begins by quoting an anecdote from Paul Schlipp, "Whitehead's Moral Philosophy," *The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead* (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1951): 593: "One of the present writer's correspondents, who himself is an ardent disciple of Whitehead, upon hearing that the writer was engaged in writing on "Whitehead's Moral Philosophy," wrote in a letter: 'I suggest you take as a model for your essay on 'Whitehead's Moral Philosophy' a well-known treatise on The Snakes of Ireland.'"

[2] Whitehead does say, concerning the relationship between God and the world, that God's role is "the patient operation of the overpowering rationality of his conceptual harmonization. He does not create the world, he saves it: or, more accurately, he is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness" (PR 346). Both Whitehead's language here (truth, beauty, and goodness) and his metaphor (a vision as guide) are Platonic, as well as poetic. Nonetheless, or perhaps for this reason, the point made above remains valid.

Furthermore, when Whitehead does state what for him is the general principle in terms

of which all actual occasions can be evaluated, which is the evocation of intensities,

the result, as Spencer wryly puts it, "sounds more like a call for a permanent

revolution in morals than a moral principle."[3]

Even so, to look at Whitehead's systematic work and not find there a vigorous

argument for understanding reality in a certain way and thus, by implication, for

understanding the correlative demands on human behavior is to wander, as it were,

through the many rooms of a building looking for a shrine and not see that the entire

building is itself a shrine. Whitehead's ethic—his view that in a deep and absolute

sense some forms of creative advance are better than others—is built into the very

foundation of his metaphysics. To appropriate one of Tillich's justifiably famous

formulations, we could say that morality for Whitehead is not one mode of human

experience alongside others, but rather is the depth dimension in every experience,

where the specific elements of religion, say, or history or even (perhaps especially)

mathematics receive their specific valuation from the ground of creativity and novelty.

II. FAITH IN THE ORDER OF NATURE

Whitehead's endeavor to set forth a system of speculative philosophy is based

upon his faith that there is an ultimate nature of things, and that this nature of things

can be known and described by human reason. More precisely, Whitehead believes

that the nature of things will reveal an ultimate unity such that all elements of reality

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[3] Spencer, "The Ethics of Alfred North Whitehead" 2.

are part of the unity. As Whitehead puts it, the hope is that "we fail to find in experience any elements intrinsically incapable of exhibition as examples of general theory" (PR 42). This hope, he adds, is not "a metaphysical premise" but rather "the faith which forms the motive for the pursuit of all sciences alike, including metaphysics" (PR 42). The basis of this hope is faith in what Whitehead calls "the rationality of things" and the "ultimate moral intuition into the nature of intellectual action."

The faith that Whitehead claims is, simply put, the faith that the human experience of the world is both trustworthy and revelatory: the experience actually is what there actually is. Though our apprehension may at times (even often) be imperfect, our faith in reason keeps us from losing hope, because "the faith does not embody a premise from which the theory starts; it is an ideal which is seeking satisfaction. In so far as we believe that doctrine, we are rationalists" (PR 42). In a direct reference to the mathematical substrate of his work as a philosopher, Whitehead writes that "philosophy is akin to poetry, and both of them seek to express that ultimate good sense which we term civilization. In each case there is reference to form beyond the direct meanings of words. Poetry allies itself to metre, philosophy to mathematical pattern" (MT 174)

Whitehead's goal is the eliciting from experience of self-evidence with respect to the ultimate nature of things.

> The final problem is to conceive a complete [*panteles*] fact.[4] We can only form such a conception in terms of fundamental notions

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[4] Whitehead notes that *panteles* is often wrongly translated by 'absolute,' and refers the reader to Plato's mention of 'absolute' and 'relative' in the *Sophist*, 255C.

concerning the nature of reality. We are thrown back upon philosophy… In the end—though there is no end—what is being achieved, is width of view, issuing in greater opportunities… Philosophy should now perform its final service. It should seek the insight, dim though it be, to escape the wide wreckage of a race of beings sensitive to values beyond those of mere animal enjoyment (AI 158-159).

As Ivor Leclerc notes, Whitehead's effort to conceive "a complete fact" concerning the nature of reality resonates with the philosophical enterprise of Aristotle described in the *Metaphysics*:

And indeed the question which was raised of old and is raised now and always, and is always the subject of doubt, namely, what being is [*ti to on*], is just one question: what is substance [*ousia*]? For it is this that some assert to be one, others more than one, and that some assert to be limited, others unlimited. And so we must consider chiefly and primarily and almost exclusively what that is which *is* in this sense.[5]

As was the case with ancient philosophers generally, Aristotle took as his ultimate metaphysical data the primary substances and their qualification by forms or universals. Since Descartes, modern philosophers including Whitehead have taken the experiences of subjects as their basic data. In both cases, however, the goal of the philosophical enterprise is to describe what is. For his part, Whitehead refers to the focus of his philosophical inquiry not as substance but as a series of actual occasions or actual entities. The most important characteristic of the complete fact is that it is actual—made up of the most real things that are. Hence, says Whitehead, "the general Aristotelian principle is maintained that, apart from things that are actual, there is nothing—nothing either in fact or in efficacy" (PR 40). Indeed, "in separation from

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[5] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Z, I, 1028b 2-8 in Ivor Leclerc, *Whitehead's Metaphysics: An Introductory Exposition* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986) 17.

actual entities there is nothing, merely nonentity—'The rest is silence'" (PR 43). By implication, therefore, these entities are the constituent elements of reality itself. "The actual world is built up of actual occasions; and by the ontological principle whatever things there are in any sense of 'existence,' are derived by abstraction from actual occasions'" (PR 73).

By the ontological principle, Whitehead follows Aristotle in insisting that actual entities are the only final real things. Whatever else may exist, in whatever sense, does so by virtue of being dependent on or derivative of the actual occasions. This principle articulates Whitehead's fundamental assertion about existence or being, which sets him apart from most modern philosophers who have inherited a subjectivist bias from Descartes.[6] In recent thought, the basic challenge to philosophy was understood as epistemological: how can we move from the perception of our subjective experience to certainty of the existence of external things? The consequence of this standpoint, Leclerc notes, is that philosophy has been "haunted by the solipsist difficulty, from which the only escape is the irrational appeal to 'practice' or what Santayana has called 'animal faith.'"[7]

Whitehead's decision to look to the experience of subjects to discover the final real things that make up the world constitutes what he calls the Reformed Subjectivist Principle. It is not simply a subjectivist principle, which asserts that what constitutes an experiencing subject is the sense perception of qualities modifying substances.

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[6] Leclerc discusses Whitehead's departure from the subjectivist turn in modern philosophy. Ibid., 26-28.

[7] Ibid., 26.

Such a principle, Whitehead insists, inexorably leads to solipsism because, on Descartes' terms, a substance requires nothing but itself in order to exist, and no relationship can be based upon sheer externality. A world of unrelated substances is either solipsist or irrationally pluralist: "We find ourselves in a buzzing world, amid a democracy of fellow creatures; whereas, under some disguise or other, orthodox philosophy can only introduce us to solitary substances, each enjoying an illusory experience" (PR 50).

Whitehead's subjectivist principle has been reformed not in terms of whose experience counts but in terms of what constitutes experience. What Whitehead calls the "self-enjoyment" of experiencing subjects is not the enjoyment of sensations out of which, by inference or implication, one can construct an external world. Nor are the sensations representations of universals of underlying substances that are otherwise unknowable. Rather, the "substance" of experience is directly known by the experiencing subject precisely because the subject is constituted by, that is, internally related to, what is being experienced. The actual past world is taken into account by the experiencing subject in a way that constitutes its present experience. Apart from the experience of a subject in this sense, there is nothing whatsoever. "No things are 'together' except in experience; and no things *are* in any sense of 'are,' except as components in experience or as immediacies of process which are occasions in self-creation" (AI 236).

Whitehead maintains that the creative power of the human mind could not produce the impressions that make up our sensory world. If our perceptions did belong to our minds only, the perceptions would come into existence out of nowhere—an

impossibility, according to the ontological principle. Whitehead is adamant on this point: "There is nothing which floats into the world from nowhere. Everything in the actual world is referable to some actual entity" (PR 244). Again, "Everything must be somewhere, and here 'somewhere' means 'some actual entity'" (PR 46). In perhaps his most well known formulation of the ontological principle, Whitehead says:

> Actual entities—also termed 'actual occasions'—are the final real things of which the world is made up. There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real. They differ among themselves: God is an actual entity, and so is the most trivial puff of existence in far-off empty space. But, though there are gradations of importance, and diversities of function, yet in the principles which actualities exemplifies all are on the same level. The final facts are, all alike, actual entities; and these actual entities are drops of experience, complex and interdependent (PR 18).

The implication of the ontological principle is that we can explain what there is in the world only by referring to actual occasions: "every explanatory fact refers to the decision and to the efficacy of an actual thing" (PR 46). This, according to Whitehead, simply makes explicit the tacit presuppositions according to which we live and act. "The common sense of mankind conceives that all its notions ultimately refer to actual entities, or as Newton terms them, 'sensible objects'" (PR 72). Whitehead states that the ontological principle extends a general principle laid down by John Locke when he asserts that the notion of power is a constituent element in our idea of a substance. "The notion of 'substance' is transformed into that of 'actual entity,' and the notion of 'power' is transformed into the principle that the reasons for things are to be found in the composite nature of definite actual entities" (PR 19). In other words, what something is—the reason why it is what it is—can be discovered only by looking at

actual entities, both the other entities to which something is related and the self-determination of the actual entity itself. "The ontological principle can be summarized as: no actual entity, then no reason" (PR 19).

Whitehead's overall enterprise is to 'conceive a complete fact'—to investigate the true characteristics of everything that is real and thereby develop a theory in terms of which reality as a whole can be described. He calls this endeavor speculative philosophy or metaphysics, by which he means "the science which seeks to discover the general ideas which are indispensably relevant to the analysis of everything that happens" (RM 82n). Put differently, and more famously: "Speculative Philosophy is the endeavor to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted (PR 3)."[8]

As Whitehead points out elsewhere, both philosophy and science are disciplines concerned with understanding how individual facts illustrate general principles. The principles are stated in the abstract, and the facts are understood as embodying the principles (AI 179). This way of understanding every element of our experience in terms of general principles is what, for Whitehead, constitutes the essence of rationalism: the search for reasons, or grounds, or in Aristotle's sense of the term, causes. These reasons, Leclerc observes, are the general principles exhibited by things. "Thus anything—an entity or an event—is *rationally understood* when the principles or reasons it embodies are discerned or discriminated."[9]

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[8] As Leclerc and other have pointed out, the terms speculative philosophy and metaphysics are not synonymous terms, but for our purposes the distinction is not decisive.

[9] Leclerc, *Whitehead's Metaphysics: An Introductory Exposition* 32.

Whitehead makes clear that the philosophical scheme he has in mind is completely (that is, absolutely) general, such that "everything of which we are conscious, as enjoyed, perceived, willed or thought, shall have the character of a particular instance of the general scheme" (PR 3). The scheme must be applicable ("some items of experience are thus interpretable") and adequate ("there are no items incapable of such interpretation"). It must also be coherent: its concepts must not only be logically consistent, they must also be integrated parts of a unified system of interrelated ideas that presuppose each other. Finally, the scheme must be necessary, "in the sense of bearing in itself its own warrant of universality throughout all experience, provided that we confine ourselves to that which communicates with immediate matter of fact" (PR 4). Because the metaphysical features of actual entities are completely general, they must be embodied in all things, and thus are necessarily universal. By implication, therefore, the metaphysical principles are not contingent, a characteristic that would mark principles of some degree of restricted generality.

Whitehead's philosophical method demonstrates his unshakeable confidence in the trustworthiness of human experience and the reliability of human reason.

> Faith in reason is the trust that the ultimate natures of things lie together in a harmony which excludes mere arbitrariness. It is the faith that at the base of things we shall not find mere arbitrary mystery. The faith in the order of nature which has made possible the growth of science is a particular example of a deeper faith. This faith cannot be justified by any inductive generalisation. It springs from direct inspection of the nature of things as disclosed in our immediate present experience. There is no parting from your own shadow. To experience this faith is to know that in being ourselves we are more than ourselves: to know that our experience, dim and fragmentary as it is, yet sounds the utmost depths of reality: to know that detached details merely in order to be themselves demand that they should find themselves in a

system of things: to know that this system includes the harmony of logical rationality, and the harmony of aesthetic achievement (SMW 27).

III. PERCEPTION: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE WHOLE

The metaphysical task, as Whitehead understands it, is to describe our experience of the world as an interconnected whole, even when in our perception the world seems not well ordered. "In the world, there are elements of order and disorder, which thereby presuppose an essential interconnectedness of things. For disorder shares with order the common characteristic that they imply many things interconnected" (AI 227-228). It is a mistake, Whitehead believes, to think that our perception of the world, and thus the source of our true knowledge of it, comes by means of our sense perception, especially our visual senses.

This view of perception, which Whitehead calls "the sensationalist doctrine" (PR 157) and to which he proposes an alternative, is made up of two principles: the subjectivist principle and the sensationalist principle. The subjectivist principle states that "the datum in the act of experience can be adequately analysed purely in terms of universals," (PR 157) a principle that is based on three premises: 1) that the ultimate ontological principle is expressed by the substance-quality relationship, which is to say that final metaphysical facts are always expressed as qualities inhering in substances; 2) that Aristotle was correct in defining a primary substance as always a subject and never a predicate, which means that primary substances and qualities are two mutually exclusive classes of things; and 3) that the experiencing subject is

always a primary substance. The sensationalist principle states that "the primary activity in the act of experience is the bare subjective entertainment of the datum, devoid of any subjective form of reception" (PR 157). This, Whitehead claims, is a doctrine of *mere* perception, the implication of which is that the (temporally) initial elements of experience consist of a bare consciousness of sense data, and the emotional and purposive elements of experience are derivative of it. On these terms, any experience that is not conscious cannot be counted as experience at all.

Whitehead argues that it is a mistake wholly to equate experience with sense perception or, to put the same point a different way, to assume that sense experience is our only available mode of perception. He points out that the idea of our experience "conceived as a reaction to clearly envisaged details is fallacious. The relationship should be inverted. The details are a reaction to the totality" (MT 109). What is original in experience is the "vague totality." In other words, experience has to do with the relation of an entity to the world as a whole, not with the entity's consciousness of that experience. Whitehead puts it this way: "The principle that I am adopting is that consciousness presupposes experience, and not experience consciousness… Thus an actual entity may be conscious of some part of its experience. Its experience is its complete formal constitution, including its consciousness, if any" (PR 53).

The means by which one elucidates immediate experience is a matter on which Whitehead disagrees strongly with many of his scientific and philosophical predecessors, most notably those who try to explain all of existence in terms of the ultimate facts of reality as identified by Newtonian physics: matter, space, and time. The scientist's task—as an observing mind set apart from the observed world—was to

observe the hidden patterns in the natural world and describe them. This scientific

knowledge consisted not of the world as it appeared to be (the world of secondary

qualities), but the real world of matter, which is the unchanging substance perpetually

rearranged by natural processes, and of the laws according to which matter is changed.

The truest and most basic properties of the natural world, in the Newtonian view, were

the ones that could be treated mathematically: mass and velocity. The result of this

conception was an atomist view of reality that understood each actuality as what it was

apart from all other actualities whatsoever.

> Newtonian physics is based upon the independent individuality of each
> bit of matter. Each stone is conceived as fully describable apart from
> any reference to any other portion of matter. It might be alone in the
> Universe, the sole occupant of uniform space. But it would still be that
> stone which it is. Also the stone could be adequately described without
> any reference to past or future. It is to be conceived fully and
> adequately as wholly constituted within the present moment (AI 156).

Whitehead takes exception to Newtonian cosmology for several reasons. First,

it applied a theory adequate only to certain aspects of reality to everything, which

implied that all reality could be described in terms of the ideas of mass and velocity,

and insisted that this was the only reality. This insistence Whitehead called the fallacy

of misplaced concreteness—the tendency to describe abstractions as the final real

things that ultimately make up the world. Whitehead also rejects the distinction

between the observer and the observed, insisting that we ourselves are part of the

reality we are trying to investigate and understand. As he puts it, "There is no holding

nature still and looking at it" (CN 14-15).

Whitehead's primary reason for rejecting Newtonian physics and its related conceptions, however, is that they presuppose individual substances that require nothing other than themselves to exist. There are no such entities, Whitehead concludes; not even God can exist separate from all other entities. The fact of the matter is quite the opposite: "every entity is in its essence social and requires the society in order to exist. In fact, the society for each entity, actual or ideal, is the all inclusive universe, including its ideal forms" (RM 104). Modern physics has reached an analogous conclusion, having gradually rejected the explanatory doctrines of simple location and external relation in favor of a story that "commences with the wave-theory of light and ends with the wave-theory of matter. It finally leaves us with the philosophic question, What are the concrete facts which exhibit this mathematical attribute of wave-vibration?" (AI 156). This, Whitehead observes, poses a final problem not only to science but also to philosophy: to conceive anew the complete fact made up of fundamental notions concerning the nature of reality.

IV. PROCESS: THE MANY BECOME ONE

"Nature is full-blooded. Real facts are happening"(MT 144).

The four-century change of view from Newtonian to modern scientific views, according to Whitehead, can be characterized as a transition from the static notions of space and matter as fundamentals of scientific explanation to a dynamic notion of process, conceived as "a complex of activity with internal relations between its various factors" (MT 145). For the older view, change—whether in space or time, or both—

was accidental and not essential, as was endurance. "Nature at an instant is, in this view, equally real whether or not there be no nature at any other instant, or indeed whether or not there be any other instant" (MT 145). For the modern view, in contrast, "process, activity, and change are the matter of fact. At an instant, there is nothing. Each instant is only a way of grouping matters of fact… Thus all the inter-relations of matters of fact must involve transitions in their essence. All realization involves implication in the creative advance" (MT 146).

Since the world as we experience it is characterized by change and becoming, growth and decay, Whitehead argues that the most appropriate way to imagine and describe the nature of reality is as a process of becoming. To exist, that is, to be real or fully actual, is to be in process. Put more precisely, Whitehead insists—this is the first category of explanation—"that the actual world is a process, and that the process is the becoming of actual entities" (PR 22).

A. Concrescence and Transition

The process that constitutes the actual world is made up of two different types of fluency, the microscopic process of concrescence and the macroscopic process of transition, which Whitehead understands as the final and the efficient causes, respectively, of particular existents. Transition is "the fluency whereby the perishing of the process, on the completion of the particular existent, constitutes that existent as an original element in the constitutions of other particular existents elicited by repetitions of process" (PR 210). In other words, as the macroscopic process develops

over time, the creative process moves from one actual occasion to the next, each time carrying with it the immediate past event as an element of which all future events must take account. In this way, it becomes, as Whitehead states, the efficient cause of future events—the process by which the past actual world contributes to the becoming of the present occasion. Put another way, though perhaps just as obliquely, transition marks the move "from attained actuality to actuality in attainment" and "provides the conditions which really govern attainment" (PR 214). Transition marks the end (that is, the perishing) of what Whitehead in a different context calls an event's "private life" and the beginning of its "public career" (PR 290).

The necessity of the relation between the past actual world and the present occasion is fundamental to Whitehead's view that every entity requires other entities in order to exist. The fourth category of explanation, also known as the principle of relativity, states that "it belongs to the nature of a 'being' that it is a potential for every 'becoming'" (PR 22). Nothing exists absolutely; everything in the world without exception is contingent upon everything else without exception, and each requires the others to exist. There is one general metaphysical characteristic attaching to every actuality, according to Whitehead: its relation to every item in its universe is made definite in the process of its becoming an actuality.

This actual connection between an occasion and all the events in its past are established by what Whitehead calls feelings or prehensions; these are the way one actuality can be internally related to, and hence conditioned by, another actual occasion. An actual entity is "a process of 'feeling' the many data, so as to absorb them into the unity of one 'satisfaction.' Here 'feeling' is the term used for the basic

generic operation of passing from the objectivity of the data to the subjectivity of the actual entity in question" (PR 40). This feature of actual entities embodies one application of the ontological principle, called the doctrine of conceptualism, which states that "the search for a reason is always the search for an actual fact which is the vehicle of the reason" (PR 40).

According to Whitehead, every prehension has three factors: the prehending subject, which is the actual entity in which the prehension is a concrete element; the datum which is prehended; and the subjective form, which is how—that is, the way in which—the subject prehends the datum. Simply put, a prehension is a relation of simple feeling between two actual entities, one of which is the subject of the feeling, the other of which is the initial datum of the feeling. In Whitehead's usage, the term 'feeling' is what he calls a mere technical term, but "it has been chosen to suggest that functioning through which the concrescent actuality appropriates the datum so as to make it its own" (PR 164).

The transition of a datum from an initial datum to an objective datum involves an objectification of the datum, such that the prehending subject adopts the perspective of that entity which it is prehending. This objectification can result either in a positive prehension (which Whitehead also calls a feeling), in which the datum is appropriated as part of the internal makeup of the prehending subject. Or it can yield a negative prehension, in which the datum is eliminated as a possible constituent part of the subject's internal constitution. Thus the objective datum, which constitutes the perspective of the prehended entity within the prehending subject, arises from the appropriation or elimination of the initial datum. But the objective datum is prehended

by the subject in a particular way—a novel and non-repeatable way. This novel "how" constitutes what Whitehead calls the subjective form of the prehension. The result of this simple-yet-complex relationship is that, in a novel way, the real presence of one entity becomes objectified in the constitution of another, which is the relationship on which Whitehead bases his understanding of causal efficacy, or cause and effect.

> A simple physical feeling is an act of causation. The actual entity which is the initial datum is the "cause," the simple physical feeling is the "effect" and the subject entertaining the simple physical feeling is the actual entity "conditioned" by the effect. This "conditioned" actual entity will also be called the "effect." All complex causal action can be reduced to a complex of such primary components. Therefore simple physical feelings will also be called "causal" feelings (PR 236).

Prehensions, or feelings, come in two types. If the datum of the prehension is an actual entity, the feeling is a physical prehension. If the datum is an eternal object, which is an object of pure potential whose conceptual recognition does not involve a necessary reference to any definite actual entities in the temporal world, the feeling is a conceptual prehension. As the general potentiality of the universe, eternal objects, like everything else, must be somewhere, and for eternal objects that place is what Whitehead calls the primordial nature of God. There the eternal objects are conceptually prehended and ordered so they become relevant to the creative process.

> This ideal realization of potentialities in a primordial actual entity constitutes the metaphysical stability whereby the actual process exemplifies the general principles of metaphysics, and attains the ends proper to specific types of emergent order. Because of the actuality of this primordial valuation of pure potentials, each eternal object has a definite, effective relevance to each concrescent process. Apart from such orderings,…novelty would be meaningless, and inconceivable (PR 40).

In order to exist, every entity must have an aim or form of definiteness that at the outset of its becoming is already an element in its emerging constitution. The subjective aim of the occasion is a prehension of what the occasion might become or achieve, which it receives in the primary stage of becoming as a hybrid physical prehension, that is, a physical relation to one of God's conceptual prehensions. The subjective aim represents the ideal of what the entity might become, and appears to the entity as a lure or call to realization—the pure feeling of divine purpose. This Whitehead also terms the initial aim of the entity.

In this way, the freedom of the entity is wholly determined neither by its past nor by its potential. By the ontological principle, the final cause of an occasion lies within the occasion itself. But the understanding of each actual occasion as internally related to the occasions in its immediate past also means that the freedom of the entity is significantly constrained. The past actual world of an occasion limits the range of the occasion's freedom for self-realization; only those present worlds are possible that the physical prehension of the occasion's past actual world can enable. Since there are a limited number of potential ways to relate oneself to whatever happens to exist in one's immediate past, the real potentiality of the present occasion, the scope within which it can exercise its freedom, is substantially given for it. In Whitehead's language, "there is no such fact as absolute freedom; every actual entity possesses only such freedom as is inherent in the primary phase 'given' by its standpoint of relativity to its actual universe. Freedom, givenness, potentiality, are notions which presuppose each other and limit each other" (PR 133). Put another way, in any given set of possible relationships between an emergent occasion and its immediate past,

there is a greater or lesser range of ways in which its present potential could be realized.

Whitehead also provides for the freedom of each individual entity to solve the problem of the incoherence of its past actual world differently from its contemporaries. "The causal independence of contemporary occasions is the ground for the freedom within the Universe. The novelties which face the contemporary world are solved in isolation by the contemporary occasions" (AI 198). One actual entity need not resolve its relations to its actual world in the same way as its contemporaries, even though their actual worlds overlap. Thus, Whitehead provides for divergence between contemporaries.

At the microscopic level, the process by which an actuality becomes whatever it becomes is called concrescence, "the name for the process in which the universe of many things acquires an individual unity in a determinate relegation of each item of the 'many' to its subordination in the constitution of the novel 'one'" (PR 211). Concrescence moves an actual occasion toward its final cause, which is what Whitehead calls its subjective aim: its own ideal of itself, of what it will become. In the primary phase of concrescence, which Whitehead calls the conformal phase, the emergent occasion prehends, through simple physical feelings, the multitude of occasions in its past—the ingredients out of which it will constitute its future. The process of concrescence is the means by which, and the phase during which, these initial feelings are unified into a determinate satisfaction.

> Each actual entity is conceived as an act of experience arising out of
> data. It is a process of 'feeling' the many data, so as to absorb them into
> the unity of one individual 'satisfaction.' Here 'feeling' is the term used

for the basic generic operation of passing from the objectivity of the data to the subjectivity of the actual entity in question. Feelings are variously specialized operations, effecting a transition into subjectivity (PR 40-41).

The point Whitehead continues to emphasize in his explication of experience is that actual entities are not substances or objects, but subjects, which is to say that they are experiences; in the most fundamental sense, they are constituted by what they feel, or prehend. "There is nothing in the real world which is merely an inert fact. Every reality is there for feeling: it promotes feeling; and it is felt" (PR 310). The relation is not external to the fact of what the occasion is in itself; the relation—the prehension—is the constitutive element. Also, Whitehead continues, "there is nothing which belongs merely to the privacy of feeling of one individual actuality. All origination is private. But what has been thus originated, publicly pervades the world" (PR 310).

Whitehead's conception of the relationship between what is private (in his conception of subjective immediacy) and what is public (in his conception of objective immortality) underscores the extent to which public and private are, as Lois Gehr Livezey puts it, "mutually implicative notions."[10] The public world is what makes up the internal constitution of every entity whatsoever, and private experience is the "self-enjoyment of being one among many" (PR 145). Whitehead says that each new creation "has to arise from the actual world as much as from pure potentiality: it arises from the total universe and not solely from its mere abstract elements. It adds to that universe. Thus every actual entity springs from *that* universe which there *is for it*" (PR 80). Put differently, and appropriately poetically, he says that each creature is a mode

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[10] Lois Gehr Livezey, "Rights, Goods, and Virtues: Toward an Interpretation of Justice and Process Thought," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1987): 38.

"of housing the world in one unit of complex feeling" (PR 80). This recognition that, for all entities whatsoever, there is what Whitehead once called "a common world to think about" (SMW 84) establishes both the solidarity and intelligibility of the world, which thereby enables public discourse and common action, and makes the world, in prospect at least, a matter of mutual responsibility.[11]

This restates the category of freedom and determination: "The concrescence of each individual actual entity is internally determined and externally free" (PR 27). Whatever is determinable is determined in the concrescence, but there is always a remainder that must be decided by the subject of the concrescence that becomes superject. "The final decision is the reaction of the unity of the whole to its own internal determination. This reaction is the final modification of emotion, appreciation, and purpose" (PR 28).

Perhaps the best known formulation of the process by which an occasion moves from its initial stage of conformation to its final satisfaction appears in *Adventures of Ideas*, where Whitehead describes the role of creativity in the constitution of an immediate subject. "Whether the ideas thus introduced by the novel conceptual prehensions be old or new, they have this decisive result, that the occasion arises as an effect facing its past and ends as a cause facing its future. In between lies the teleology of the Universe" (AI 194).

Given our purposes, the sense in which the concrescence of an individual actual entity is internally determined and externally free requires explication. An actual occasion, Whitehead says, is "nothing but the unity to be ascribed to a particular

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[11] Ibid., 39.

instance of concrescence" (PR 212). Concrescence, in turn, is "the name for the process in which the universe of many things acquires an individual unity in a determinate relegation of each item of the 'many' to its subordination in the constitution of the novel 'one'" (PR 211). The fundamental inescapable fact, Whitehead insists, is the creativity in virtue of which there can be no "many things" which are not subordinated in a concrete unity. This creative element is the key; it is how an actual entity becomes what it is. The point is the concrete unity: the 'one' that the many become, and that is the locus of creativity in virtue of which the one determines what it will be.

B. Creativity and the Divine Life

The category of the ultimate, in Whitehead's explication of the categorical scheme, is creativity—the principle of novelty by which, in the nature of things, the many singular entities in the world enter into complex unity. More specifically, creativity is "the universal of universals characterizing ultimate matter of fact. It is that ultimate principle by which the many, which are the universe disjunctively, become the one actual occasion, which is the universe conjunctively" (PR 21). This creative advance from disjunction to conjunction is the ultimate metaphysical principle, which Whitehead states simply (and famously) as: "The many become one, and are increased by one" (PR 21).

The instance of concrescence by which the real internal constitution of an actual occasion is established has three formal stages in the process of prehending its

past actual world: the responsive phase, the supplemental stage, and the satisfaction.

The responsive phase is "the phase of pure reception of the actual world in its guise of objective datum for aesthetic synthesis" (PR 212). This involves the mere reception of a multiplicity of external (and private) centers of feeling, which are implicated in a nexus of mutual presupposition but not absorbed into the private immediacy of the present concrescent subject. The second phase, the supplemental phase, is one in which the many feelings, "derivatively felt as alien, are transformed into a unity of aesthetic appreciation immediately felt as private…the origins become subordinate to the particular experience" (PR 212). The feelings prehended in the second stage include not only the physical feeling of occasions in the subject's past actual world, but also propositional feeling of eternal objects which the subject determines are relevant in respect to its pure potential.

In this second stage, Whitehead notes, the influx of conceptual feelings gives the feelings an emotional character. But the origins are not lost in the privacy of the subject's emotional response, because there is no element in the universe capable of pure privacy. The third metaphysical principle, from which emotional feeling is not exempt, states that to be something is to have the potentiality for acquiring a real unity with other entities. Hence, to be a component in an actual occasion is to realize this potential.

> In more familiar language, this principle can be expressed by the
> statement that the notion of 'passing on' is more fundamental than a
> private individual fact. In the abstract language here adopted for
> metaphysical statement, 'passing on' becomes 'creativity,' in the
> dictionary sense of the verb *creare*, 'to bring forth, beget, produce.'
> Thus, according to the third principle, no entity can be divorced from
> the notion of creativity. An entity is at least a particular form capable of

infusing its own particularity into creativity. An actual entity, or a phase of an actual entity, is more than that; but, at least, it is that (PR 213).

The third phase of the concrescence, which Whitehead calls satisfaction, is the culmination of the concrescence, which marks the evaporation of all indetermination. This is the point at which the satisfied actual entity embodies a determinate attitude of 'yes' (by means of positive prehensions) or 'no' (by means of negative prehensions) in respect to all modes of feeling and to all entities in the universe. "Thus the satisfaction is the attainment of the private ideal which is the final cause of the concrescence" (PR 212).

> The concrescence is thus the building up of a determinate 'satisfaction,' which constitutes the completion of the actual togetherness of the discrete components. The process of concrescence terminates with the attainment of a fully *determinate* 'satisfaction'; and the creativity thereby passes over into the 'given' primary phase for the concrescence of other actual entities. The transcendence is thereby established when there is attainment of *determinate* 'satisfaction' completing the antecedent entity. Completion is the perishing of immediacy: 'It never really is' (PR 85).

Thus, a satisfied actual entity emerges from a determinant combination of efficient and final causes. The task of a sound metaphysics, Whitehead notes, is to exhibit final and efficient causes in their proper relation to each other (PR 84). On the one hand, "no actual entity can rise beyond what the actual world as a datum from its standpoint—*its* actual world—allows it to be. Each such entity arises from a primary phase of the concrescence of objectifications which are in some respects settled: the basis of its experience is 'given'" (PR 83). On the other hand, "the breath of feeling which creates a new individual fact has an origin not wholly traceable to the mere

data. It conforms to the data, in that it feels the data. But the *how* of feeling, though it is germane to the data, is not fully determined by the data" (PR 85). The self-definition of the individual fact is determined by the way in which it appropriates the ingression of eternal objects as a lure for its feeling. Whitehead describes the process in the following way:

> …there is an origination of conceptual feeling, admitting or rejecting whatever is apt for feeling by reason of its germaneness to the basic data. The gradation of eternal objects in respect to this germaneness is the 'objective lure' for feeling: the concrescent process admits a selection from this 'objective lure' into subjective efficiency. This is the subjective 'ideal of itself' which guides the process. Also the basic data are constituted by the actual world which 'belongs to' that instance of concrescent process. Feelings are 'vectors'; for they feel what is *there* and transform it into what is *here* (PR 87).

For this reason, an actual entity has a threefold character, according to Whitehead: the character given for it by its past actual world, the subjective character at which it aims in the process of concrescence, and its superjective character, which is the pragmatic value of its specific satisfaction qualifying the transcendent creativity. In terms of efficient causation, the reason for a given entity is its past actual world, but in terms of final causation, the actual entity is its own reason. The past actual world is a necessary element in any explanation of the present occasion, but it is not a sufficient cause to determine the outcome of the concrescence. Each actual entity is finally responsible for what it becomes; it actualizes the ideal of itself in terms of which the final determination of the concrescence is guided. In this sense, an actual occasion satisfies Spinoza's definition of a substance; it is *causa sui*. In the language of Whitehead's metaphysics, to be *causa sui* means that the process of concrescence

"is its own reason with respect to the qualitative clothing of feelings. It is finally responsible for the decision by which any lure for feeling is admitted to efficiency. The freedom inherent in the universe is constituted by this element of self-causation" (PR 88).

The concrescent occasion's subjective aim—its own ideal of itself—emerges in its initial phase as "an endowment which the subject inherits from the inevitable ordering of things, conceptually realized in the nature of God" (PR 244). The "nature of God," in Whitehead's view, constitutes God's primordial nature and God's consequent nature. The former is the concrescence of a unity of conceptual feelings, which include among their data all eternal objects. The particular form of the concrescence of God's primordial nature is such that the subjective forms of the conceptual feelings constitute the eternal objects into relevant lures of feeling "appropriate for all realizable basic conditions" (PR 88). The latter is the physical prehension by God of all actualities of the evolving universe. This conception of God is such that God is considered "as the outcome of creativity, as the foundation of order, and as the goad toward novelty" (PR 88).

The initial stage of the subjective aim is rooted in the nature of God, in that God "is that actual entity from which each temporal concrescence receives that initial aim from which its self-causation starts" (PR 244). That initial subjective aim, Whitehead goes on to say, determines the initial gradations of relevance for the eternal objects that are present for conceptual feeling. It also provides the subject with its initial conceptual valuations and its initial physical purposes. Thus, the transition of creativity from the past actual world to the immediate novel concrescence is

conditioned by the relevance of God's conceptual valuations with respect to: 1) the particular possibilities of transmission from the actual world, and 2) the various possibilities for the initial subjective form which are available for the initial feelings. Again, God is "the lure for feeling, the eternal urge of desire. His particular relevance to each creative act, as it arises from its own conditioned standpoint in the world, constitutes him the initial 'object of desire' establishing the initial phase of each subjective aim" (PR 344). Put simplistically, but not inaccurately, the past actual world provides the concrescent occasion with the raw materials that both enable and limit its particular experience as an occasion. God, as it were, provides the initial recipe that arrays the ingredients for the best possible outcome.

Taken as a whole, the world of actual occasions is both mutually immanent and mutually transcendent with respect to the divine life. God and the world are mutually immanent; they are internally, that is, essentially, related to one another. The consequent nature of God constitutes the objective immortality of the world in God, and the objectification of the world in God constitutes the subjective immediacy of God's own actuality. The objective immortality of God in the world is constituted by the superjective nature of God, which is the causal efficacy of God in the world.

God and the temporal world are also mutually transcendent; they are internally determined as well as internally related. The freedom of God is expressed by the unconditioned primordial realm of potentiality, as well as by the consequent nature of God, the first phase of which is a conformal feeling of the world. As God integrates these conformal feelings with the divine conceptual valuation of possibility, the subjective form of the integration yields a divine judgment regarding the relative value

of this actual world to the divine life. As Whitehead says, "The consequent nature of God is his judgment on the world. He saves the world as it passes into the immediacy of his own life. It is the judgment of tenderness which loses nothing that can be saved" (PR 346).

God and the world are also mutually implicated in the creative character of existence. By virtue of the consequent nature of God, God "shares with every new creation the actual world; and the concrescent creature is objectified in God as a novel element in God's objectification of that actual world" (PR 345). Furthermore, God's superjective nature provides "particular providence for particular occasions" (PR 351) by imparting an ordered relevance onto what would otherwise be unrealized possibilities. This constitutes the adventure of God in the adventure of the world.

C. Freedom and Society

It is worth noting at this juncture how Whitehead's conception of God is similar, in many ways, to that of Tillich. Recall that for Tillich, the actuality of God is conceived as being, as living, as creating, and as related. With respect to the first of these specifications, of course, Tillich insists that God is not a being in the usual sense, but being-itself, or the ground of being. In this sense, God is the sole exception to the ontological structure.

We have examined in some detail the basis of this claim, as well as its implications both for the divine role in the life of creation generally and for a conception of justice in particular. We have seen that Tillich's primary reason for

exempting God from the ontological structure is to protect the divine life from being bound by the finitude of life under the conditions of existence. Whitehead shows that this concern can be addressed in other ways, such as by the conception of the primordial nature of God. In other respects, Tillich's explication of the divine life is remarkably similar to Whitehead's. Tillich says, for example, that "Life is the actuality of being, or, more exactly, it is the process in which potential being becomes actual being… God lives in so far as he is the ground of life" (I 242). In this process of life, Tillich adds, "God is the principle of participation as well as the principle of individualization. The divine life participates in every life as its ground and aim" (I 245).

Concerning God as creating, Tillich states that "The divine life is creative, actualizing itself in inexhaustible abundance. The divine life and the divine creativity are not different" (I 252). He continues: "In the creative vision of God the individual is present as a whole in his essential being and inner *telos* and, at the same time, in the infinity of the special moments of his life-process… But man's being is not only hidden in the creative ground of the divine life; it also is manifest to itself and to other life within the whole of reality" (I 255). God as being-itself is also the ground of every relation; in the divine life "all relations are present beyond the distinctions between potentiality and actuality" (I 271).

It is beyond the purview of this project to undertake a detailed comparison of Tillich and Whitehead's conceptions of God. It is clear, however, that if Tillich's exception to the ontological structure were waived, his understanding of the role of the divine, especially as it relates to a theory of justice, would be substantially the same as

that of Whitehead. For both thinkers, the divine life is the source of both creativity and of confidence in the ultimate goodness of creation. As Tillich puts it, "The certainty of God's directing creativity is based on the certainty of God as the ground of meaning and being. The confidence of every creature, its courage to be, is rooted in faith in God as its creative ground" (I 270).

Within the context of God's role in the process of concrescence as conceived by Whitehead, Randall Morris wonders, somewhat rhetorically, wherein lies the freedom of the subject, given that the actual world determines the realm of real potentiality for a subject, and if God provides it with an initial aim? He states his question this way: "If God is the source of the subjective aim, and if that aim is the locus of finite freedom, then how can Whitehead avoid the charge of radical finalism? Is not God in the end responsible for the outcome of the creative process?"[12] Morris responds on Whitehead's behalf by citing the distinction drawn in Whitehead's view of concrescence between the initial phase of the subjective aim and its later phases. Each temporal entity, Whitehead says, "derives from God its basic conceptual aim, relevant to its actual world, yet with indeterminations awaiting its own decisions. This subjective aim, in its successive modifications, remains the unifying factor governing the successive phases of interplay between physical and conceptual feelings" (PR 224).

The arena of freedom, in other words, lies in the indeterminations that await the entity's own decisions, and its successive modifications of the initial aim. As noted

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[12] Randall C. Morris, *Process Philosophy and Political Ideology: The Social and Political Thought of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991) 31.

above, the concrescent subject admits into subjective efficacy a selection from the

gradation of eternal objects that is present for it as the objective lure for feeling. This

selection becomes the ideal of itself, which guides the process of concrescence. But

the ideal remains under development through the subsequent phases of the

concrescence. The subject's prehension of the primordial nature of God is indeed the

primary element in the initial lure for feeling. But, Whitehead explains, as conceptual

feelings are integrated with physical feelings, a subsequent phase of propositional

feelings supervenes. "The lure for feeling develops with the concrescent phases of the

subject in question" (PR 189). Another way to make the same point, according to

Whitehead, is to say "that God and the actual world jointly constitute the character of

the creativity for the initial phase of the novel concrescence. The subject, thus

constituted, is the autonomous master of its own concrescence into subject-superject"

(PR 245).

In so doing, the actual entity becomes an inextricable part of what Whitehead

calls a nexus. In the fourteenth category of explanation, Whitehead states that "a nexus

is a set of actual entities in the unity of the relatedness constituted by their prehensions

of each other, or—what is the same thing conversely expressed—constituted by their

objectifications in each other" (PR 24). As actual entities involve each other by reason

of their prehensions of each other, there are thus, Whitehead goes on to say, "real facts

of togetherness of actual entities, which are real, individual and particular, in the same

sense in which actual entities and the prehensions are real, individual, and particular"

(PR 29-30). In other words, actual entities are the basic microscopic material out of

which the world is made, and nexus are macroscopic aggregates of actual entities,

making up the macroscopic entities of everyday experience, such as people, trees, and houses. The process of what Whitehead calls transmutation is the mechanism through which an aggregate of many actual entities is prehended as a unity—as one macroscopic entity.

The way in which actual entities aggregate themselves into various types of nexus enables Whitehead to describe, in terms of his metaphysical system, the notions of society, enduring object, and person. Whitehead's initial definitions—that a society is a nexus with a social order, and that an enduring object or an enduring creature is a society whose social order has taken the special form of personal order (PR 34)—require some explication. In order for a nexus to enjoy social order, three conditions must pertain: there must be a common element of form illustrated in the definiteness of each actual entity included in the nexus; this common element of form must arise in each member of the nexus by virtue of conditions imposed on it by prehension of some other members of the nexus; and these prehensions must impose those conditions of reproduction by virtue of their inclusion of positive prehensions of that common form. The common element of form in the society is called its defining characteristic.

> The point of a 'society,' as the term is here used, is that it is self-sustaining; in other words, it is its own reason. Thus, a society is more than a set of entities to which the same class-name applies: that is to say, it involves more than a merely mathematical conception of 'order.' To constitute a society, the class-name has got to apply to each member, by reason of genetic derivation from other members of that same society. The members of the society are alike because, by reason of their common character, they impose on other members of the society the conditions which lead to that likeness (PR 89).

Societies thus construed appear in a wide array of various structures and complexities. The problem with which each society must struggle, according to Whitehead, is the tension between stability and complexity. Put simply, and perhaps simplistically, a rock is a highly stable society (Whitehead describes such societies as "unspecialized") which can survive important changes in its environment precisely because its relationship with other societies in its the environment are of extremely low intensity. A person, on the other hand, is a society that is both highly complex and highly specialized with respect to the particulars of its environment, with which it also has a highly intense relationship. The problem with being a rock is having to live a life of low intensity (hence, low value); the problem with being a person is having to live a life that, albeit highly complex (and thus highly valuable), is so highly specialized that any significant changes in the environment with respect to its specialized features can prove catastrophic. "Thus the problem for nature is the production of societies which are 'structured' with a high 'complexity,' and which are at the same time 'unspecialized.' In this way, intensity is mated with survival" (PR 101).

There are two ways in which structured societies can respond to this challenge, both of which involve the conceptual prehension of the many nexus in the environment. Either the conceptual prehension will block the particulars of the environmental nexus by massively objectifying them, prehending "each in its unity as *one* nexus, and not in its multiplicity as *many* actual occasions" (PR 101). Or the conceptual prehension will reveal an appetite for complexity, demonstrating the initiative "to receive the novel elements of the environment into explicit feelings with such subjective forms as conciliate them with the complex experiences proper to

members of the structured society" (PR 102). Rather than blocking intensity in order to ensure survival, the subjective aim of this concrescent occasion in the society "originates novelty to match the novelty of the environment" (PR 102). These latter structured societies are termed living societies, while the former are termed inorganic societies.

Structured societies, in sum, are complex societies that include subordinate societies that can be either inorganic (crystals, rocks, planets, suns) or living. Although a living structured society contains inorganic structured society as subservient nexus, its dominant nexus will be living, that is, it will contain actual entities that generate initiative in conceptual prehensions. As we have seen, the two ways in which dominant members of structured societies secure stability amid environmental novelty are, according to Whitehead, "(i) elimination of diversities of detail, and (ii) origination of novelties of conceptual reaction" (PR 102).

Given that the aim of every actuality is to achieve subjective intensity, the relationship between the individual occasion and the society of which it is part becomes paramount. The aim of subjective intensity is proportionally achieved, according to Whitehead, as the eternal objects ingressed by the actuality increase in number and complexity. Put another way, an increase in satisfaction is the result of an increase in intensity, which arises from the ingression of a balanced pattern of contrasted, but compatible, eternal objects. Such an increase in intensity requires the actuality or society in question to share a more complex and inclusive harmony of data with its surrounding environment. It comes down to this: "The universe achieves its values by reason of its coordination into societies of societies, and into societies of

societies of societies." (AI 206). The same principle pertains on the level of human society: "The stubborn reality of the absolute self-attainment of each individual is bound up with a relativity which it issues from and issues into" (AI 292). The complexity of these relationships, Whitehead insists, is not (or, perhaps more accurately, not merely) indicative of the level of human fulfillment in the psychological sense; it is constitutive of growth and development in individual depth and intensity of experience.

> Beyond the soul, there are other societies, and societies of societies. There is the animal body ministering to the soul: there are families, groups of families, nations, species, groups involving different species associated in the joint enterprise of keeping alive. These various societies, each in its measure, claim loyalties and loves. In human history, the various responses to these claims disclose the essential transcendence of each individual actuality beyond itself (AI 291-2).

In Whitehead's view, therefore, "the problem is not how to produce great men, but how to produce great societies. The great society will put up the men for the occasions" (SMW 205). This is not to say that a society has value for its own sake. Whitehead notes that a society is the "provision of opportunity"—the necessary condition for the development of the individual's intensity of experience. "The worth of any social system depends on the value experience it promotes among individual human beings" (ESP 64). In sum, the purpose that animates the creative advance is the evocation of intensities. The evocation of societies is purely subsidiary to this absolute end" (PR 105). The final end or cause of creation, on this reading, including the end of the creation of societies, is individual satisfaction and intensity.

The implication of this conception is not only that the *reason* for an occasion lies within the occasion itself, but that the *constitution* of what it is has to do with its relation to, that is, its prehension of, everything whatsoever.

> A prehension reproduces in itself the general characteristics of an actual entity: it is referent to an external world, and in this sense will be said to have a 'vector character'; it involves emotion, and purpose, and valuation, and causation… A reference to the complete actuality is required to give the reason why such a prehension is what it is in respect to its subjective form. This subjective form is determined by the subjective aim at further integration, so as to obtain the 'satisfaction' of the completed subject. In other words, final causation and atomism are interconnected philosophical principles (PR 19).

Whitehead emphasizes this point again in a different context by citing a passage he had written previously in *Science in the Modern World*.

> It is this realized extension of eternal relatedness beyond the mutual relatedness of the actual occasions which prehends into each occasion the full sweep of eternal relatedness. I term this *abrupt* realization the 'graded envisagement' which each occasion prehends into its synthesis. This graded envisagement is how the actual includes what (in one sense) is 'not-being' as a positive factor in its own achievement. It is the source of error, of truth, of art, of ethics, and of religion. By it, fact is confounded with alternatives (PR 189, from SMW, ch. XI).

The question which emerges at this point, however, has to do with the terms on which the concrescent occasion makes the decisions about how its subjective aim, which was given at the outset by the primordial nature of God, should best be modified and made determinate. If the subject is free to choose, why should it choose one possible modification of its subjective aim over another? This question is made particularly complicated by the fact that the subjective aim functions as the guiding principle in terms of which the process of concrescence unfolds.

Whitehead's response is to point to the ontological principle, of which the subjective aim is both an example and a limitation. "It is an example, in that the principle is here applied to the immediacy of concrescent fact. The subject completes itself during the process of concrescence by a self-criticism of its own incomplete phases" (PR 244). The subjective aim thereby expresses the ontological principle, namely, that the emergent occasion is in part its own reason is an exemplification of that principle. This completion of each subject constitutes the creativity in which its freedom is finally grounded. In other words, the synthesis of subjective forms derived conformally is not finally governed by the antecedent data. The regulative principle—the missing determination for the synthesis of subjective form—is derived from the novel unity imposed by the immediate occasion from the spontaneity of its own essence.

Whitehead's metaphysics implies that this principle of freedom conceptually applies to all actualities, but does so in different ways depending on whether or not the occasion is self-conscious. Even if we set aside for the moment the immediate occasions that choose self-consciously, however, there are no fixed terms on which the decision of the immediate occasion is made. The occasion could not be given concrete alternatives, because that would erase the indeterminacy of what has not yet occurred. In general, then, the ideal given to the immediate occasion is an abstraction, designating a greater or lesser range of possibilities for its satisfaction. The occasion cannot become a concrete thing except by deciding to actualize itself somewhere within this range. The decision is therefore made by the occasion, albeit arbitrarily, because concreteness cannot otherwise be achieved.

V. VALUE: SOMETHING THAT MATTERS

Whitehead's theory of justice is based on his conviction that, in metaphysical terms, some things are better than others, without exception. The fundamental basis of his metaphysical theory can be summarized by the following general principles. The category of the Ultimate states that what is ultimately presupposed by all existence, as well as by every principle of explanation and every type of obligation and condition, is the general flux of the many into the one and of the one into the many. The principle of relativity states that to be anything at all is to be a potential element in every becoming. The principle of individuality states that actual entities are fully concrete and in some sense absolute. The ontological principle states that every principle and every statement of possibility derives from decisions of one or more actual entities: "Actual entities are the only reasons; so to search for a reason is to search for one or more actual entities" (PR 24). The principle of process states that all actuality is the self-constitution of actual entities in the process of integrating the entire universe into one complex, fully determinate feeling.

While the category of the Ultimate affirms that the creative flux of all things is the active production of novelty, mere novelty is not sufficient, however. A concrescent occasion is lured by the prospect of achieving a self-constitution, which will realize a complex new value to which the entire universe will contribute—a value that Whitehead calls worth. "The essence of power is the drive toward aesthetic worth for its own sake. All power is a derivative from this fact of composition attaining

worth for itself. There is no other fact… It constitutes the drive of the universe" (MT 119).

A. The Principle of Relativity

At the primitive stage of conscious discrimination of the difference between the self and others, there is "the vague sense of many which are one; and of one which includes the many. There are actually two senses of the one—namely, the sense of the one which is all, and the sense of the one among the many" (MT 110). These divisions are real, and they are based on the sense of existence as the experience of value—the value of each entity unto itself, as well as the value of the other entities which it constitutively prehends. The occasions in the actual past world, as value experiences in and for themselves, are now felt as contributing to this new value experience, which is the becoming of a new present entity.

This principle of relativity, which first emerges in Whitehead's theory of perception, remains decisive for his conception of value. The following passage from Whitehead's *Modes of Thought* is, for our purposes at least, one of the most crucial in his entire corpus, for which reason I quote at length.

> The fundamental *basis* of this description is that our experience is a value experience, expressing a vague sense of maintenance or discard; and that this value experience differentiates itself in the sense of many existences with value experience; and that this sense of the multiplicity of value experiences again differentiated it into the totality of value experience, and the many other value experiences, and the egoistic value experience. There is the feeling of ego, the others, the totality. This is the vague, basic presentation of the differentiation of existence, in its enjoyment of discard and maintenance. We are, each of us, one among others; and all are embraced in the unity of the whole.

> The basis of democracy is the common fact of value experience, as constituting the essential nature of each pulse of actuality. Everything has some value for itself, for others, for the whole. This characterizes the meaning of actuality. By reason of this character, constituting reality, the conception of morals arises. We have no right to deface the value experience which is the very essence of the universe. Existence, in its own nature, is the upholding of value intensity. Also no unit can separate itself from the others, and from the whole. And yet each unit exists in its own right. It upholds value intensity for itself, and this involves sharing value intensity with the universe. Everything that in any sense exists has two sides, namely, the individual self and its signification in the universe. Also either of these aspects is a factor in the other (MT 110-111, emphasis his).

Whitehead begins with what he calls a vague and basic presentation of the differentiation in existence: we are one among others, and all are part of the unity of the whole. "The universe is thus a creative advance into novelty. The alternative to this doctrine is a static morphological universe" (PR 222). But this perception has emotional import; it is an experience of value. "Our experience of actuality is a realization of worth, good or bad. It is a value experience. Its basic expression is— Have a care, here is something that matters! Yes!—that is the best phrase—the primary glimmering of consciousness reveals, something that matters" (MT 116). At the base of our existence, Whitehead insists, is the sense of worth—the sense that something is worthy or has intrinsic value. "It is the sense of existence for its own sake, of existence which is its own justification, of existence with its own character" (MT 109). Value, as Whitehead suggests elsewhere, is part of the essence of matter of fact (SMW 138).

B. The Source of Worth

In the process of becoming, at both the microscopic and macroscopic levels, God's primordial nature is the source of both novelty and order, neither of which would be present in the world apart from God. As we have noted previously, this does not imply that God determines the outcome of the creative process, it simply acknowledges that God is implicated in the transition of eternal potentiality into temporal actuality, specifically by evaluating what an actuality might become and providing the relevant eternal object as an initial subjective aim to both initiate and guide the process of concrescence. This aim appears to the actuality as a persuasive lure toward a certain determinate form of realization, but persuasion is not determination; the actuality has the freedom to prehend the aim in its own way. As the source of possibilities for the concrescent occasion, God is the primordial ground of novelty in the world.

As we noted earlier, Whitehead's metaphysics implies that this principle of freedom conceptually applies to all actualities, but does so in different ways depending on whether or not the occasion is self-conscious. Nonconscious occasions always fulfill the initial aim, but since the aim can only designate a range of possibilities, each determines for itself where it will land within this range. In contrast, self-conscious occasions—human beings and perhaps certain subhuman animals—can decide either to actualize themselves within the range designated by the ideal or to actualize some lesser unity-in-diversity and, thereby, to corrupt or alter the ideal. Because only conscious decisions have a sufficient range of options from which to choose for the

term "freedom" to be applied, only they can be considered moral in character, in that they have the capacity either to violate or to fulfill the divine aim.

Concerning God's role as the source of novelty, Sten Philipson notes that, in comparison to the God of classical Christian theology, Whitehead's God relates to and influences the rest of the world. "God does not act *on* it—as we can act on things—but *in* it. God is an 'event' in the world, according to Whitehead, which penetrates and influences other 'events.' God does not manipulate the world from without, but…lures or persuades the world from within."[13] In the creative process, God is what Whitehead calls the primordial ground of order, in which role God orders the multiplicity of data in the universe. Put another way, God grades in importance—places in conceptual order—the potential forms for becoming. Whitehead describes this process in the following way.

> The primordial created fact is the unconditioned conceptual valuation of the entire multiplicity of eternal objects. This is the 'primordial nature' of God. By reason of this complete valuation, the objectification of God in each derivate actual entity results in a gradation of the relevance of eternal objects to the concrescent phase of that derivate object. There will be additional ground of relevance for select eternal objects by reason of their ingression into derivate actual entities belonging to the actual world of the concrescent occasion in question. But whether or no this be the case, there is always the definite relevance derived from God (PR 31).

As an emergent occasion enters the initial phase of concrescence, God examines the actual past world of the occasion and assesses the range of

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[13] Sten M Philipson, *A Metaphysics for Theology: A Study of Some Problems in the Later Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead and Its Application to Issues in Contemporary Theology* (Uppsala: University of Uppsala Press, 1982) 59.

possibilities—eternal objects—for how these past occasions could achieve a definite relation in the present occasion. God, after evaluating the potential outcomes and selecting the relevant one(s), presents the best potential structure of definiteness to the concrescent occasion as its initial aim. In this process, an actual fact is juxtaposed to the realm of novel but relevant possibilities, and a contrast emerges between fact and possibility. God's own aim in the creative advance, as Donald Sherburne puts it,

> …is to have a world emerge of such a sort that his own experience of that world will result in the greatest possible intensity of his own experience. He therefore—and this is God functioning superjectively—offers as a lure to each actual entity as it arises that subjective aim the completion of which, in that entity's own concrescence, would create the kind of ordered, complex world that, when prehended by God, would result in maximum intensity of satisfaction for him.[14]

As Whitehead himself says, God is indifferent to novelty for its own sake. Nor is God motivated by a desire for preservation or a love of particulars. God's aim for an occasion is for its "depth of satisfaction as an intermediate step towards the fulfillment of his own being. His tenderness is directed towards each actual occasion, as it arises. Thus God's purpose in the creative advance is the evocation of intensities" (PR 105).

This description of God's central role in the creative process of becoming is not designed, as Whitehead famously put it, to pay metaphysical compliments to the deity. It is simply an apprehension of our experience: "When it comes to the primary metaphysical data, the world of which you are immediately conscious is the whole datum" (RM 83). One of the characteristics of this world, immediately apparent to

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[14] Donald W. Sherburne, *A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966) 227.

consciousness, is that the world is ordered. Indeed, says Whitehead, "there is an actual world *because* there is an order in nature. If there were no order, there would be no world. And, since there is a world, we *know* that there is an order" (RM 101). Again, our apprehension of the world as a cosmos where 'the ultimate natures of things lie together in a harmony" is a realization that springs from "direct inspection of the nature of things as disclosed in our own immediate present experience" (SMW 27). By implication, then, it is reasonable to think that all the actualities and possibilities in the universe are ordered (as in "placed in some particular order") by a ground of order and novelty. As Whitehead concludes, "The ordering entity is a necessary element in the metaphysical situation presented by the actual world" (RM 101).

This conception of God as being what Whitehead elsewhere calls the "Principle of Concretion" (SMW 250) is therefore necessary to complete a metaphysical account of the true character of reality.

> The order of the world is no accident. There is nothing actual which could be actual without some measure of order. The religious insight is the grasp of this truth: That the order of the world, the depth of reality of the world, the value of the world in its whole and in its parts, the beauty of the world, the zest of life, and the mastery of evil, are all bound together—not accidentally, but by reason of this truth: that the universe exhibits a creativity with infinite freedom, and a realm of forms with infinite possibilities; but that this creativity and these forms are together impotent to achieve actuality apart from the completed ideal harmony, which is God (RM 115).

VI. MORALITY: THE MAXIMIZING OF IMPORTANCE

At the very foundation of our awareness of ourselves as human beings and of our world around us, there is the dim and vague recognition of what William James calls something more, which is the decisive ground for our experience of ourselves and our world as important and intrinsically valuable.[15] This experience which blends sheer matter-of-fact with an urgent sense of importance exhibits one characteristic of what Whitehead calls the primary mode of conscious experience: the "fusion of a large generality with an insistent particularity" (MT 4). Just as the experience of matters-of-fact, as mere existence, introduces the notions of variety, multiplicity, and more and less, so the experience of importance introduces grades of importance, and the notion of something being more or less important. The multiplicity, whether matter-of-fact or of importance, requires a finite intellect to exercise selection in dealing with it. "Thus intellectual freedom issues from selection, and selection requires the notion of relative importance in order to give it meaning. Thus importance, selection, and intellectual freedom are bound up together, and they all involve some reference to matter of fact" (MT 7).

The notion of matter-of-fact, Whitehead goes on to explain, is a recognition in thinking of the external activities, or goings-on, of nature, in which we and all other things like us are involved—it is "the thought of ourselves as process immersed in process beyond ourselves" or the grasp of "the concept of mere agitation of things agitated" (MT 8). The notion of importance, which can be inadequately defined as

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[15] Philipson, *A Metaphysics for Theology: A Study of Some Problems in the Later Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead and Its Application to Issues in Contemporary Theology* 65.

"interest," is "that aspect of feeling whereby a perspective is imposed upon the universe of things felt" (MT 11). Perspective emerges from the recognition that all the details of our experience are interconnected, but not all are equally important. "Thus perspective is the outcome of feeling; and feeling is graded by the sense of interest as to the variety of its differentiation" (MT 10). Taken as a whole, the imposition of perspective upon the universe of things felt demonstrates that "the generic aim of process is the attainment of importance" (MT 12). We apprehend that this sense of importance extends beyond our selves and our immediate actual world. Writ large, this "value beyond ourselves" (MT 102) becomes an ideal, which is our apprehension of the divine.

> There are experiences of ideals—of ideals entertained, of ideals aimed at, of ideals achieved, of ideals defaced. This is the experience of the deity of the universe. The intertwining of success and failure in respect to this final experience is essential. We thereby experience a relation to a universe other than ourselves. We are essentially measuring ourselves in relation to what we are not. A solipsist experience cannot succeed or fail, for it would be all that exists. There would be no standard of comparison. Human experience explicitly relates itself to an external standard. The universe is thus understood as including a source of ideals (MT 103).

What experience apprehends is that "there is a unity in the universe, enjoying value and (by its immanence) sharing value" (MT 120). When we observe the grand fact of the universe, constituted by complex relations of value-experience, "our sense of the value of the details for the totality dawns upon our consciousness. This is the intuition of holiness, the intuition of the sacred, which is at the foundation of all religion" (MT 120).

Morality, by implication, "consists in the control of process so as to maximize importance. It is the aim at greatness of experience in the various dimensions belonging to it" (MT 13-14). Whitehead adds, without apparent irony, that this notion of the various dimensions of experience and their final unity in importance is "difficult and hard to understand." But, he continues, only by understanding the relationship between experience and importance can we grasp the notion of morality, which is "always the aim at that union of harmony, intensity, and vividness which involves the perfection of importance for that occasion" (MT 14). Morality is not a matter of adhering to some putative ultimate moral law of the universe, which directs us to behave in a specified way, say, to rest one day in seven (as distinct from one in six or eight days), or to refrain from working on Sundays. "There is no one behavior system belonging to the essential character of the universe, as the universal moral ideal" (MT 14). While morality does not indicate what you are to do in a theoretical situation, it nonetheless does specify "the general ideal which should be the justification for any particular objective" (MT 14). Whatever the specific situation, Whitehead concludes, an action is moral if it thereby safeguards "the importance of experience so far as it depends on that concrete instance in the world's history" (MT 15).

A. The Qualities of Civilization

At the human level, morality seeks to maximize importance both for the individual and for the unity and harmony of society as a whole. This can best be done, as Whitehead explains at length in *Adventures of Ideas*, by advancing the five essential

qualities of civilization: truth, beauty, art, adventure, and peace. If "the business of morals" is to maximize "the effect of the present on the future," (AI 269), then the ideal at which moral action should aim is best represented in these five goals of human civilization. Art, according to Whitehead, is the human capacity for valuation, which is grounded in freedom and characterized by consciousness, spontaneity, purposiveness, discipline, and joy. The goal toward which art aims is two-fold: beauty, which is the interweaving of the many feelings which constitute internally-related experience into one complex pattern exemplifying harmony and intensity; and truth, which is the conformity of this valuation to the breadth and depth of the actual world from which it emerges. Beauty captures the intrinsic importance of individuality, while truth captures the intrinsic importance of our common world and shared history, as well as the reality of God. In a world of process, the aim at truthful beauty requires adventure, which is the ongoing quest for new perfection embodying the possibility of self- and world-transformation, as well as peace, which is the gift of self-transcendence. In sum, according to Whitehead, art "heightens the sense of humanity" (AI 271).

In light of this analysis, how might one express a moral imperative to maximize importance by maximizing the elements of civilization in terms of their public significance? Lois Livezey proposes the following formulation:

> Truth is the adequate *re-presentation* of the public world, especially with respect to the depths of the reality of God and the world, so as to reveal its significance. Beauty is the adequate *appreciation* of the public world in terms of the integration of diversity into some intrinsic importance. Art, the very capacity for free and purposeful action itself, is the contribution of *complex finite value to the harmony* of the public world. Adventure is the adequate, i.e., relevant, *transformation* of the

public world. And peace is *faith* in the public world, that "fine action is treasured in the nature of things" (AI 274).[16]

This conception of the common good, Livezey goes on to say, has not only an obvious aggregative aspect, but also an implicit distributive aspect. It has something of the character of Gewirth's "equality of generic rights," which requires that all agents extend to their recipients the same rights to freedom and well being that they necessarily claim for themselves.[17] It is reasonable, therefore, to interpret the mandate to maximize importance as including a principle of universalizability to everything (including everyone) without exception. This distributive principle, Livezey concludes, also follows from the reality of a shared world and the requirements of the principle of the generality of harmony.

At the outset of his speculative work, Whitehead notes that philosophy is "the self-correction by consciousness of its own initial excess of subjectivity" (PR 15). As each actual occasion contributes to the circumstances of its origin those formative elements that deepen its own peculiarity, the selective character of the occasion tends to obscure the external totality from which it originates and which it embodies. This tendency is most pronounced at the level of the human individual, as consciousness exercises the highest grade of selectivity and "attains its individual depth of being by a selective emphasis limited to its own purposes. The task of philosophy is to recover the totality obscured by the selection" (PR 15). The selectiveness of individual human

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[16] Livezey, "Rights, Goods, and Virtues: Toward an Interpretation of Justice and Process Thought" 46.

[17] Ibid., 47. She refers to Alan Gewirth, "The Basis and Content of Human Rights," in J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman, eds., *Human Rights* Nomos XXIII (New York and London: New York University Press, 1981) 131.

experience is moral, Whitehead goes on to say, to the extent that it balances in importance the experience of the whole with the purposes of the individual.

> Morality of outlook is inseparably conjoined with generality of outlook. The antithesis between the general good and the individual interest can be abolished only when the individual is such that its interest is the general good, thus exemplifying the loss of minor intensities in order to find them again with finer composition in a wider sweep of interest (PR 15).

In other words, one cannot separate moral experiences from considerations of the environment in which moral decisions are made. Therefore, individuals must take responsibility for the kind of society and civilization—and ultimately, because fundamentally, the kind of reality—they are creating. As Thomas Auxter notes, "Whitehead is more concerned with elaborating the kind of reality in which we are implicated, and through which we define choices, than with writing a dissertation on morality as such."[18] For Whitehead, moral responsibility means taking with ultimate seriousness the process by which the indefinite is made definite. Evil holds sway when the relations among things are indeterminate and indistinct. The ultimate evil, Whitehead say, lies in the fact that "the past fades, that time is a 'perpetual perishing.' Objectification involves elimination. The present fact has not the past fact with it in any full immediacy" (PR 340).

But this need not be the case. Though it is true that the process of becoming entails loss, in that the past is present under an abstraction, there is no reason, at least of any ultimate metaphysical generality, why this should be the whole story. The

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[18] Auxter, "The Process of Morality," in *Hegel and Whitehead* 229.

process of selection can be undertaken so that there is "novelty without loss of this direct union of immediacy among things" (PR 340). The task of reason, Whitehead insists, is to "fathom the deeper depths of the many-sidedness of things" (PR 342). The greatest achievement of value occurs when the interest of an individual is aligned with the general good, to the end that the intensities of life gain a finer composition as they are coordinated with the good of others.[19]

At the microscopic level, morality, which Whitehead also describes as the specialization of interest and expression, refers to that aspect of the superjective role of the concrescence that is directed toward responsible activity that supports and enhances the quality of the environment. Goodness, therefore, is "a qualification belonging to the constitution of reality, which in any of its individual actualizations is better or worse" (AI 268). Even though the quality of a given actuality's immediate environment (that is, its past actual world) is what it is, the concrescent actuality will, by virtue of its own decision, make the ensuing environment either better or worse. Morality is concerned with the way in which an actuality controls process so as to maximize importance.

Because no change of any kind is possible except as the result of decisions made by actual entities, each entity, as a locus of creative action, has a metaphysical obligation to maximize importance. In humans, this obligation becomes what Whitehead describes as a duty: "Duty arises from our potential control over the course of events" (AE 14). The fundamental ontological fact is that actual entities do have

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[19] Concerning this sense of Whitehead's overall speculative endeavor, Auxter notes parenthetically that from one point of view, *Process and Reality* is a series of metaphysical arguments for this claim. Ibid.

decisive control of the creative process. (Again, Whitehead implies that the moral enterprise is limited to humans and perhaps some subhuman animals.) Whatever quality inheres in the environment results from their decisions; the environment is what they make it, and they constitute the environment by constituting themselves. "They are the creation of their own creature. The point to be noticed is that the actual entity, in a state of process during which it is not fully definite, determines its own ultimate definiteness. This is the whole point of moral responsibility" (PR 255).

The very fact of existence, as we have seen, depends utterly on the order that expresses the consequence of God's appetite for beauty. There is an actual world, Whitehead reminds us, because there is an order in nature. No order, then no world. This order, which is derived from the immanence of God in the world, reveals the creativity of beauty in the making. Each individual occasion is free to create its own value from the universe as given. Once the creative decision is made, however, the question of what value the occasion will be for succeeding occasions and for the beauty of the universe is settled. An entity's moral freedom is thus evaluated with respect to the contrast between what is and what might have been in the universe. A decision is judged better or worse by this standard.

The universe, by virtue of its aesthetic character, is a moral universe. Moreover, the existence of the individual is constituted by a response to an ideal that incorporates an aim beyond the individual. John Spencer summarizes the obligation of each concrescent entity to use its freedom for the better.

> The absolute obligation, then, is identical with the recognition that the value of the individual existence is that of the universe given for it, and that of its status as a value given for the universe. The obligation of the

free individual is to respond to this actual world community of which
one is both a product and a member. That is, each concrescence is the
valuing of the universe, and a value for the universe. The value for the
universe is the value for God. The obligation is therefore to participate
in the increase of value or Beauty, both receiving existence from it and
giving to it… The response is morally better or morally worse
according as it measures up to the ideal out of which it was born.[20]

Religion and philosophy play important roles in moral existence, the former by

aiming at "a generalization of final truths first perceived as exemplified in particular

instances" (RM 120), the latter by describing the ultimate structure of existence in

terms that are "disengaged from the facts of current modes of behavior" (AI 25). In

this sense, religion "stands between abstract metaphysics and the particular principles

applying to only some among the experiences of life" (RM 31) and formulates its

insights into dogmas, which aim adequately to express "that permanent side of the

universe which we can care for" (RM 120).

However, morality is not ultimately dependent on either religion or philosophy

to provide an awareness of what constitutes goodness in the world, or how to

maximize importance in a particular situation. Morality arises from an immediate

intuition of being in a world of coordinated values which can both satisfy the craving

for meaningful intensity and demand devotion to means and ends that extend beyond

the individual. "Our intuitions of righteousness disclose an absoluteness in the nature

of things, and so does the taste of a lump of sugar" (MT 121). Moral demands arise

not as products of religious revelation or philosophical inquiry, but immediately from

the apprehended character of the environment as it mediates the unity of the universe,

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[20] Spencer, "The Ethics of Alfred North Whitehead" 270.

as the individual entertains novel possibilities for constituting the universe by virtue of the immanence of the primordial nature of God as subjective aim. "It is the immanence of the Great Fact including this initial Eros and this final Beauty which constitutes the zest of self-forgetful transcendence belonging to Civilization at its height" (AI 295-6).

B. The Absolute Moral Principle

For Whitehead, the absolute moral principle can be stated simply: cooperate with the divine purpose in the creative advance. We recall that what is inexorable in God is "valuation as an aim toward 'order': and 'order' means 'society permissive of actualities with patterned intensity of feeling arising from adjusted contrasts'" (PR 244). God, in this sense, is the *sine qua non* both for sheer existence as well as for the presence of beauty and value in the universe. "Religion is the vision of something which stands beyond, behind, and within the passing flux of immediate things…something whose possession is the final good, and yet is beyond all reach; something which is the ultimate ideal, and the hopeless quest" (SMW 275). This vision, Whitehead goes on to say, presents the one purpose whose fulfillment is eternal harmony: the worship of God, which is not a rule of safety, but "an adventure of the spirit, a flight after the unattainable" (SMW 276).

The general principle that promotes the creative advance is always to choose that alternative which increases the strength, or maximizes the intensity, of experience. There are two aspects to the strength of experience: the order that makes it possible,

and the novel enjoyment that makes it actual. The two correlative dimensions of moral obligation are, respectively, order and love. Good will thus be maximized when the creation of order provides maximum opportunity for the freedom of creative enjoyment, which in turn adds again to the creative order. In addition to expressing the general purpose of God, this sense of the good also provides a universally applicable ethical principle, as well as an understanding of absolute obligation (AI 292).

As John Spencer illustrates,[21] a moral act is defined by Whitehead not in terms of legalistic obedience to some absolute principle, but in terms of the creativity of a decision made in positive response to divine persuasion. Thus, morality cannot be measured by the success of an action as measured by its consequences, nor does it depend on the actual achievement of the kind of human order and enjoyment envisioned by Whitehead. Morality lies in the steadfastness of the aim to achieve order and beauty. This cannot be an aim at being morally correct, Spencer insists, nor at being morally good. Both will lead to the type of morality that Whitehead repeatedly denounces. Rather, an act is morally good if it aims at achieving a widening pattern of general harmony and an intensifying of individual enjoyment.

To serve as the metaphysical foundation for a theory of justice, Whitehead's adventure in speculative philosophy must be able to account for the real potential for genuine alternatives in situations of moral choice, the genuine freedom of the individual subject to decide between or among the relevant alternatives, and a conception of responsibility in terms of which a specific decision can be either justified or condemned. My belief is that Whitehead's metaphysics meets all three of

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[21] Ibid., 282-90.

these criteria. In the process of concrescence, the past actual world of the individual presents certain limits which constrain the individual's freedom in the present, but within those constraints, the way in which the past constitutes the present and is thereby bequeathed to the future is decided by the individual in question. The various alternatives for decision are graded in importance by the divine in an attempt to lure the occasion toward maximizing order and beauty, and hence toward value.

The scope and complexity of the universe is such that most of these individual decisions do not appear to consciousness in the form of moral decisions. Whitehead does not state clearly that some occasions make the decision nonconsciously and others consciously, so that the latter are moral. However, his metaphysics implies that having a decision between better and worse does require self-consciousness. Hence, nonconscious occasions can only do what is best, but they do in fact determine their precise actualization of the best.

Even so, every act leaves the world with what Whitehead calls a deeper or fainter impress of the divine life. Actions that strengthen the balanced complexity of the world are better without exception, and those that weaken it are worse without exception. In either case, the responsibility for the action ultimately rests with the individual. The moral order is that aspect of the aesthetic order that is concerned with strengthening (or with the consequence of weakening) the goodness or value of the world. Moral justification, in turn, is the demonstration that an action is right: it can be shown to contribute to the enrichment of an order in the world that will maximize the intensity of the constituent individuals.

This principle of universal relativity, according to Whitehead, extends to the four creative phases in which the universe as a whole accomplishes its actuality: the phase of conceptual origination, which is deficient in actuality but infinite in adjustment of valuation; the temporal phase of physical origination, in which full actuality is attained by a multiplicity of actualities, though they are deficient in solidarity with each other; the phase of perfected actuality, in which immediacy is reconciled with objective immortality, and both individual identity and collective unity are maintained; and the fourth phase, in which "the perfected actuality passes back into the temporal world, and qualifies this world so that each temporality includes it *as an immediate fact of relevant experience*" (PR 351, emphasis added).

> We find here the final application of the doctrine of objective immortality. Throughout the perishing occasions in the life of each temporal Creature, the inward source of distaste or refreshment, the judge arising out of the very nature of things, redeemer or goddess of mischief, is the transformation of Itself, everlasting in the Being of God. In this way, the insistent craving is justified—the insistent craving that zest for existence be refreshed by the ever present, unfading importance of our immediate actions, which perish and yet live evermore (PR 351).

Elsewhere, Whitehead makes the same point in a different way. "Every scrap of our knowledge derives its meaning from the fact that we are factors in the universe, and are dependent on the universe for every detail of our experience" (ESP 101-102). However, this dependence relies upon a particular kind of relationship between the immediate facts and the universe as a whole. "The immediate facts of present action pass into permanent significance for the universe. The insistent notion of Right and Wrong, Achievement and Failure, depends upon this background. Otherwise every

activity is merely a passing whiff of insignificance" (ESP 94). Ultimately, by paying careful attention to the significance of the universe, the astute observer will be able to develop general principles that are applicable to particular situations.

> Although particular codes of morality reflect, more or less imperfectly, the special circumstances of the social structure concerned, it is natural to seek for some highly general principles underlying all such codes. Such generalities should reflect the very notions of the harmonizing of harmonies, and of particular individual actualities as the sole authentic reality. These are the principles of the generality of harmony, and of the importance of the individual. The first means 'order,' and the second means 'love' (AI 292).

Whitehead notes that there is a suggestion of opposition between these two principles, in that order is impersonal and love is personal. The antithesis can be solved by rating various types of order according to their success in promoting the strength of individual experience. The individual occasion can likewise be rated both on the intrinsic strength of its own experience and on its influence in promoting a high-grade social order. The moral code, Whitehead concludes, consists of "the behavior-patterns which in the environment for which it is designed will promote the evolution of that environment toward its proper perfection" (AI 292).

VII. JUSTICE: THE MORAL IDEAL MADE PUBLIC

We now turn to a consideration of the role Whitehead envisions the moral ideal taking in shaping the public world. For reasons we noted earlier, justice as an explicit concept does not play a role in Whitehead's thought; indeed, the term does not appear in the index of either *Process and Reality* or *Adventures of Ideas*. Nonetheless, when

Whitehead's moral ideal is applied to the public world, it establishes a principle of justice by which we can evaluate our public laws and institutions.

The two categories of existence that Whitehead says "stand out with a certain extreme finality" are actual entities and eternal objects, which represent the particulars and the universals in his metaphysical system (PR 22). Every actual entity is essentially social, in two ways. "First, the outlines of its own character are determined by the data which its environment provides for its process of feeling. Second, these data are not extrinsic to the entity; they constitute that display of the universe which is inherent in the entity" (PR 203). Thus, the data on which the subject passes judgment, Whitehead insists, are themselves components which condition—that is, constitute in part—the character of the judging subject. Any general presupposition that is drawn as to the character of the experiencing subject must also characterize the social environment that provides data for that subject.

Morality is the aim at the "union of harmony, intensity, and vividness which involves the perfection of importance for that occasion" (MT 14). It is reasonable over time, according to Whitehead, to make an inductive judgment that the kind of decisions that have demonstrably enabled the drive toward maximal satisfaction in the past, and appear to do so in the present, will likely provide the same level of satisfaction in the future. These judgments are probable and not certain, but since actual occasions will usually be more or less the same in the future as in the past, the induction seems warranted. Based on repeated experience over time, the judgments become established as principles—such as laws, for example—in terms of which the value of possible decisions in the future can be assessed. Such codifications,

Whitehead notes, "carry us beyond our own direct immediate insights. They involve the usual judgements valid for the usual occasions in that epoch. They are useful, indeed essential, for civilization. But we only weaken their influence by exaggerating their status" (MT 14).

How should the human political community be ordered such that its citizens live in an environment that is maximally suited to the achievement of harmony and intensity? As Gamwell rightly points out, Whitehead identifies democracy as a "singular achievement."[22] Whitehead further notes that novel general ideas (such as democracy) always pose a danger to an existing order, because "the whole bundle of its conceivable special embodiments in various usages of a society constitutes a program of reform" (AI 15). As long as the ideas remain "speculative suggestions in the minds of a small, gifted group," or even if written testimony arises which explains the attractiveness of the idea and how little its adoption will disturb the comforts of the society, the result of this exposure will mainly be the inoculation of the social system against "the full infection of the new principle" (AI 15). Even so, the program of reform represented by the general idea remains potent. "At any moment the smouldering unhappiness of mankind may seize on some such program and initiate a period of rapid change guided by the light of its doctrines" (AI 15).

The conception of the dignity of human nature—the "ideal of the intellectual and moral grandeur of the human soul"—was one such idea. It was a "worthy moral force" that "haunted the Mediterranean world" (AI 15). This idea had "in a way

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[22] Gamwell, *Democracy on Purpose: Justice and the Reality of God* 4. The following description of Whitehead's view of democracy follows, albeit in a more extended fashion, the summary outline Gamwell provides on pages 4-5.

transformed the moral ideas of mankind: it had readjusted religions: and yet it had failed to close with the basic weakness of the civilization in which it flourished. It was the faint light of the dawn of a new order of life" (AI 15). The appeal of the ideal of human dignity, according to Whitehead, lies in the fact that "the specialized principle of immediate conduct exemplifies the grandeur of the wider truth arising from the very nature of the order of things," a truth which humanity has developed sufficiently to be able to feel, though perhaps not yet able "to frame in fortunate expression" (AI 16).

Human life is driven forward, according to Whitehead, by the dim apprehension of notions that are initially too general even for existing language. The process of life is not, Whitehead insists, a matter of great ideas languishing until enough good people show up to put them into effect. Rather, the dimly apprehended ideal promotes "the gradual growth of the requisite communal customs, adequate to sustain the load of its exemplifications" (AI 22).

> Hence, progress is never swift and rarely sure. As the history of human sacrifice and human slavery amply demonstrate that the history of ideas is a history of mistakes: But through all mistakes it is also the history of the gradual purification of conduct. When there is progress in the development of favorable order, we find conduct protected from relapse into brutalization by the increasing agency of ideas consciously entertained. In this way Plato is justified in his saying, The creation of the world—that is to say, the world or civilized order—is the victory of persuasion over force (AI 25).

The worth of human beings, Whitehead concludes, consists of their liability to persuasion (AI 83). Civilization is the maintenance of the social order by means of its own inherent persuasiveness in embodying the nobler alternative. While the use of

force is sometimes unavoidable in human societies, it is a dependable sign that civilization has failed.

Over time, four factors decisively govern the fate of social groups, according to Whitehead (AI 85-86). One is the "inexorable law that apart from some transcendent aim the civilized life either wallows in pleasure or relapses slowly into a barren repetition with waning intensities of feeling." A second, the "iron law of nature," is that the bodily necessities of food, clothing, and shelter must be provided if the group is to thrive. The third is that the "compulsory dominion" of human beings over each other must extend only to the "barest limits" necessary for the coordination of the social welfare. Fourth, progressive societies are those that trust themselves to "the way of persuasion." Pursuits that promote the way of persuasion include family affections, intellectual curiosity, and the practice of commerce. These activities extend beyond themselves, however, into a greater bond of sympathy: "the growth of reverence for that power in virtue of which nature harbours ideal ends, and produces individuals capable of conscious discrimination of such ends" (AI 86). This reverence, which is the foundation of the respect for human beings as human, secures the liberty of thought and action that is "required for the upward adventure of life on this Earth" (AI 86).

CHAPTER FIVE

**COMPREHENSIVE COMMITMENTS AND THE PUBLIC
WORLD**

In our search to discover the appropriate role for comprehensive commitments
in a modern political community, we have seen that, according to Paul Tillich, the
search for the basic meaning of justice is part of the search for the basic meaning of all
concepts that are present in the human cognitive encounter with the world. Tillich
presupposes a world that a rational human mind can grasp by the intuition of its
essential structures, the elaboration of which is the work of ontology, which asks not
about particular beings, but about being as such, about the structures which are
presupposed in any encounter with reality, and about the character of everything that
is in so far as it is. As a principle or structural element or category of being, justice has
an ontological basis.

The ontological question, Tillich explains, presupposes an asking subject and
an object about which the question is asked, which in turn presupposes the self-world
structure as the basic articulation of being. One of the pairs of elements that constitute
this basic structure is the polarity of individualization and participation. In the
experience of this polarity under the actual conditions of existence, human beings are
aware of the unconditioned as a limit to their desire to assimilate the whole world into

their selves. This relation to the unconditioned imposes upon their sense of being a moral imperative—an ought-to-be—that provides an ontological basis for discovering how to reach the perfect form of individualization that we call human, and the perfect form of participation we call community. For Tillich, the pursuit of individuality in community provides a moral norm for human beings.

Since estrangement from the essential unity of being is the central feature of human existence, love is the reunion of the separated. The form in which love is realized in society, the structure of its presence, is justice—not simply a proportional or distributive justice, but a theonomous form of justice, which for Tillich is both creative and transforming. It involves giving to each its due, as well as also making possible through its inspiration of creative acts the reunion of the separated.

The ultimate ground and source of justice, as well as love and power, is being-itself, to which Tillich gives the name God. However, as the ground of being and the goal of existence, God can be identified neither with essence or existence. If God were simply the totality of essential being, then God could not achieve self-transcendence and fulfill the role of power of being. If God were an existing being, then God would be threatened by nonbeing. Since neither is possible, God must be beyond the distinction between essence and existence; God must be being-itself. The ground of being, Tillich insists, is not itself an instance of the ontological categories.

This separation of the nature of the ontological categories from the character of being-itself is consistent with the overall distinction Tillich draws between philosophy and theology. According to Tillich, revealed knowledge (the purview of theology) does not conflict with ordinary knowledge (the purview of philosophy) about the

structures of nature and history or about the nature of human beings and their relation to one another, because theology and philosophy are defined by different questions and thus have differing sources and norms. Because the ontological basis and content of Tillich's theory of justice is within the realm of ordinary knowledge, it is open to the scrutiny of any reasonable person. The ultimate source and ground of Tillich's theory of justice, however, is the ground of being, known only by revelation. In Tillich's view, the answers to the questions implied by human existence are contained in the revelatory events on which Christianity is based and are spoken to human existence from beyond it. Tillich insists that the content of the Christian message cannot be derived from the analysis of the structures of human existence.

As we have seen, this poses a dilemma. Either the ground of being is part of the self-world structure, in which case any reasonable person can explore answers to questions both about the mystery of existence generally (accompanied by moments of numinous astonishment) and the meaning of human life in particular. Or the ground of being is not part of the self-world structure, in which case it is not the subject of ordinary knowledge—which is the means by which we deliberate and make decisions about our individual and communal lives. What I have argued is that an understanding of the depth and ground of being as part of being, rather than apart from being, makes the ground of justice and of the moral imperative accessible to those who hold incompatible comprehensive commitments. More specifically, if God is the chief exemplification of the self-world structure, rather than the unique exception to it, then Tillich's account of justice as the moral imperative of individuality-in-community

would not only have an adequate theistic backing, it will also be accessible in contemporary contexts of pluralism.

Such an accommodation, I have suggested, is consistent with Tillich's conception of love as the ultimate ethical principle. "Love, *agape*, offers a principle of ethics that maintains an eternal, unchangeable element, but makes its realization dependent on continuous acts of creative intuition" (MB 88). Love is an unconditional command that has the power to break through all other commands, which is why it can be the solution to the question of ethics in a changing world. "*Love alone can transform itself according to the concrete demands of every individual and social situation without losing its eternity and dignity and unconditional validity*. Love can adapt itself to every phase of a changing world" (MB 89). Ethics in a changing world must be understood as the ethics of the *kairos*, the right time.

Within a context where there exists a pluralism of comprehensive views, a common pursuit of justice depends on common access to principles of justice. John Rawls's theory of justice is designed for modern constitutional democracies, which are characterized by a persistent, more or less permanent pluralism. Such societies are constituted by rational citizens engaged in seeking their own individual goods as determined by their own privately held, thus diverse and often conflicting, comprehensive schemes. According to Rawls, only a theory of justice that is both non-universal and non-teleological could be relevant to such a society. Within this context, a democratic government must discover the common ground present among its citizens. For this common ground to emerge, and for an overlapping consensus about justice to develop, Rawls maintains that the conception of justice must be separated

from all reasonable comprehensive schemes and be accepted by persons who hold those schemes.

Rawls stands firmly in the liberal tradition of political philosophy, a tradition committed to the essential understanding of human beings as free to choose their own individual conceptions of the good. He seeks to formulate principles of justice acceptable to all who affirm that a pluralism of comprehensive views should be legitimate. The challenge for such a theory is to win an overlapping consensus—not to show all the citizens involved that any idea they all share is true, but only that they have reason to accept it.

Unlike comprehensive theories, Rawls's theory does not state what justice requires in all situations, or how all of society's institutions could be organized to achieve justice. Moreover, the overlapping consensus may be achieved based on an individual's moral or religious reasons that, from a philosophical point of view, are inadequate or have been discredited. The goal is not for individuals in their roles as human beings to accept principles of justice as true, but only for them, in their roles as citizens within the political system, to accept the principles as reasonable. According to Rawls, these principles about justice can be worked out by appeal to ideas about justice that are latent within the basic political, social and economic institutions of democratic societies and stand independent of any particular comprehensive understanding of moral, religious, or philosophical values or ideals.

Even if a group of citizens reaches an overlapping consensus about justice based on their own comprehensive commitments, however, they would surely not agree that the principles of justice thus derived are wholly independent of their

commitments. I have argued that Rawls's insistence that his principles of justice are freestanding, that is, independent of the comprehensive claims that constitute the overlapping consensus, cannot be supported. A theory of justice established independent of an ontological basis ultimately involves the denial of comprehensive claims generally.

The thesis of this dissertation is that Alfred North Whitehead's metaphysics extends Tillich's ontological basis for a theory of justice, the principles of which thereby legitimate, as does Rawls, a plurality of comprehensive views. In other words, Whitehead's thought helps to articulate a conception of justice that is both ontologically established and relevant to modern situations of pluralism. As we have described in some detail, the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead is based upon his belief that the human experience of the world is both trustworthy and revelatory; the nature of the world and our experience of it can be known and described by human reason. We have seen that for Whitehead freedom is a strictly universal principle that serves as a basis for understanding the context within which human beings can flourish.

We noted in chapter 4 that Whitehead's conception of God is similar, in many ways, to that of Tillich. For both Tillich and Whitehead, the actuality of God is conceived as being, as living, as creating, and as related. With respect to the first of these specifications, of course, Tillich insists that God is not a being in the usual sense, but being-itself, or the ground of being. In this sense, Tillich's God is the sole exception to the ontological rule. We examined in some detail the basis of this claim, as well as its implications both for the divine role in the life of creation generally and

for a conception of justice in particular. It is clear, however, that if Tillich's exception

to the ontological rule were waived, his understanding of the role of the divine,

especially as it relates to the ground of justice and the source of the moral imperative,

would be substantially the same as that of Whitehead. For both thinkers, the divine life

is the source of both creativity and of confidence in the ultimate goodness of creation.

In this chapter, we will recall in summary fashion what we have concluded

about the relationship between individuals and the public world. While the world

necessarily provides for the individuals the constituent elements of their experiences

of value, in so doing it enables diverse ways of understanding the experience of value

itself. These diverse understandings of the value of the public world, in turn, form the

basis of an individual's comprehensive commitments, which, because they are

commitments, have a private origin, but because they are comprehensive, have a

public trajectory. Comprehensive commitments are the motive force behind an

individual's engagement in the public world.

In this situation, what does justice require? That is, what principles adequately

enable yet appropriately limit the interplay of often incompatible comprehensive

commitments in the public world? We shall conclude that justice requires freedom, so

that the political context in which comprehensive commitments attempt to fulfill

themselves is an extension of the ontological reality that enabled them to form in the

first place. Justice also requires faith—both a faith that affirms the reality and

trustworthiness of our experience, as well a faith that articulates our comprehensive

commitments and thereby expresses our political purpose. Finally, justice requires that

persuasion be the principal means of adjudicating the interplay of incompatible

comprehensive commitments in the public world. Religion, in order to fulfill this mandate, must be rational—not in the sense that it can or should explain the ground of its comprehensive commitments on the basis of ordinary knowledge, but in the sense that it can, in publicly accessible terms, justify its political purposes.

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE PUBLIC WORLD

We recall that for both Tillich and Whitehead, the interplay between the self and its world is the fundamental source of meaning for the individual. As Tillich states, each individual can know what the experience of the natural world means to him- or herself, but no one can know what the behavior of other human beings means to them. Which is why one can only begin with the self—not the self in isolation from the world of which it is part, but the self with an immediate experience of that world.

The self to which Tillich refers in the self-world polarity refers neither to the human mind or ego but to an individual—be it an individual human being, a non-human organic being such as an animal, or even, by analogy, something which is part of the inorganic realm, such as an atom (I 169). What sets one self apart from all other selves is the simple fact that each is distinct from everything else in the universe. The issue, as Tillich puts it, is not whether selves exist. Rather, the issue is our awareness as human selves of self-relatedness, which is an original phenomenon that both logically and temporally precedes all questions of existence, one in which the contrast between a subjective self and an objective world is not yet apparent. In this experience of self-relatedness, there is only an awareness of an experience of a self as having a

world to which the self belongs. It is in this awareness that human beings experience directly and immediately the structure of being and its elements (I 169).

Like Tillich, Whitehead emphasizes that what he calls actual entities are not substances or objects, but subjects, which is to say that they are experiences; in the most fundamental sense, they are constituted by what they feel, or prehend. "There is nothing in the real world which is merely an inert fact. Every reality is there for feeling: it promotes feeling; and it is felt" (PR 310). The relation is not external to the fact of what the occasion is in itself; the relation—the prehension—is the constitutive element. Also, Whitehead continues, "there is nothing which belongs merely to the privacy of feeling of one individual actuality. All origination is private. But what has been thus originated, publicly pervades the world" (PR 310).

Because Whitehead's starting point is the experience of differentiation in existence, he insists that we are one among others, and all are part of the unity of the whole. "The universe is thus a creative advance into novelty" (PR 222). This perception has emotional import; it is an experience of value. "Our experience of actuality is a realization of worth, good or bad. It is a value experience. Its basic expression is—Have a care, here is something that matters! Yes!—that is the best phrase—the primary glimmering of consciousness reveals, something that matters" (MT 116). At the base of our existence, Whitehead says, is the sense of worth—the sense that something is worthy or has intrinsic value. "It is the sense of existence for its own sake, of existence which is its own justification, of existence with its own character" (MT 109).

In his volume titled *Power, Value and Conviction: Theological Ethics in the Postmodern Age*, William Schweiker notes that "The most pressing and basic question of life is the question of the goodness of existence. That is, it is the connection between being and value, existence and goodness, that matters most to us."[1] He adds that we live in a moral space—a moral world. Human worlds are constituted and shaped by convictions about what is worthy of human striving. Thus a moral ontology "seeks to examine the space of life, the moral world we inhabit, in order to judge the values and norms used to orient our lives."[2] In other words, as Schweiker concludes, moral values denote a relation between moral agents and their world.[3]

Tillich describes this relation as the basis of the moral imperative: our human experience of an obligation to become actually what we are essentially and, therefore, potentially. For Tillich, any act in which a human being actualizes his or her essential centeredness is a moral act. Morality is not concerned with obeying divine or human laws, but with "the function of life in which the centered self constitutes itself as a person; it is the totality of those acts in which a potentially personal life process becomes an actual person" (III 38). The first presupposition of this conception of morality is the potentially total centeredness of the one whose life is actualized under the dimension of spirit, which means having at the same time, face to face with the self, a world to which the self belongs as a part. Human beings live in an environment, but they have a world—a structured whole of infinite potentialities. Because humans

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[1] William Schweiker, *Power, Value, and Conviction: Theological Ethics in the Postmodern Age* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1998).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

transcend the merely environmental quality of their surroundings, they have the potential to be completely centered.

The second presupposition of morality for Tillich is that, because human beings have a world that they face as totally centered selves, they can ask questions and receive answers and commands. This implies both a freedom from the merely given environment in which they exist, and a freedom for the norms that determine the moral act through freedom. "These norms express the essential structure of reality, of self and world, over against the existential conditions of mere environment" (III 39). Freedom, in other words, is the openness to norms of unconditional validity that express the essence of being, but freedom is also the ability to respond to those norms, an ability which makes the individual responsible.

Whitehead concurs that, as he puts it, morality arises from an immediate intuition of being in a world of coordinated values which can both satisfy the craving for meaningful intensity and demand devotion to means and ends that extend beyond the individual. "Our intuitions of righteousness disclose an absoluteness in the nature of things" (MT 121). Moral demands arise not as products of religious revelation or philosophical inquiry, but immediately from the apprehended character of the environment as it mediates the unity of the universe, as the individual entertains novel possibilities for constituting the universe.

The problem, of course, is that each individual constitutes the universe in a different way, and thus apprehends differently the norms that express the essential structure of reality. Schweiker states the matter succinctly: "If human life is set on edge by questions about existence and worth, our planet will be home to as many

'moral worlds' as there are moral belief systems."[4] The challenge in the modern world is that "we can no longer hold that every culture is at root a manifestation of the same human spirit, or even that all of the spheres of culture can be decoded in order to understand the working of spirit. Questions of diversity and pluralism strike at the root of human life itself; they must be addressed without the a priori assumption that a human 'unity' undergirds all civilization."[5] The real differences posed by diverse moral worlds must be interpreted and compared, not merely decoded, according to Schweiker. "This does not necessarily entail radical moral relativism or demand that diversity as such is inherently good; it means, rather, that the continuities in human life and among cultures are intertwined with dimensions of existence that foster and preserve diversity."[6]

With respect to how individuals confront these issues, Charles England argues that a formal convergence appears in the thought of Tillich and Whitehead concerning the notions of power and value, and of freedom and responsibility.[7] Human beings, on this reading, have the power to act in pursuit of certain values; the freedom with which they do so is directly proportionate to their responsibility for the outcome. But the context within which the individual dimensions of both power and value are defined, as well as of freedom and responsibility, is the presence of an ultimate end or final good toward which both individual and communal action should be directed. This true

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] England, "Power and Value: A Study of Two Views of Responsibility" 83ff.

good can be defined in terms of a concept such as theonomy (Tillich) or civilization (Whitehead), but in either case it conveys the conviction that what characterizes existence generally and sets the terms for human development is the value present in the nature of things. The acknowledgement of this fact is the first step toward developing personal allegiances and public institutions that are based on a true understanding of the ultimate good for every person and all institutions. "For in terms of these forms of knowledge all advance or degradation is measured and all basic interpretations of the present situation are made. In view of the ultimate good, responsibility may be ascribed; on the basis of true understanding of nature or history, correct imputations of causality can be made."[8]

The question for any human community, as well as for the individuals that make it up, is how to achieve this understanding. We have noted that for Whitehead, morality does not ultimately depend on either religion or philosophy to provide an awareness of what constitutes goodness or how to maximize importance. Morality arises from an immediate intuition of being in a world of coordinated values which can both satisfy the craving for meaningful intensity and demand devotion to means and ends that extend beyond the individual. Moral demands arise from the apprehended character of the environment as it mediates the unity of the universe—as the individual entertains novel possibilities for constituting the universe. The general moral principle that reflects this ultimate character of the universe is always to choose that alternative which increases the strength, or maximizes the intensity, of experience. There are two aspects to the strength of experience: the order that makes it possible,

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[8] Ibid., 97.

and the novel enjoyment that makes it actual. The two correlative dimensions of moral obligation are, respectively, order and love. The good will thus be maximized when the creation of order provides maximum opportunity for the freedom of creative enjoyment, which in turn adds again to the creative order.

II. THE NATURE OF COMPREHENSIVE COMMITMENTS

We have seen that the public world provides the constituent elements of value experiences for individuals but also enables diverse ways of understanding the experience of value itself. These diverse understandings of the value of the public world for an individual's experience, in turn, form the basis of the individual's comprehensive commitments, which, because they are commitments, have a private origin, but because they are comprehensive, have a public trajectory. Comprehensive commitments are the motive force behind an individual's engagement in the public world.

This is the crux of the matter, given that this dissertation emerged from the conviction that a theory of justice should have a comprehensive basis, but should also be relevant to modern societies that legitimate a plurality of comprehensive views. To suggest that justice should have a comprehensive basis, however, is to make a claim most contemporary thinkers view as either unwise or dangerous, or both. Nevertheless, comprehensive claims are precisely that: all-encompassing. I have argued that such claims cannot be limited to one's private life alone, and indeed can legitimately be limited only by something like the proviso that the actions of one

individual based on his or her beliefs do not impede the ability of other people to exercise their beliefs. This limitation, in other words, does not exclude from the political or public realm actions based on religious conviction.

As we have noted previously, the most obvious feature of comprehensive commitments is that they are commitments made (whether consciously or not) by individuals, and these commitments extend to include, as well as to define the meaning of, everything. As such, the individuals who hold them are understandably reticent to set the commitments aside, even in situations where their presence is troublesome.

Simply put, religion is the domain of comprehensive claims, of the matters everybody cares the most about, of the things about which human being are unconditionally concerned. As such, religion is the source of political purpose—the domain wherein individuals discover their own sense of the *telos* of their individual lives and, by implication and extension, human history. People will inevitably disagree about these matters, of course, hence the importance of democracy in both its enabling and its limiting roles, and of persuasion as a means of political accommodation. Nonetheless, individuals discover the purpose toward which they move within the domain of comprehensive claims, which is the realm of religion. Religion seeks to identify the things about which human beings ought to be unconditionally concerned, and thus to delineate the most general terms that should inform or be applied to all particular situations.

In a modern democratic society in which citizens hold divergent and often incompatible comprehensive views, it is sometimes tempting to try to bracket such

convictions in order to secure social cooperation based on mutual respect. However, this approach fails when confronted by the fundamental claims themselves. As Lincoln responded in his debate with Douglas about whether to bracket moral controversy concerning slavery for the sake of political agreement, "Is it not false statesmanship that undertakes to build up a system of policy upon the basis of caring nothing about the very thing that everybody cares the most about?"[9] What individuals care about most deeply they also care about most comprehensively, and this is as it should be. Experiences of value that emerge from an individual's encounter with the public world lead to certain conclusions about the world and how it is and should be constituted. But, again, not everyone will agree on these matters, which is precisely why justice plays a critical mediating role.

III. WHAT JUSTICE REQUIRES

In a situation of pluralism, what does justice require? What principles adequately enable yet appropriately limit the interplay of incompatible comprehensive commitments in the public world? Justice in the public world requires freedom, so that the political context in which comprehensive commitments attempt to fulfill themselves is an extension of the ontological reality that enabled them to form in the first place. Justice also requires faith—both a faith that affirms the reality and trustworthiness of our experience of this world we share with others, as well a faith that articulates our comprehensive commitments and thereby expresses our political

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[9] Angle, p. 389 in Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* 201.

purpose. Finally, justice requires that persuasion be the principal means of adjudicating the interplay of incompatible comprehensive commitments in the public world. Religion, in order to fulfill this mandate, must be rational: it must be able in publicly accessible terms to justify its political purposes.

A. Freedom

I have argued, in full agreement with both Tillich and Whitehead, though partially contra Rawls, that because freedom is an ontological reality, it is also a political necessity. Recall that Tillich views the centered self as a whole made up of parts that were causally determined by earlier events and circumstances. These constituent parts are subject to the influence of the centered self as a whole. The freedom of the self is the freedom to modify the force and outcome of the parts, albeit within the limitations imposed by whatever desires and motives come together in the self. In other words, the whole that makes up the self is not simply the aggregate of its causally determined parts. The self has the power to influence how these parts affect the self as a whole, and this power constitutes what Tillich understands as the freedom of the self.

Put differently, the moral law is our essential nature expressed as an imperative. The moral imperative demands that the self use its freedom to become actually what it is essentially and therefore potentially: a person in a community of persons. Within that context, each person must find a balance between resisting social

conformity in order to preserve the individual freedom and recognizing that the true character of a person as such can only be formed in community.

We also noted Rawls's idea that "a well-ordered democratic society is neither a community nor, more generally, an association" (PL 40). Rather, a community is "a special kind of association, one united by a comprehensive doctrine, for example, a church" (PL 40n). Even so, what lies at the heart of Rawls's understanding of a shared political life—a union of social unions, as he puts it—is the freedom of each citizen to choose his or her own individual conceptions of the good. The political order must, at virtually any cost, safeguard this freedom.

Whitehead affirms freedom's central role when he observes that every final actuality (or final real thing) is an instance of self-creative process. This means that nothing can wholly determine the being of something else; thus, freedom is a strictly universal principle. We also recall Whitehead's assertion that a fully human actuality is an active subject of process, not merely a passive object. Moreover, human actualities have the potential for greater value or importance insofar as the world to which they relate gives them greater freedom. This is the ontological ground for Whitehead's conception of individuality and community.

The opportunities that are present for an individual in a particular situation, according to Whitehead, can only emerge within an environment that provides not only a stable social order, but also respects the value of each individual's freedom to grow and develop.

> A stable order is necessary, but it is not enough. There must be
> satisfaction for the purposes that are inherent in human life.
> Undoubtedly the first essential requirement is the satisfaction of the

necessities of bodily life—food, clothing, shelter. These economic factors are dominant up to the level of moderate enjoyment. They then almost suddenly become the mere background for those experiences which form the distinction between mankind and the animal world. It is the imaginative originality in mankind that produces ideals, good or bad. We live guided by a variety of impulses—towards loving relationship, towards friendship, towards other types of enjoyment such as games, art, ideals of mutual enterprise, and ideals disclosing some sense of immortality. This intimate development of human experience enters into political theory as respect for each individual life. It demands a social structure supplying freedom and opportunity for the realization of objectives beyond simple bodily cravings (AESP 55).

However else they may view the public world in different ways, Tillich, Rawls, and Whitehead agree that justice is best pursued through a political process in which all are free and equal, namely, a democratic system. For Rawls, this is the only way to legitimate a diversity of comprehensive doctrines. For Tillich and Whitehead, democracy is required because a community is best when it maximizes the freedom of all, and individuals make the most of their opportunities when they seek to contribute to such a community. For Tillich, this constitutes the moral imperative to become a person in a community of persons. But this understanding of what makes the community best cannot itself be one all citizens must explicitly accept precisely because, as I will discuss further in a moment, that understanding endorses freedom or democracy and, therefore, the way of persuasion. Hence, this view also provides the proper context in which Rawls's concern for the democratic legitimization of diverse comprehensive doctrines can be coherently endorsed. In sum, the basis of a democratic political order is the freedom of the individual or citizen.

Whitehead goes on to classify both historic and contemporary forms of government in terms of how each conceives of freedom as related to relevant

opportunities for individuals within the society. As we noted earlier, the decisive shift from political barbarism to civilized political governance came in the transition from societies based on the presupposition of slavery to societies based on the presupposition of individual freedom. In theoretical terms, this shift was marked by the acceptance of the dignity of human nature as a premise of political interpretation. This dignity was articulated in terms of essential human rights, conceived as arising from sheer humanity, secured by laws applying equally to rulers and the governed, and achieved by the people freely organizing themselves. In practical terms, this transition occurred in western political history in a gradual progression from slavery to serfdom, then to feudalism, then to aristocracy, then to legal equality, and finally to what Whitehead calls "careers effectively open to talent" (AI 20).

The point of fulcrum in this transition was always the question of citizenship. The ancients conferred upon only a few members of society the freedom of self-rule and the right to avail themselves of relevant opportunities. Civilized societies are marked by the extension of the benefits of citizenship to the entire population. The political form wherein, at least in theory, every person is a citizen, and in which all citizens have the freedom to participate in self-rule and the right to avail themselves of relevant opportunities, is, of course, democracy. The distinctive mark of democracy is that the people rule themselves in their own interest; no one is excluded from the rule of law or from participating as part of the self-governing citizenry. True democracy is one in which free men and women obey laws they themselves have made. Once a society has become civilized by repudiating slavery, the mechanism of advance is the ability of the society to cultivate the intrinsic possibilities of human character.

Within the general category of civilized political forms, Whitehead further distinguishes between governments which emphasize individual absoluteness, and thus focus on the personal freedom and welfare of individuals, and those which emphasize individual relativity, and thus focus on the dependence of individuals upon the state as well as the welfare of society as a whole (AI 43). In affirming democracy—the self-organization of the people—as the best form of government, Whitehead answers the question of whether one, some, or many should rule. Within the scope of true democracy, Whitehead maintains that concrete freedom is advanced by the respect for human beings as human, by the extension of reason in philosophic understanding, and by the extension of institutions that are open to everyone.

B. Faith

In a context where individuals disagree profoundly about fundamental issues, justice also requires faith that each individual's experience of the world be trustworthy. Based on these experiences, each person develops certain beliefs about the nature and meaning of our existence. These comprehensive commitments constitute a particular way of interpreting the telos of life, and our lives, albeit private, become the source of the purpose in terms of which we engage other human beings in the public world. Our comprehensive commitments, in other words, become our political purpose.

For Tillich, philosophy examines our world by means of an exercise in ontology, which deals with the structure of being in itself and undertakes an

ontological analysis of that structure. In Tillich's words, philosophy is *"that cognitive approach to reality in which reality as such is the object"* (I 18). Reality as such, Tillich goes on to explain, is not the whole of reality but the structure which makes reality a whole and thus a potential object of knowledge. These structures, along with the related categories and concepts, are presupposed in the cognitive encounter with every realm of reality. The philosopher's attitude is appropriately impartial:

> The philosopher tries to maintain a detached objectivity toward being and its structures. He tries to exclude the personal, social, and historical conditions which might distort an objective vision of reality. His passion is the passion for a truth which is open to general approach, subject to general criticism, changeable in accordance with every new insight, open and communicable (I 22).

Whitehead's endeavor to set forth a system of speculative philosophy is also based upon his faith that there is an ultimate nature of things, and that this nature of things can be known and described by human reason. More precisely, Whitehead believes that the nature of things will reveal an ultimate unity such that all elements of reality are part of the unity. As Whitehead puts it, the hope is that "we fail to find in experience any element intrinsically incapable of exhibition as examples of general theory" (PR 42). This hope, he adds, is not "a metaphysical premise" but rather "the faith which forms the motive for the pursuit of all sciences alike, including metaphysics" (PR 42). The basis of this hope is faith in what Whitehead calls "the rationality of things" and the "ultimate moral intuition into the nature of intellectual action."

The faith that Whitehead claims is, simply put, the faith that the human experience of the world is both trustworthy and revelatory: the experience actually is

what there actually is. Though our apprehension may at times (even often) be imperfect, our faith in reason keeps us from losing hope, because "the faith does not embody a premise from which the theory starts; it is an ideal which is seeking satisfaction. In so far as we believe that doctrine, we are rationalists" (PR 42). In a direct reference to the mathematical substrate of his work as a philosopher, Whitehead writes that "philosophy is akin to poetry, and both of them seek to express that ultimate good sense which we term civilization. In each case there is reference to form beyond the direct meanings of words. Poetry allies itself to metre, philosophy to mathematical pattern" (MT 174)

Whitehead recognizes that the experience in which we place our faith is necessarily individual. But when he says that "religion is what the individual does with his solitariness," what he means is not that religion is a strictly private matter. Rather, religion in its normative sense is the thoughtful reflection from the standpoint of generality, motivated by the lure of, and hence the passion for, the general good: "Religion is the translation of general ideas into particular thoughts, particular emotions, and particular purposes; it is directed to the end of stretching individual interest beyond its self-defeating particularity" (PR 15). As Whitehead demonstrates, what individuals have in common is a sense of being part of one whole, the relation to which each understands or comprehends in a different way. He explains that religion is founded on the concurrence of three related concepts in one moment of self-consciousness—"concepts whose separate relationships to fact and whose mutual relations to each other are only to be settled jointly by some direct intuition into the ultimate character of the universe" (RM 58). These concepts are the value of an

individual for itself, the value of the diverse individuals of the world for each other, and the value of the objective world, which is "a community derivative from the interrelations of its component individuals, and also necessary for the existence of each of these individuals" (RM 58).

Though the solitariness of religion is fundamental, according to Whitehead, there is only one common world shared by the individuals that constitute it. "In its solitariness the spirit asks, What, in the way of value, is the attainment of life? And it can find no such value till it has merged its individual claim with that of the objective universe" (RM 59). When this happens, it becomes clear that, as Whitehead simply puts it, "Religion is world-loyalty" (RM 59). Livezey describes the nature of world-loyalty in the following way:

> Thus, the religion of world-loyalty is characterized not by a preoccupation with self-preservation but by a self-transcending valuation for others and for the whole, the love of humankind and allkind as such, the generality of harmony. And, here as elsewhere, the standpoint of generality and the introduction of novelty traffic together, for the religion of world-loyalty requires a loyalty not to the world as it is but to the world as it might be.[10]

In so concluding, Livezey reinforces the import of Whitehead's insistence that "every scrap of our knowledge derives its meaning from the fact that we are factors in the universe, and are dependent on the universe for every detail of our experience" (ESP 101-102). This is a more general way of stating that "the insistent notion of Right and Wrong, Achievement and Failure, depends upon this background.

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[10] Livezey, "Rights, Goods, and Virtues: Toward an Interpretation of Justice and Process Thought" 56.

Otherwise every activity is merely a passing whiff of insignificance" (ESP 94).

Whitehead summarizes the situation in the following way:

> The actual world, the world of experiencing, and of thinking, and of physical activity, is a community of many diverse entities; and these entities contribute to, or derogate from, the common value of the total community. At the same time, these entities are, for themselves, their own value, individual and separable. They add to the common stock, yet they suffer alone. The world is a scene of solitariness in community (RM 86).

When the individual places its creative adventure in the service of an aim beyond itself, it participates in the *telos* of divine creativity: the source in the nature of things of all importance and goodness. "In this way God is completed by the individual, fluent satisfactions of finite fact, and the temporal occasions are completed by their everlasting union with their transformed selves, purged into conformation with the eternal order which is the final absolute 'wisdom'" (PR 347). The devotion of the individual, in this case, is to the ultimate order of divine goodness, which accepts the individual's creative contribution and returns to the individual the full intensity of the ordered importance. As Whitehead put it, the divine is "that element in virtue of which our purposes extend beyond values for ourselves to values for others…that element in virtue of which the attainment of such a value for others transforms itself into a value for ourselves" (RM 152).

Surely a thoroughgoing reverence for the value of this relationship, and a sense of our individual duty in light of it, lies at the foundation of a strong political order. "Where attainable knowledge could have changed the issue, ignorance has the guilt of vice. And the foundation of reverence is this perception, that the present holds within

itself the complete sum of existence, backwards and forwards, that whole amplitude of time, which is eternity" (AE 14).

C. Persuasion

As Rawls and other have noted at length, the interplay of incompatible comprehensive commitments is a signal feature of the modern world. For all who are actors on the political stage, therefore, their political purposes are driven by their ultimate concerns. Since, presumably, these differing views can be articulated by the use of reason and modified through the use of persuasion, persuasion can help adjudicate among competing claims. The goal is to provide a means by which democracy can accommodate religious plurality. The presence of a plurality of religions, in other words, is the result of the presence of various ways of expressing what people take to be adequate general ideas. Since persuasion can operate in such a society, it can provide the means whereby incompatible comprehensive commitments can interrelate.

For his part, Whitehead suggests that civilization involves both the triumph of persuasion over force and the extension of liberty in the realms of human thought and action. Persuasion and liberty, however, are contingent on what Whitehead calls the "fortunate adjustment" of the human character in society, as well as on the basic respect for human beings as human, which is grounded in reverence for the divine. Men and women have a duty to advance civilization, and the experience of this duty, which derives from the freedom of human beings to control events, is part of the

concept of civilization as the highest ideal for human living. Love and order, which Whitehead terms the ultimate criteria of moral responsibility, are principles which guide choice and action toward civilized attainment, and they require both the adjustment and the transformation of institutions to distribute influence more adequately and to improve opportunities for achieving higher values.

What this dissertation seeks to advocate is what Franklin Gamwell calls "a comprehensive teleology that can be redeemed by argument."[11] At the outset of *Modes of Thought*, Whitehead distinguishes two modes of philosophy. The first is the criticism of generality by methods derived from the specialization of science, which yields a mode of philosophy Whitehead calls systematization. It applies elements of the scientific and sociological disciplines in order to test the coherence of the internal structures and external purposes of everyday life.

However, Whitehead goes on to say, something more is needed as well. A great society is one in which people not only conduct their lives, but reflect on what they are doing when they conduct their lives. "This extra endowment can only be described as a philosophic power of understanding the complex flux of the varieties of human societies" (AI 97). This endowment constitutes the second mode of philosophy, which also concerns notions of large, adequate generality, but focused more broadly on what Whitehead calls civilization. Civilized beings, he says, "are those who survey the world with some large generality of understanding" (MT 4). The reflective power of surveying society from this standpoint is "an unspecialized aptitude for eliciting generalizations from particulars and for seeing the divergent

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[11] Gamwell, *Democracy on Purpose: Justice and the Reality of God* 7.

illustrations of generalities in diverse circumstances" (AI 97). This habit of general

thought is the gift of philosophy, in the widest sense of that term.

Whitehead believes, as did Plato, that "there can be no successful democratic

society till general education conveys a philosophic outlook" (AI 98). Philosophy, in

this context, is not "a ferocious debate between irritable professors" (AI 98). Rather, it

is a survey of possibilities and their comparison with actualities. "In philosophy, the

fact, the theory, the alternatives, and the ideal, are weighed together. Its gifts are

insight and foresight, and a sense of the worth of life, in short, that sense of

importance which nerves all civilized effort" (AI 98). In this sense, philosophy is the

duty not just of a few specialists but also of all citizens. "It is our business—

philosophers, students, and practical men—to recreate and reenact a vision of the

world, including those elements of reverence and order without which society lapses

into riot, and penetrated through and through with unflinching rationality" (AI 99).

This vision, Whitehead believes, will provide a "properly concrete philosophy in

guiding the purposes of mankind" (AI 99).

In other words, the philosophic mode of thought (one appropriate to a moral

commitment) requires a standpoint of generality that is nonetheless informed by

history and appreciative of the distinctive elements of particular human experiences.

Whitehead's concept of civilization—defined by the qualities of truth, beauty, art,

adventure, and peace—specifies this standpoint with respect to the ideals that have yet

to be realized and the perfections that have yet to be attained in a particular context of

experience. The something more which is needed, Lois Livezey argues, is "a principle

of interpretation of the facts of the situation, that is, the values and structures which

constitute and organize the actual world of our life together, including the good and evil there exemplified—the issue at stake in the situation."[12]

Livezey proposes that assemblage—Whitehead's term for the philosophic habit requisite to democratic citizenship—itself requires clarification and specification by whatever issue is at stake in the situation. In what Livezey calls the politics of moral persuasion, the philosopher king gives way to common citizens, and the public realm becomes subject to public discourse. The *raison d'être* of persuasion is not the avoidance or resolution of conflict, but the ideals whose realization in an occasion or group of occasions will create, preserve, and transform the world. "In mutual persuasion, then, a public world is created which rests not only on the instinctual or emotional basis of community, but on thought, the imaginative consideration of relevant ideals (assemblage), which transforms the emotional basis of community into *love of the world*.[13]

In a democratic society, the relationship between comprehensive views and the public order is often played out in practical terms as the role of religion. More specifically, the question often posed to religion in the public world is whether its claims are rational. Whitehead maintains that religion is rational in the sense that any religion purports to represent in symbols and practices the telos of the universe, and a true religion represents that telos truly. "Rational religion is religion whose beliefs and rituals have been reorganized with the aim of making it the central element in a

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[12] Livezey, "Rights, Goods, and Virtues: Toward an Interpretation of Justice and Process Thought" 53-54.

[13] Ibid., 55.

coherent ordering of life—an ordering which shall be coherent both in respect to the elucidation of thought, and in respect to the direction of conduct toward a unified purpose commanding ethical approval" (RM 30). Given that this is the case, there are no grounds for excluding religions from the public sphere, because whatever differences they may have among themselves about the proper answer to the comprehensive question can be the object of discussion and debate.

Put differently, justice is the means by which various individuals, each of whom has developed a "unified purpose commanding ethical approval," accommodate themselves to the demands of becoming, as Tillich put it, a person in a community of persons. The demands of these internal relations are pervasive: "Every ethical commandment is an expression of man's essential relation to himself, to others, and to the universe. This alone makes it obligatory and its denial self-destructive" (III 46). For this reason, Tillich recognized the dialogic character of all ethical considerations: "Theonomous ethics in the full sense of the phrase, therefore, is ethics in which, under the impact of the Spiritual Presence, the religious substance—the experience of an ultimate concern—is consciously expressed through the process of free arguing and not through an attempt to determine it" (III 267).

In the end, therefore, Tillich believed that the appropriate means of acknowledging the care with which the mutually implicative array of human purposes must be coordinated is to use the language of love. "Love alone can transform itself according to the concrete demands of every individual and social situation without losing its eternity and dignity and unconditional validity. Love can adapt itself to every phase of a changing world" (MB 89). As we have previously noted, Whitehead

expresses much the same conviction when he described the way in which human activities extend beyond themselves into ever greater bonds of sympathy as "the growth of reverence for that power in virtue of which nature harbours ideal ends, and produces individuals capable of conscious discrimination of such ends" (AI 86). This reverence, which is the foundation of the respect for human beings as human, secures the liberty of thought and action that is "required for the upward adventure of life on this Earth" (AI 86).

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