

## **The Centrality of God in the Process Metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead: A Critique of the Post-Deistic Era**

By

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### **Abstract**

Since the time Nietzsche declared the death of God, while Auguste Comte postulated in the Law of Three Stages that humankind had gone past the religious/mythical stage as well as the metaphysical/speculative stage and was now living in the positive/scientific stage, there has been the consistent institutionalization of atheism and secularism. The early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw Freud's publication of the *Future of an Illusion* in which he predicted that as science continues to advance, religion will become obsolete. The logical positivist too lumped up metaphysical and religious propositions as meaningless and nonsensical. It is within this atmosphere that Alfred North Whitehead comes into philosophy. The main question that this paper seeks to answer is: Why does the concept of God occupy an eminent place in Whitehead's system when all his contemporaries consider God a hypothesis they no longer needed as Laplace had earlier maintained? Of great interest here is the fact that before 1925 Whitehead's writings had no concern for God. However, in his 1925 *Science and the Modern World*, the chapter on "Abstractions" required that there be such an explanatory factor, reason for which it is immediately followed by the chapter on "God". The last part of his *Process and Reality* treats elaborately the nature of the relationship between God and the world. This paper explores the reasons why Whitehead places a lot of interest on God and the role that this God plays in his system.

**Key Words:** *God, Creativity, atheism, post-deistic, Process Metaphysics, aesthetics*

### **I. Introduction**

In his *African Religions and Philosophy*, Mbiti (1969: p. 1) holds that "Africans are notoriously religious." These words paint the picture of Africa flourishing with ancient religious traditions and rituals, with Islam dominating huge areas of the African continent, with Christians in their first fervor filling churches to overflowing, and with new religious movements proliferating everywhere (Aylward & Onyanha 1997). As such, cultural values revolve around religious beliefs and the concept of God, reason why most of the norms

and laws are acceptable to the people. Igboin (2011: p. 96) argues that it “is a fact that in African traditional belief, God is the explanation of all things. The world was created by him. The Africans therefore believe that the environment is knitted to the presence of God.” For Mbiti (1969: p. 119), “God is the explanation of man’s origin and sustenance; it is as if God exists for the sake of man.” God’s agents are charged with the responsibility of maintaining law and order in the society. Thus, both physical and supernatural forces are always present in the administration of the society (Igboin 2011).

This concept of God is, therefore, vital to the worldview of the traditional African since God permeates every facet of the African universe. This was the case in the western worldview before the advent of secularism. When we page through the history of philosophy we realise that metaphysical investigations of God have preoccupied Western philosophers from Aristotle through Plotinus to St Augustine, St Anselm, St Thomas Aquinas, Don Scotus, Descartes, and others, who have provided a plurality of arguments to prove the existence of an Absolute Being.

From the Enlightenment, religion started losing taste among Western thinkers, here we think of Hume, Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and others. This led to the rise and proliferation of secularism as McTernan explains:

*The ‘secularization thesis’ that dominates contemporary Western political thinking is based on the premises that the decline in religion is an irreversible process. The enlightenment, the secularists argue, challenged the old religious certainties, making science the new paradigm of understanding the world. Religion lingers on as a comforting myth for those who need support in times of personal crisis but having been relegated from the mainstream to the backwaters it has ceased to have any impact on the social or political life in modern society. Religion therefore is seen as an ‘epiphenomenon’ - it represents something other than what it appears to be – and as such, they maintain, it has no real role in shaping a new international order (McTernan 2008: pp. 12-13).*

Within such an atmosphere, religion is seen to be clung to only by those who cannot see the arguments against it or are so clever that they can make up apparently true, but in reality false, arguments for why they continue to believe (Habgood 1972). This attitude towards religion means that God no longer needed in the western society. Ludwig Feuerbach expresses it thus:

*In place of the love of God, we ought to acknowledge the love of man as the only true religion. In place of belief in God, we ought to expand man’s belief in himself, in his own strength; the belief that humanity’s destiny is dependent not on a being higher than humanity itself, that man’s only demon is man himself – the primitive man, superstitious, egoistic evil, but that similarly man’s only God is man himself (Feuerbach 1957: p. 31).*

The 20<sup>th</sup> century exemplifies the greatest attempt to displace God from all human activities. It stands out as the most secularized, with the highest number of openly proclaimed atheists. It is within this 20<sup>th</sup> century scientific atmosphere that Alfred North Whitehead gets into philosophy. Unlike his contemporaries,

he devoted much of his philosophical life to science, metaphysics and religion and considered these to be very much interconnected and dynamic disciplines that are linked by constant interactions leading to the emergence of a global vision of reality. It is only when all are taken as working together, albeit, maintaining their autonomy, that one can arrive at the truth. Hence the fundamental question that this paper seeks to answer: Why does God occupy an eminent place in Whitehead's system? This is especially interesting because Whitehead's contemporaries (the Logical Positivists) had classified metaphysical and religious propositions as meaningless and nonsensical. God was dead and science, with its verifiability principle, was the only instrument that could ascertain validity. To further compound the issue, Whitehead himself had been dissatisfied with thinkers who required God as a solution to the problems in the natural world. In fact, for him, "the easy assumption that there is an ultimate reality which, in some unexplained way, is to be appealed to for the removal of the perplexity, constitutes the great refusal of rationality to assert its rights" (Whitehead 1926: pp. 134-135). Yet, in his 1925 *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead invoked God as an explanatory principle in his philosophy.

God is the most bewildering concept in Whitehead's metaphysics. Whitehead's process philosophy prioritizes becoming over being, relation over substance, and advocates for incessant novelty over the permanence. Whitehead argues against the bifurcation of nature or the separation of reality from appearance. His philosophy grants equal ontological status to every single thing that exists, insofar as it exists. And he calls existing realities, not beings, but actual entities. These are the "final real things of which the world is made up. There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real. ... God is an actual entity and so is the most trivial puff of existence in far off empty space. The final facts are, all alike, actual entities" (Whitehead 1978: p. 18). Since Whitehead's God is an actual entity like any other existing entity, there is no room for a specially "eminent" entity: one that would be absolute, unchanging, transcendent, and super-sensible, as God is usually taken to be. He himself admits this in the following words:

*The notion of God as the "unmoved mover" is derived from Aristotle, at least so far as Western thought is concerned. The notion of God as "eminently real" is a favourite doctrine of Christian theology. The combination of the two into the doctrine of an aboriginal, eminently real, transcendent creator, at whose fiat the world came into being, and whose imposed will it obeys, is the fallacy which has infused tragedy into the histories of Christianity and of Mahometanism (Whitehead 1978: p. 342).*

Whitehead recognized that human understanding is always constructed from some metaphysical framework. For him, "apart from metaphysical presupposition there can be no civilization" (Whitehead 1947: p. 164). Metaphysical understanding can guide one's imagination and provide basis for one's thought and action. Metaphysics, as a result, is a kind of spiritual innovation. Whitehead was also disturbed by the scientists who tried to prove,

with their science, the non-existence of God. Deeply concerned by this non-religious current in philosophic thought, he sought to develop a philosophical system in which God and the findings of science would not be mutually exclusive or even inharmonious (Frost 1989: p. 266). With him, metaphysics regained its primordial position but this time not classical Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics. He championed *Process Metaphysics* (from his critique of materialist mechanism) which views reality as one of change and process. All entities or events in the world possess processes and are contributing to a larger process, reality. Why does Whitehead need God in his metaphysical system?

## **II. God in Whitehead's Metaphysical System**

John B Cobb Jr. explains the necessity of Whitehead's God from a historical perspective, that is, from the philosophical atmosphere at the beginning of modernism and its aftermath in these words:

*Modernity arose through a process of secularization. This was in part a continuation of the prophetic tradition within Christianity. In this tradition God is sharply distinguished from the world and the way things are. God's transcendence is emphasized. God judges the world. God's will calls for the transformation of the world. Thus the world as it is is not sacred. It is the creation of God but not itself divine. Human beings are free to explore it and to use it (Cobb 1994: p. 51)*

Earth was therefore the center of the universe and God dwelled in the outermost sphere. This was an appalling condition that Whitehead's God was introduced to remedy and revolutionize. In fact, for Cobb, this horrendous situation was present in medieval Christianity along with more sacramental views that connected the divine and the natural more closely. God was the external creator of a machine whose workings reflected infinite knowledge and control. But the machine could be examined and adjusted without involving God in any way (Cobb 1994). As a consequence, God was isolated from human affairs especially issues of science. God was only known as the author of the moral law and as the one who will judge all depending on our obedience to this law. Religion had its place but one that was segregated from the natural sciences. In fact, the full development of modernism has had a negative effect on religion and the place of God. Cobb again articulates it succinctly when he says:

*The fuller development of modernism involved the extension of secular thought further and further. Society and morality, like nature, came to be understood as separate from God and thus freed from religion. The area in which religion had an appropriate role became smaller and smaller, and, for an increasing number of people, it vanished altogether. Whereas in early modernism it was generally supposed that a rational religion of some form is needed to maintain social order, in late modernism religion in general is typically seen as an oppressive and distorting force from which the human spirit needs to be freed (Cobb 1994: p. 52).*

God was, therefore, considered a substitute for and a competitor with science. Yet for Whitehead, God is neither a substitute nor a competitor. Rather he is the

primordial ground of reality. He is not before all creation but with all creation. In fact, God, for Whitehead, is a fellow sufferer who understands and preserves everything with tender kindness that nothing be lost (Whitehead 1978: p. 342). For this reason God cannot be far removed from the world for that would lead to a vicious separation of God and the world. This explains Whitehead's insistence on the immanence of God.

But this immanent God is not static but is in process with all of reality. This is because, for God to be related to the world and to be meaningful to it, He must in some way interact with it. God is the reason for the whole movement of process and evolution of the world. So important is He to the universe that without Him the universe becomes meaningless. This falls in line with Whitehead's principle of process: that the actual world is a process, and that the process is the becoming of actual entities. The being of an actual entity is constituted by its becoming (Whitehead 1978: p. 23). To be is to be in process, and this, to Whitehead, is fundamental and so to say that God stands outside his principle is to deny His existence. This is what he means when he says that "neither God, nor the world, reaches static completion. Both are in the grip of the ultimate metaphysical ground, the creative advance into novelty" (Whitehead 1978: p. 349). This principle of process clearly shows Whitehead's abandonment of the traditional understanding of substance with its inhering qualities. Whitehead demonstrates by this principle that the category of becoming is more inclusive than that of being, for even becoming includes being, whereas being excludes becoming or even out-rightly denies it any ontological status. Traditionally the category of being has been understood as singularly static and the unchanging subject of change is considered as substance. In its place Whitehead thinks that, if entities are thought of in terms of fluency or process, then becoming is the category that most aptly applies to reality (Farr 2005).

Whitehead (1978) considers metaphysics to be the study of the generic traits of nature in all its aspects. Metaphysics, as such, tries to establish a scheme capable of interpreting any and all of experience. More specifically, metaphysics, for Whitehead, is "the science which seeks to discover the general ideas which are indispensably relevant to the analysis of everything that happens" (Whitehead 1930: p. 84). The notion of "everything that happens" is important because for Whitehead, reality is made up of events – actual occasions – and not static substances. As such, all things flow. This, for Whitehead, is the most fundamental fact of experience. That's why Whitehead considers the flux of things as the one "ultimate generalization around which we must weave our philosophy" and as such "the elucidation of meaning in the phrase 'all things flow' is one chief task of metaphysics" (Whitehead 1978: p. 208).

Why, then, introduce in this the real presence of a divine being? For Charles Hartshorne, the answer is twofold: First Whitehead is not without religion. Second, his categories adopted at least as much for the other purposes require God as their chief and indispensable exemplification (Hartshorne 1972). In his

“Whitehead Without God” Donald Sherburne provides three reasons for the presence of God in Whitehead’s metaphysical scheme: (1) God preserves the past and in so doing creates significance, meaningfulness, and also provides the ontological ground for the claim that truth is immortal; (2) God provides the ontological ground, the “somewhere,” for eternal objects; (3) God is the source of subjective aims in temporal occasions, and in this role is the principle of limitation productive of order, the source of novelty, and the source of the real perspective standpoint within the extensive continuum for each occasion (Sherburne 1967).

Following the Aristotelian-scholastic tradition of presenting arguments to justify the introduction of the divine being in their systems, we shall present Whitehead’s attempt at arguing for the necessity an Absolute in his metaphysical system.

### **III. God as a Harmonizing Factor in Whitehead’s Metaphysics**

For Whitehead, “God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification” (Whitehead 1978: p. 344). God, for Whitehead, is an essential element that could not be substituted in the coherence of his metaphysical image of the physical world. He does not try to religiously apply the concept of God, but rather presents it as a coherent metaphysical element of the universe (Monserrat 2008). Without God, the coherence of the basic metaphysics cannot be maintained. As God was necessary for the Aristotelian system, Whitehead considered that is was necessary for his metaphysics as well. This is because nothing within any limited type of experience can give intelligence to shape our ideas of any entity at the base of all actual things, unless the general character of things requires that there be such an entity. Hence, “in the place of Aristotle’s God as Prime Mover, we require God as the Principle of Concretion” (Whitehead 1926: p. 174).

Therefore, from Whitehead’s Ontological Principle which establishes actual entities as the basic unit of existence, Whitehead argues that these entities, though they are the final real things of the which the world is made, they are themselves limited, for the creative advancement into novelty surpasses their simply moving from one entity to a new entity. The universe is in a process of becoming, the creative advance into novelty. The becoming of new things implies that there are unrealized possibilities which are really achievable. From the ontological principle, actuality is prior to possibility in that something is before it becomes. Now, the unrealized possibilities are realized thanks to the ingression of eternal objects into actual entities. It follows that the grounding of temporally unrealized possibilities must be in a non-temporal entity, God, and in this case in His Primordial nature. In Whitehead’s words:

*The things which are temporal arise by their participation in the things which are eternal. The two sets are mediated by a thing which combines the actuality of what is temporal with the timelessness of what is potential. This final entity is the divine element in the world.... By reason 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 ordering, there would be a complete disjunction of eternal objects unrealized in the temporal world. Novelty would be meaningless, and inconceivable (Whitehead 1978: p. 40).*

As such Monserrat explains that in the continuous process of the “general potentiality of the universe”, its creative advancement into novelty is explainable only to the extent that we found it on some “special non-temporal actual entity that is always given as the ontological base of the universe. This is what Whitehead calls God.” Now, since out of nothing comes nothing (ex nihilo nihil fit), God thus acts as that “fundamental actual entity that gives birth to the (ontological) potentiality of the universal process” (Monserrat 2008: p. 832).

Furthermore, for Whitehead’s eternal objects as the pure potentialities responsible for the transit from potentiality to actuality, that is, from old to new actual entities, to make sense, there must be an ordering principle and this can neither be actual entities themselves nor eternal objects. Whitehead describes eternal objects as “the realm of ideal entities, or forms, which are in themselves not actual, but are such that they are exemplified in everything that is actual, according to some proportion of relevance” (Whitehead 1925: p. 24). That’s why an eternal object can be described only in terms of its potentiality for ‘ingression’ into the becoming of actual entities. The term ‘ingression’ refers to the particular mode in which the potentiality of an eternal object is realized in a particular actual entity, contributing to the definiteness of that actual entity (Whitehead 1978: p. 24). The selection and rejection of eternal objects is the done only by each actual entity since eternal objects are simply pure potentials. Hence, “an eternal object is always a potentiality for actual entities; but in itself, as conceptually felt, it is neutral as to the fact of its physical ingression in any particular actual entity of the temporal world” (Whitehead 1978: p. 44). God must exist without which eternal objects would be “mere undifferentiated nonentities, mere isolation indistinguishable from nonentities” (Whitehead 1978: p. 392) since eternal objects, by themselves, are not properly ordered for ingression into this or that actual entity. The primordial nature therefore establishes relevance between eternal objects and actual entities:

*‘Relevance’ must express some real fact of togetherness among forms. The ontological principle can be expressed as: All real togetherness is togetherness in the formal constitution of an actuality. So if there be a relevance of what in the temporal world is unrealised, the relevance must express a fact of togetherness in the formal constitution of a non-temporal actuality. But by the principle of relativity there can only be one non-derivative actuality, unbounded by its prehensions of an actual world. Such a primordial superject of creativity achieves, in its unity of satisfaction, the complete conceptual valuation of eternal objects on which the creative order depends.... Its status as an actual efficient fact is recognised by terming it the ‘primordial nature of God’ (Whitehead 1978: p. 344).*

Monserrat is even more explicit in this light when stating the necessity of God from the point of eternal objects:

*These (eternal objects) are by nature of their pure potentiality, abstract forms without realization and without relation to actual entities; above all if we pay attention to their most germinal and primogenital forms. Nonetheless, eternal objects have been made by way of an evolutionary process: how could they then have entered into the creative process of actual entities? Whitehead responds to that by saying God is precisely the mediation between the potential (eternal objects) and the actual (its actualization in the world as a concrescent process). The existence of God as the ontological basis of the world therefore explains that the eternal objects have in God, as an eternal actual entity, an ideal, representative conceptual actuality. God is the guide of the realization of the «eternal objects» (formal) in the concrescence of the actual entities (Monserrat 2008: p. 832).*

As such, God evokes new subjects into being and preserves their achievements and thus is both the source and conserver of all finite values. Eternal objects are ordered by God with a view to eliciting greater value in the world. Actual occasions prehend pure potentials for their realization as ordered in his way. Thus they derive from God an initial aim at realizing what is possible in that situation. Hence God's necessity lies in the fact that His ordering of eternal objects functions as a basis of regularity in the world, the basis of novelty and of purposiveness (Cobb 2008: p. 68).

God is, therefore, necessary as the ground of novelty. Here the question is: why do new kinds of things come into existence rather than merely repeat the patterns of their predecessors? (Barbour 1996). Whitehead's answer is that apart from God there is nothing new in the world, and no order in the world. But even more important is the fact that the presence of God's "conceptual feelings" (Primordial nature) as "data" for all actual occasions (Whitehead 1978) is the reason why there is never just mere repetition. In every concrescence, "physical inheritance is essentially accompanied by a conceptual reaction partly conformed to it, and partly introductory of a relevant novel contrast, but always introducing emphasis, valuation, and purpose" (Whitehead 1978: p. 108). God is the source of such a "conceptual reaction" involving "contrast"; he provides the alternatives that allow the entity to make its own "decision." This is why Whitehead proclaims, in several passages in his *Process and Reality*, that "apart from God, there could be no relevant novelty" (Whitehead 1978: p. 164); that "God is the organ of novelty, aiming at intensification" (Whitehead 1978: p. 67); that, "apart from such orderings" of eternal objects as occur in the primordial nature of God, "novelty would be meaningless, and inconceivable" (Whitehead 1978: p. 40) and that "apart from the intervention of God, there could be nothing new in the world" (Whitehead 1978: p. 247). Steven Shaviro further explains that Whitehead's:

*God is a force for novelty, precisely because he does not determine the actual course of events. To the contrary, he ensures the indeterminacy of this course, its openness to difference in the future. God does not decide anything; but he*

*offers material for the decisions made by all other entities. Whitehead's God is therefore an anti-entropic force; without him, "the course of creation would be a dead level of ineffectiveness, with all balance and intensity progressively excluded by the cross currents of incompatibility" (Process and Reality, 247). God renovates the universe by making impossibles compatible. In case of contradiction or exclusion, he "converts the opposition into a contrast" (Process and Reality 348), so that formerly irreconcilable terms become thinkable and realizable together. Whitehead's God may not quite embody the category of community (reciprocal determination) in the way that Kant's does; but at least he widens the scope of such community. God is the reason why mere linear causality (the "causal efficacy" of "physical inheritance") cannot completely determine (although, of course, it very strongly constrains) the course of events (Shaviro 2009: p. 134).*

Even more, God is a stimulus for change: in Whitehead's most striking phrase, he is "the goad towards novelty" (Whitehead 1978: p. 88). God provides the "lure for feeling" that seduces an entity into its process of becoming, or that draws it into difference

Finally, Whitehead needed God in his system as the fundamental explanatory factor. The world of actual entities is insufficient to explain what they have produced by themselves in the process of concrescence in the history of the universe. They are insufficient and need to have reference to a fundamental basis, understood to be God, which contains, representatively, the universe of formal possibilities (mental pole) and ontologically, the universe of the physical possibilities of concrescence in the enriching evolution of the universe (physical pole). Therefore Whitehead thinks in a similar way to traditional theist philosophy: the world is insufficient to give reason to itself and it is necessary to postulate the existence of God as the basis of being. To metaphysically conceive of the world and go toward its ultimate fundamental roots, we arrive at the ultimate limitation, which is God. There is nothing beyond that limit; it is the last thing, ontologically stable and without time which confers to the world a basis. This basis, God, is the beginning of determination and the concrete nature of nature but is not in itself derived from anything. It is "the last" in the sense that it is necessary to postulate metaphysically of an entity that is the basis for and determines unstable events without itself being founded or determined. We refer to God as being necessary; as the necessary principle to base the world (the real and the formal). Nevertheless, at the same time, God is not possible as a rational explanatory object. This is because Whitehead tells us in a slightly cryptic way:

*God is the ultimate limitation, and His existence is the ultimate irrationality. For, no reason can be given for just that limitation which it stands in His nature to impose. God is not concrete, but He is the ground for concrete actuality. No reason can be given for the nature of God, because that nature is the ground of rationality (Whitehead 1978: p. 179).*

How are we, then, to understand what divine irrationality really means? For Roth (1967: p. 126), this simply means that "though there is a metaphysical

need for a principle of determination, there is no final explanation of the principle itself.” Monserrat’s interpretation is as follows:

*The world, in the previous sense, is not self-sufficient or absolute: it must be based on an entity that is neither concrete or determinable from a subsequent dimension: it must be the last, the ontological basis, sufficient and non-temporal: we can infer that it is the basis and we can attribute to it necessity (the necessary permanence in being once we know that it exists). However, this entity that is the basis for the rationality of the world is not, in turn by itself rational because we cannot explain it. We know that God exists but not how or why. We cannot speak rationally about the ultimate limit. We cannot say, for example, that God is that whose essence is to necessarily exist; we do not know what God is like or what its essence is. The world, for Whitehead tells us that God should exist and as the basis for being we consider it necessary (Monserrat 2008: p. 834).*

Alix Parmentier argues in this regard that Whitehead affirms the need for human intelligence to be guided, to establish the existence of God yet he argues too for the impossibility to find a way to form a concept (of God). We can “metaphysically discover that God exists (and this is the ultimate requirement of human intelligence and its grandeur) but we cannot know what it is” (Parmentier 1968: p. 491). He also observes that to put God as the beginning of necessary determination does not imply that we should give him a “reason”: it is the ultimate limitation, that it is not possible to give a reason it escapes all rationality that is on top of it and is able to explain it. From there, “God does not allow itself to be deduced” (Parmentier 1968: p. 492) and it is the ultimate irrationality that is necessary in order to confer rationality to the world. Thus without God Whitehead’s metaphysical categories would fail since eternal objects and actual occasions dearly need such a being.

#### **IV. The Aesthetic Function of Whitehead’s god**

Whitehead’s God plays an aesthetic role in the evolution of the universe. For him, the aim of God is beauty. God is the measure of the aesthetic consistency of the world. God is the lure for feeling which draws actual occasions towards new heights of creative beauty. God is the primordial ground of order and novelty of actual occasions. He is both the measure of their past successes and their spur to new ones. Thus:

*God’s role is not the combat of productive force with productive force, or of destructive force with destructive force; it lies in the patient operation of the overpowering rationality of his conceptual harmonisation. 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 (Whitehead 1978: p. 346).*

Whitehead posits God on the basis of “aesthetic experience,” rather than morality. To the extent that we make “decisions” – and, for Whitehead, decision “constitutes the very meaning of actuality” (Whitehead 1978: p. 43) – we are engaged in a process of selection. We “feel” (or positivelyprehend) certain data, and “eliminate from feeling” (or negativelyprehend) certain others. But

this process of selection is an aesthetic one. It is felt, rather than thought (or felt before it is thought); and it is freely chosen, rather than being obligatory. The process of selection rests upon aesthetic criteria, rather than upon either cognitive or moral ones. These criteria are what Whitehead calls the Categorical Obligations of “Subjective Harmony” and “Subjective Intensity” (Whitehead 1978: p. 27). The subjective aim of every actual occasion is first, to harmonize all its data, by making them compatible for integration into one complex fully determinate feeling and second, to maximize the intensity of this feeling. The goal of every decision is therefore Beauty, defined by Whitehead as the mutual adaptation of the several factors in an occasion of experience. As for the intensity with which this “adaptation” is felt, Whitehead simply notes that “an intense experience is an aesthetic fact” (Whitehead 1978: p. 277).

## V. Conclusion

Whitehead’s philosophizing on God at the time when his student – Bertrand Russell – and his contemporaries chose to either have a sceptical attitude towards such a subject or to out rightly reject and relegate such a subject to the sphere of the irrational, shows his commitment to the metaphysical quest. This is because, one cannot be genuinely metaphysical without arriving at the notion of an Absolute Being at the helm of the hierarchy of being. Granted Whitehead does not grant any special ontological status to God, since to him, all existents, including God are actual entities, he, however, grants a gradation in terms of function. Just as Aristotle and other great metaphysicians needed God as the *terminus ad quem* of their metaphysical expedition, Whitehead too followed in that trajectory. The difference is that Whitehead’s context was so hostile to any metaphysical and religious propositions, whereas earlier centuries had accommodated and even regarded such propositions as the basis of both lived experience and intellectual investigations. Another difference is that Whitehead chose a completely different form of metaphysics and as such, a completely different approach to theorizing about God.

Whitehead’s philosophy of mathematics is seen as an *a priori* investigation, focusing on what can be extracted from the *knower*. This, of course, is because mathematics is a rational science. His philosophy of nature is seen as *a posteriori* because it focuses on what can be extracted from the *known*, that is, from nature. Now, Whitehead’s metaphysics is a *synthesis* of both the *a priori* and *a posteriori*. This is what makes Whitehead’s thought to go deeper than his contemporaries. As such, Whitehead constructs the figure of God for reasons that lie deep in his metaphysics. Like Aristotle, Whitehead is forced to move in this direction because “the general character of things requires that there be such an entity” (Whitehead 1926: p. 174). When Whitehead figures God as a process, and as an empirical being rather than a transcendent one, this means that God cannot be cited as an excuse, or invoked as an ultimate fall-back explanation. No reason can be given for the nature of God because that nature is the ground of rationality. That is to say, the ground is itself groundless and non-rational; it is even the ultimate irrationality. Whitehead’s God helps to

make things happen (in his primordial nature); and he contemplates and preserves everything that has happened (in his consequent nature). But God cannot be used in order to explain or justify anything. In his quest to secularize the notion of God, Whitehead, like Kant, moves from a speculative stance to a practical one. Whitehead makes this point explicitly when he says that his own “line of thought” in regard to God

*extends Kant’s argument. He (Kant) saw the necessity for God in the moral order. But with his metaphysics he rejected the argument from the cosmos. The metaphysical doctrine, here expounded, finds the foundations of the world in the aesthetic experience, rather than – as with Kant – in the cognitive and conceptive experience. All order is therefore aesthetic order, and the moral order is merely certain aspects of aesthetic order. The actual world is the outcome of the aesthetic order, and the aesthetic order is derived from the immanence of God (Whitehead 1925: p. 29).*

Whitehead saw the necessity for God in the modern world despite the great advances in technology. Each of us is still born and dies; each is still, throughout life, subject to accidental death or grievous injury and are still but a negligibly small part of a stupendous whole, which for all we know infinitely precedes and will infinitely outlast us. Though armed with atomic and nuclear power, humanity is yet almost nothing in physical power compared even to the sun. In fact, the devastating effects of global warming, nuclear radiations, natural disasters such earthquakes, tornadoes and cyclones, are a proof that science and technology are not they whole answer to man’s problems. With them, man still remains man and not God. If by eating the fruit, Adam and Eve thought they would be like God, with science and technology modern man thinks himself God – but all are doom to fail. On this earth now, we are powerful, but what are we in the vastness of reality? So close to nothing we can scarcely say how small, or how weak. However, science is one of our noblest, most glorious accomplishments. But one of the chief origins of science is deep humility. We are the only terrestrial animal who can see ourselves as but an item in the scheme of things, not the center about which all must or can be made to turn. We are not God and are infinitely far from being so. Rather we are tiny, and for all practical purposes ultimately temporary, as well as unreliable and often very cruel, creatures.

With Hippolyte Ngimbi Nseka we believe that human beings being finite must have their foundation on something infinite, something absolute. Whitehead’s rejection of a wholly transcendent God poses problems even in our relations as human beings. Man is in need of an absolute that is transcendent and that he can look up to. In his book *Dieu A L’Horizon De L’Acte Philosophique* Ngimbi focuses his attention just like Whitehead on the problem of God but Ngimbi differs in that he favours very much the necessity of an Absolute and shows that the African, though notoriously religious and having several absolutes – ancestors, spirits etc – has that conception of a Necessary and Unique Absolute that gives a sense of direction to his life (Ngimbi 2002). But of what importance is this consciousness of the Absolute for the African? Ngimbi avers that in the

heart of his finite being – tended towards finite actions and always contingent in this world – is written « un mouvement de dépassement, un mouvement de transcendance qui oblige l'homme à ne pas boucler sur soi et à se dépasser toujours. Mouvement de transcendance qui ouvre l'homme à un progrès continue, infini et qu'on n'a pas le droit d'arrêter au niveau simplement terrestre, horizontal » (Ngimbi 2002 : p. 204). This is because in his finite but free existence, man is open to all possibilities. Here we see a link with Whitehead whose actual entities are free and open to all possibilities that God's primordial nature provides - through eternal objects.

On the whole, Whitehead's successful conceptualization on God stands as a challenge to those who think we live in a post deistic era. In fact, Whitehead can be seen as one of the pioneers of the movement for the return to metaphysics and to religious investigations, a call that has resounded in some circles during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and Jean-Louis Schlegel's (2012) "Retours de Dieu à l'ère postmétaphysique" testifies to the fact that such investigations are still carried out in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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