Language about God in Whitehead's Philosophy: An Analysis and Evaluation of Whitehead's God-Talk

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Abstract: The way Whitehead speaks of God in his "philosophy of organism," and the evaluation thereof, is the subject of this article. The background of this issue is the position—broadly shared in theology, and here represented by Aquinas—that one should not speak "carelessly" about God. Does Whitehead violate this rule, or does his language for God express God's otherness and relatedness to the world in a new, intriguing way? In order to answer this question, an introduction into Whitehead's philosophy is given, and especially into his category of existence, the "actual entity." For Whitehead, God is an actual entity, and so is the most trivial puff of existence. His perception of the similarity and greater dissimilarity between God and the worldly actual entities (and clusters thereof) is analyzed. In the main and final section of this article, these insights are used as tools to decrypt Whitehead's God-language. Here, I compare the status of Whitehead's and Aquinas's statements about God, discuss Whitehead's ideas concerning the analogical character of concrete language, and argue that in Whitehead's philosophy too there is no discourse about God without a shift or breakdown of the "ordinary" meaning of language.

Introduction

The issue of "language about God" has been a subject of theological and philosophical debate for centuries.[1] It concerns the question *whether* ordinary language can "signify" God and, if so, *to what extent* or *how* it can do so. For instance, language regarding God is said to be (merely) metaphorical (McFague), or analogous (Aquinas, Burrell), or symbolic (Ricoeur); some regard it as "disclosure" (Ramsey), while others say that speaking about God involves a separate language game (Wittgenstein). And when it comes to, for instance, the idea of analogy, there are extensive studies about the nature of analogy (how it is to be understood), but also

about the impossibility of the analogous use of language and about better alternatives.[2] This variety of approaches shows, different as they may be, that there is a broadly shared awareness that God should not be spoken of "carelessly."[3]

Given this background, the question arises how Whitehead's God-language, as it appears in his so called "process philosophy," is to be evaluated in this respect. In his metaphysical works, many of his statements about God look very straightforward. They speak of God's purpose, God's functions, God's love, the tragedy in God, God's poles, and so forth. For instance: "God's purpose in the creative advance is the evocation of intensities" (*PR* 105). At first glance, a sentence like this does not give the slightest hint that its language is used in a metaphorical or analogical or other "special" way. So the evaluative question may be phrased as follows: Is the way Whitehead speaks of God insensitive to the "otherness" of God by using a language that is basically univocal? Or does it express and conceptualize the radical otherness of God (as well as a radical relatedness of God to the world) in a new and intriguing way?

The purpose of this article is therefore to inquire about and evaluate the features of Whitehead's God-language. In order to do so, we begin with an analysis of the exemplary theological reflections of Aquinas regarding the issue of "naming God" and with a presentation of Whitehead's philosophy and its concept of God. This will allow us then to scrutinize and evaluate the way Whitehead speaks about God.

Aquinas's Theological Reflections on the Issue of "Naming God"

The ongoing theological debate on whether or how language about God can be meaningful is rooted in the tendency in theology to emphasize a radical otherness between God and the world. As Herbert Reinelt put it aptly: "If it is held that God transcends all structures [of this world], human language cannot refer to God in any literal sense. But if it does not refer in any literal sense, then in what sense does it apply?" ("Whitehead" 222). This is the same question Aquinas addresses in his *Summa Theologiae*, specifically in *quaestio* 13 of part I, in which he analyzes the impossibilities and possibilities of language to signify God. According to him, the core of the language issue is due to the essential dissimilarity between God and all worldly beings. God is the creator of the world ("cause of the existence of the world"), which to Aquinas means that the world and God

are un-alike, non-univocal entities (I.13.5 ad 1m, also in I.104.1 c). This makes it impossible for us to know God's essence (I.13.1). Yet, because God is the creator of the world, some knowledge about God may be derived from God's creatures ("ex creaturis")—a view that has its scriptural basis in Paul's letter to the Romans (Rom. 1:20). And this enables us to name God through a language we use to describe creatures—"ex creaturis" (I.13.1 c and ad 2m). We may know God to the extent that creatures represent God, which is also the extent to which we can name God. But, although God can be named "from creatures," such a name does not express the divine essence as it is in itself (I.13.1 c).

Aquinas argues that absolute and positive names of God (as "good" or "wise") can be predicated "substantially" of God, although they fall short of a full representation of God (I.13.2 c). In the articles 5 and 6—the heart of this *quaestio*—Aquinas elaborates on the possibility of such positive predication. He treats the problem as a kind of dilemma between a univocal and an equivocal predication of God and creatures and thereby shows that both alternatives fail. He rejects the univocal predication, because the fact that God (as agent or efficient cause) and the world (as effect) are on a different level ("non-univocal"), makes univocal predication impossible (I.13.5 c and ad 1m). He also rejects a purely equivocal predication of God and creatures, because that would leave us with no possibility at all to say something meaningful about God "from creatures" (I.13.5 c). For Aquinas, the solution of this dilemma lies in some version of "analogical predication," which "is a mean between pure equivocation and simple univocation" (I.13.5 c). In analogical predication the term ascribed to two subjects does not simply mean the same in both cases (as "black" in "the stone is black" and "the ink is black"), nor does it mean something purely different (as "pitcher" in "the pitcher (kitchen utensil) stands on the table" and "Babe Ruth was a famous pitcher (baseball player)"), but it has in both cases the same core meaning *and* nevertheless a different meaning dependent on the reference. One of the illustrations Aquinas gives is that of the predication of "healthy" on both medicine and an animal. Here "healthy" has an un-alike meaning when said of medicine and an animal. Nevertheless, these meanings are not totally different, because "the one has a proportion or relation to the other" insofar as the medicine is a cause of the animal's health. According to this line of thought, Aquinas argues that some "names" can be said—analogically—of both God as creator and the creatures (I.13.5 c). In addition, Aquinas stresses that "when it is

said that God is good or wise, what is signified is not only that God is a cause of wisdom or goodness, but that these perfections preexist in God in a more eminent way" and therefore are said of God also essentially (I.13.6 c and ad 3m). Nonetheless, it remains true that these "names" fall short in their representation of God's essence (I.13.2, see above).

Thus, Aquinas tells us that we can know something of God from creatures, and can apply some words (like good or wise) both to creatures and to God, but that we can do so only analogically, because the creatures display these qualifications in virtue of their being created by God, while God has them first and perfectly (I.13.6).

This is, in broad outline, the way Aquinas approaches and solves the problem of the language about God. This approach has had an important influence on the history of theology. But this does not mean that this model is the only one possible for all theology. Aquinas's approach is based on a number of presuppositions that by now may very well have become less convincing. Moreover, during the last century, reflection on meaningful statements has become a philosophical discipline in itself. That is why nowadays, as noted above, there are various different approaches to the issue of "naming God." Yet, for all their differences, these various approaches are rooted in a common perception that in speaking of God and the world, the meaning of the language involved cannot simply be the same, nor can it be entirely different, but it must express a "similarity in dissimilarity," which is the basic characteristic of "analogy."[4] It is against this background that the position of Whitehead will be examined.

Whitehead's Philosophy and the Special Role and Features of God Therein

After a career in England in logic, mathematics, and (the philosophy of) science, Whitehead was appointed professor of philosophy at Harvard University.[5] During that Harvard period (1924–37), he developed his metaphysical project as it has been expressed most importantly in his *Process and Reality* (1929) and other writings, such as *Adventures of Ideas* (1933). Whitehead conceives "metaphysics" according to the model of scientific theories and hypotheses. To him, metaphysics is a never-ending search for a coherent and consistent set of ideas that ideally would enable us to interpret every item of experience (*PR* 3–17). Here we will focus our attention on Whitehead's philosophy as elaborated in his Harvard period, and specifically on the concept of God therein.

Basics of Whitehead's Philosophy of Organism

In his search for an adequate model of reality or the "really real," Whitehead rejects the usual mechanistic model dominated by the concept of external causality in favor of the model of an organism. He sees each elementary event (every "actual entity," every "really real") as a process that relates itself in a determinate and original way to the whole of given reality. Thus, the antecedent world functions as a "given" that is absorbed in the process of becoming of a new occasion (not unlike food that is incorporated by an organism). Whitehead signifies such absorption by the term "prehension." The growing together of these "prehensions" into one complex unity—which Whitehead calls "concrescence"—*is* the self-creating occasion, which ends in the final determinate synthesis, called "satisfaction."

For Whitehead, this model of reality, seen as a dynamic organic interplay of elementary events and of nexūs of such events (named "societies" when they meet certain qualifications), requires the presence of one special actual entity, which he names "God."[6] Of the category of "actual entities" he writes:

> "Actual entities" . . . are the final real things of which the world is made up. There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real. 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 actuality 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)

God and the World: Mutually Reversed Polarity of God and Worldly Actual Entities

In his model, God and World are "[o]pposed elements [which] stand to each other in mutual requirement" (*PR* 348). They play opposite roles. God offers every new actual entity its "initial subjective aim," that is, its best possibility of synthesis relative to its given situation. Thereupon the new event realizes itself: by de-cisions it transforms itself from possibility into actuality. And again, relative to that new actuality, God offers the then best possibility as preferable for a new nascent entity that in its turn is born through the God-given "initial subjective aim," and so on and on. This makes Whitehead say: "Neither God, nor the World, reaches static

completion. . . . Either of them, God and the World, is the instrument of novelty for the other" (*PR* 349).[7]

These opposite roles of God and the worldly actual entities are of capital importance in Whitehead's view and are explicitly conceptualized as such. Although God and the worldly actual entities belong to the same category of existence and hence fulfill the same categorial obligations, the difference of their functioning (see *PR* 18) is immense. In Whitehead's model, this difference is expressed in the fact that the *polarity of the inner process* of God and that of the worldly actual entities have a reverse order (*PR* 36, 87–88, 345, 348–49).[8] It has to be noted here that in Whitehead's vision, God is *one* single actual entity (*PR* 18, 87, 110). This implies a number of characteristics that apply exclusively to this one special entity "God"—characteristics connected with this "reversal of poles," due to which God is qualitatively different from all other actual entities (but without thereby making the actual entity "God" an exception to the metaphysical scheme). Given the importance of this reversed polarity for an adequate appreciation of Whitehead's language about God, some further elaboration is needed.[9]

A "*worldly* actual entity" (or, in Whitehead's terminology, an "actual occasion"[10]) begins with the prehension of the elements given by its past ("physical prehensions"). Second, the becoming actual occasion perceives possibilities derived from these physical prehensions ("conceptual prehensions"). Then it organizes itself by integrating those various prehensions into one complex synthesis. This process of synthesis or becoming, this concrescence, involves the transition from indeterminateness to determinateness (*PR* 45, 29, 212) or, as Whitehead puts it in one passage, from incoherence to coherence (*PR* 25). This process of becoming has temporal duration. As long as the process of synthesis is not accomplished, the becoming actual entity cannot be prehended because it has not yet achieved its satisfaction and is therefore not yet fully determinate.[11]

In the case of *God*, however, the order of the physical and the conceptual poles is reversed (*PR* 36, 348). Because there is no past for God (since God is non-derivative), God's conceptual prehensions take precedence (*PR* 87). And the "primordial nature" of God is the synthesis of these conceptual feelings according to God's own aim. In God, therefore, the prehension of the given actual world is second, which means that in God the phase of the "physical prehensions" is consequent.[12]

Only God is primarily non-derivative. In systematic language, this means that in God alone, the conceptual pole, and not the physical pole,

is primary or primordial. This has several important consequences. In an actual occasion—where the physical pole is primordial—the conceptual / valuating / teleological aspect adapts itself to the factually given, whereas, conversely, in God the factually given is absorbed in a way that is adapted to God's conceptual / valuating / teleological structure. The need for *at least one* actual entity with a reversed polar structure has its ground in Whitehead's view that the creative advance requires "physical enjoyment" and "conceptual appetition" as opposite elements with an equal claim to priority (*PR* 348). Thus, in at least one entity the appetitive or conceptual side must be primordial. The reason why there can be *only one* actual entity whose primordial pole is conceptual is that, given the occurrence of a conceptual realization not conditioned by physical data, this conceptual realization of possibilities constitutes a "matter of fact" that no other concrescence can altogether ignore. Any supposedly second such attempt could therefore never be "unconditioned." Whitehead puts it as follows: "Unfettered conceptual valuation . . . is only possible once in the universe; since that creative act is objectively immortal as an inescapable condition characterizing creative action" (*PR* 247).

Given this reversal of God's poles, and given the fact that Whitehead applies to God expressions such as "concrescence" and "satisfaction," the question arises what the meaning is of such expressions when applied to God. The first thing to be observed is that, when Whitehead speaks of God as somehow in a process of concrescence—and even goes so far as to say in one passage that God is "always in concrescence" (*PR* 31)[13]—he does *not* mean to say that God is involved in an ordinary process of concrescence and that, consequently, God would not as yet have integrated the given data and therefore would not as yet be determinate. Indeed, Whitehead argues that God always has "objective immortality,"[14] which implies that God is always fully determinate. In other words, God always has integrated already all the available data within Godself. Yet, in spite of this, God may also be said to be somehow in concrescence or to grow, because new data are continually added. Thus, God is so to say continually fully integrated and therefore determinate, yet always incomplete because there continually is something new that presents itself to be integrated—just as "the past" is the completely determinate set of events that have passed and is nevertheless constantly growing. And in the same way that every occasion that has passed immediately belongs to the past without any temporal delay or transitional state, so too every past occasion is immediately integrated in God's consequent nature. Thus, all God's

prehensions are always integrated in God, and that is precisely why God always is "satisfied." But, contrary to the satisfaction of actual occasions, God's satisfaction is not static, but dynamic, on account of the constant addition of data. It must therefore be understood as a "growing satisfaction." Hence, Whitehead can characterize God's consequent nature as being both *determinate* and *incomplete* (*PR* 345). God as fully actual is therefore always *becoming* as well as always *being*.

Whitehead's concept of God as a single actual entity with a reversed polarity, which he introduces for reasons of coherence and consistency, has many important implications. In the next section, one of those implications—the impact on the issue of the language about God—will be explored.[15]

Examination and Evaluation of Whitehead's God-Language

The various insights gained thus far will now be used to examine in more detail Whitehead's use of language when he speaks about God.

To begin with, (A) it will be shown that there is a formal difference between the status of Whitehead's statements about God and that of Aquinas's statements regarding God, which is very instructive. Subsequently, (B) this difference will be shown to be less different than it appears at first glance. This analysis will be followed by (C) a discussion of Whitehead's own ideas concerning the analogical character of language (not only about God, but also in mathematics). (D) Against this background and with the knowledge about the distinctive features Whitehead attributes to God (viz. the polar opposition between God and actual occasions in spite of their categorial similarity), Whitehead's language about God will be scrutinized. Finally, (E) this examination will reveal an even greater dissimilarity between God and all worldly macro-beings. The subsequent conclusion will expose what may be learned from this study.

A

As noted before, Aquinas developed the view that language about God can refer to *God* only when it is used analogously. Therefore, any attempt to signify God makes sense only to the extent that the words used allow for and exhibit a shift or leap in their meaning compared with the meaning they have when applied to creatures. In Whitehead's God-language, however, such a shift appears to be absent. When he speaks of God's feelings, God's valuation, God's aim, God's satisfaction, and so forth, he uses the same well-defined words that he also applies to actual

occasions. Moreover, since God and actual occasions belong to the same category of existence of "actual entities," one should not expect otherwise. However, notwithstanding this correct expectation, this appearance is deceiving because Whitehead's account of the shift or leap is already implicit in the recognition that what is said does not signify the "real God" but signifies an element of a *model*. To him, statements about God are deductions *within or from his model*, which, given the model, express what it is that would follow regarding God. Whitehead explicitly points to the hypothetical character of his model: "There is nothing here in the nature of proof. . . . The deductions from it [i.e., the theoretic system] in this particular sphere of thought cannot be looked upon as more than suggestions as to how the problem is transformed in the light of that system" (*PR* 343). So, the place at which the leap is thought to occur for Whitehead is different from where it is thought to occur for Aquinas. For Aquinas, the leap-aspect is related to the idea that in the sentences about God the language is used analogously, whereas for Whitehead it is related to the consideration that his statements about God are only deductions from a hypothetical model. Does this mean that Whitehead is not concerned with the "real God" at all? Of course not, but he knows that he can speak about the "real God" only indirectly, in much the same way that in a scientific context the variables of a hypothetical model at best correspond only indirectly with the real entities they intend to represent.[16] Whenever Whitehead speaks about God directly and not about God as a conceptual part of his model, the language he uses is accordingly quite different. A good illustration of this difference may be seen in a passage taken from his last publication:

> The conclusion [deduced from his model] of this discussion is twofold. One side is that the ascription of mere happiness, and of arbitrary power to the nature of God is a profanation. This nature conceived as the unification derived from the World of Value is founded on ideals of perfection, moral and aesthetic. It receives into its unity the scattered effectiveness of realized activities, transformed by the supremacy of its own ideals. The result is Tragedy, Sympathy, and the Happiness evoked by actualized Heroism. Of course [and here is the conversion from his model-speech to his speaking of the "real God"] we are unable to conceive the experience of the Supreme Unity of Existence. But these are the human terms in which we can glimpse the origin of that drive towards limited ideals of perfection which haunts the Universe. ("Immortality" 697–98)

Thus, for Whitehead and for Aquinas alike, the language used to speak of God is characterized by a leap. But the *locus* where the leap is thought to occur is different. For Aquinas, the leap is located in the statements about God that, inasmuch as they are intended to speak of God directly, must therefore be understood as analogous. For Whitehead, the leap consists in the fact that the sentences that appear to be taken literally in fact pertain to the framework of a model only. But there is more that needs to be said.

B

Given the fact that Whitehead explicitly stresses the model character of his statements about God, he does not need to emphasize it, but this does not alter that fact that, in his statements about God and about other beings, he too uses language in a non-univocal way. And, conversely, it may be noted that Aquinas—who here represents the theological emphasis on analogical predication—also bases his discourse about God on a model (for instance, to some extent the model of *causa prima*, or the view that transcendentals regarding God are mutually exchangeable, or that God is simple), even though he certainly does not articulate the model aspect as such. This double convergence invites further comparison.

In Aquinas, his theological model implies the view that language is basically inadequate to express God's essence. However, against the background of this primary inadequacy, he meticulously argues in favor of a qualified form of suitability of language, based on the idea that God is (imperfectly) represented in his creatures. This similarity in greater dissimilarity offers the ontological basis for a (neither univocal nor equivocal but) analogous use of language to signify God. However, for Whitehead, too, there is similarity in dissimilarity when dealing with God and the world, albeit that the dividing line between the similar and the dissimilar runs along different paths. And in Whitehead, too, this has repercussions for the language about God. This will now be explored more closely.

As we have seen before, Whitehead begins with the claim that God and actual occasions formally *belong to the same category of existence*, which is the category of "actual entities." This is related to the fact that Whitehead does not allow for a distinction between "actual" and "more actual." In combination with his choice to consider—like Aquinas does—both temporal beings and God as "actual," this forces him to claim—unlike

Aquinas—that all actual entities, including God, belong to one and the same category. This is why Whitehead can say without reservation:

> "Actual entities" . . . are the final real things of which the world is made up. There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real. 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 actuality exemplifies all are on the same level. (*PR* 18)

At first glance, this would mean that Whitehead has no reason to think that a language geared to our interaction with actual occasions should necessarily be inadequate to signify God. Indeed, the metaphysical language concerning actual entities *qua* actual entities must be as valid with regard to God as it is to other actual entities.

However, having established the equality between God and other actual entities on the level of the categories of existence (in the sense that both belong to the category of actual entities), Whitehead emphasizes that, within this category of actual entities, God stands *opposite to* all actual occasions (e.g., *PR* 345, 348). Thus, *the equality just mentioned is only a categorial or formal equality along with a concrete or material inequality*.[17] The crucial and all-pervasive difference between God and actual occasions consists in the above-mentioned and elucidated reversed polar structure of God relative to that of the actual occasions.

The implication of this fundamental inequality between God and actual occasions is that concepts that at first seemingly could be used univocally appear now to be analogous.[18] In order to be able to further explicate this point—under D—we first undertake a brief examination of some clues offered by Whitehead regarding the concept of analogy.[19]

C

Whitehead strongly emphasizes that language is never exact, not even in the case of mathematics ("Immortality" 699–700). The meaning of words is always dependent on the context in which they are used. For instance, the term "friendship" may signify two different relationships in that both may be seen to be instances of the general idea of "friendship," but that does not alter the fact that "[i]n the full concrete connection of things, the characters of the things connected enter into the character of the connectivity which joins them. Every example of friendship exhibits

the particular characters of the two friends" (*MT* 58). Whitehead rejects the possibility of a word having an identical meaning in different contexts (*MT* 66–67). This does not mean that he denies that a term has a general meaning, but it does mean that, as Herbert Reinelt points out,

> the general meaning *as specified* is not just the general meaning plus some other meaning as if one were adding part to part with no novelty resulting from the real unity of the two. There is emergent novelty in the contrast [= synthesis], and this means that a character as an element in a contrast is not simply the same as it is apart from the contrast. In the contrast, it is qualified. In so far, then, as the same character occurs in separate contrasts, those contrasts may be said to be analogical. ("Whiteheadian" 329)

This means that, for instance, the content of the concept "red" in the context of "red apple" is not identical but analogous to the content of the concept "red" in the context of "red brick"; Whitehead states that this applies even to numbers (see *MT* 66–67, 92).[20]

This non-identity will apply even more to words that are borrowed from one domain in order to clarify something in another domain; for instance, when the word "growth" is transferred from the domain of plants and animals to the domain of culture in order to better make it possible for something pertaining to culture to be interpreted. Yet, Whitehead considers this procedure of transferal—indicated as the "flight in the thin air of imaginative generalization" (*PR* 5)—necessary in order to achieve those general ideas (metaphysical concepts) by which ideally all experience may be interpreted. In this respect, he therefore writes that

> [p]hilosophers can never hope finally to formulate these 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. (*PR* 4)

As Stephen Franklin aptly observes, when compared to their ordinary use, metaphysical terms are metaphors, but when used *as* metaphysical technical terms, they are univocal. For, when used in metaphysical propositions, abstraction is made from the difference of contexts, because in metaphysical propositions *all actual entities whatsoever* are included in its logical subjects (Franklin 283–86).

D

Keeping all this in mind, let us now return to the issue of God-language in Whitehead. As noted above, the *metaphysical* meaning of concepts like "actual entity," "subjective aim," "conceptual prehension," and so forth, does not change depending on whether they are applied to, respectively, God and the actual occasions. But, as Whitehead points out (*RM* 78), this is not to detract in any way from the fact that the *concrete* meaning of concepts does change from one case to the other. For instance, in actual occasions, the subjective aim is derivative: it is derived from the conditioning by the actual world and from the valuation of God's primordial nature. But in God, the subjective aim is non-derivative. The concrete meaning of "subjective aim" as used in the context of, respectively, God and actual occasions is therefore not identical but analogous.

However, for Whitehead, the difference between God and the world is so crucial and all-pervasive that for many terms that are applied to both actual occasions and to God, the dissimilarity of meaning becomes so strong that, when applied to God, the meaning of the term is stretched to the point of breaking down. Here the reasoning and argumentation is again entirely based on the reversed polarity of God compared with the polarity of actual occasions.[21]

For instance, normally speaking, that is, in the case of actual occasions, "*concrescence*" signifies the process of transition from indeterminateness to determinateness, which ends with satisfaction as the attainment of complete determinateness. But, due to the reversal of God's poles, there are no phases of indeterminateness in God, so that there is always complete determinateness and therefore satisfaction. Thus, when "concrescence" is mentioned in reference to God, it does not have the usual meaning of "transition from indeterminateness to determinateness," but denotes a "con-crescence as an ever accretive and growing satisfaction." In this way, God enjoys "*temporality*," but—contrary to the usual connotation of "coming to be and passing away"—in the sense that God "grows" (Johnson 7).[22]

Moreover, in actual occasions, "satisfaction" marks the transition from subjective immediacy to objective immortality,[23] so that satisfaction entails the disappearance of subjective immediacy. In God, this is not the case. God's subjective immediacy does not perish with satisfaction,[24] and therefore God can be said to have a "growing satisfaction." But clearly, the two terms in the latter expression have lost much of their usual meaning.

For "*satisfaction*" is no longer momentary, but lasting, and "*growth*" now refers to a "process" that does not fit either one of the two Whiteheadian kinds of process (concrescence and transition).[25] The result of this is that, when it comes to God, the meaning of the terms "mutability" and "immutability" break down as well. Normally speaking, change pertains to a nexus (for instance, a society), whereas Whitehead says of an actual entity that it does not change. Therefore, God, as one single actual entity, must be said to be "*immutable*," but in the paradoxical sense that this immutability does *not* exclude temporal growth. From a theological point of view, all this is extremely interesting and deserves more scholarly attention.

However, having said all this, it should be emphasized here that the breakdown of the "ordinary" meaning of the terms mentioned does *not* in any way affect the validity of the meaning of these terms as formally established in the categoreal scheme. The meanings of those terms (all of which pertain to the process of an actual entity and the end point thereof) strongly connote the context of actual occasions (for instance, that the concrescence has a duration that is related to the creation of determinateness from indeterminateness), and it is this *con*notation—and *not* the formal categorial meaning—that breaks down when those terms are applied to God. In other words, the theologically important fact that normal language breaks down when applied to God does *not* in any way affect the validity of Whitehead's metaphysical claim that God is not to be treated as an exception to the metaphysical principles (*PR* 343).

E

So far our reflection on the analogous nature of Whitehead's language about God and actual occasions was related to two things: the *categorial similarity* between God and actual occasions (because all are "actual entities") and the *polar dissimilarity* between God and actual occasions. However, the background of *the categorial similarity disappears* whenever a term is applied to God on the one side, and to the macro-entities of our everyday experience on the other. The worldly beings we interact with are never single actual occasions, but always conglomerates of many actual occasions (a "nexus" or, more specifically, a "society"). Therefore, these macro-entities do not belong to the category of existence of "actual entities," but to a different one, namely the category of existence of "nexūs" (*PR* 22). God, by contrast, is in Whitehead's model the only

"macroscopic *res vera*" (*PR* 167): God is not a "society" (like a human person, for instance), but one single actual entity. Therefore, the unity of God radically differs from the unity of, for instance, a human being, or, as William Christian says: "[God's] unity differs from the unity of a human person not in degree but in kind" (393). Thus, the above-mentioned "categorial similarity" is so formal as to become a misleading expression, for, when *compared to anything that has a personal identity, there is nothing left but a categorial dissimilarity*. All this is of supreme importance, as also Christian points out (393), for the understanding of the nature of White-headian theological language when it speaks of the thought, the will, the aim, or the love of God or when God is said to be a person or to act.

Conclusion

The double question considered in this article was whether White-head speaks about God carelessly, that is, without consideration for the essential difference between God and worldly entities, or whether his God-language expresses and conceptualizes the otherness and the relat-edness of God to the world in a new and constructive way.

Here we may conclude that there are two points that justify the claim that Whitehead does *not* speak of God carelessly. First, Whitehead emphasizes that his discourse about God occurs from and within the assumptions of a model. The second much more important point is that, even within the framework of that model, Whitehead's discourse about God is never univocal, partly because of the *polar opposition* between God and the actual occasions (despite their categorial similarity) and partly because of the *categorial dissimilarity* between God and all worldly macro-beings. Here it should be noted that this second point in its two aspects of polar opposition and categorial dissimilarity is fully based on the reversal of poles in God, which itself is only compatible with the concept of God as one single actual entity.[26]

Two observations must be added. First, while Whitehead has no reli-gious or theological reason for thinking that God is unknowable in respect of God's essence,[27] for him, too, the otherness of God is so radical that there is no discourse about God without a shift or breakdown of the "ordinary" meaning of the language used. Second, this breakdown of the "ordinary" meaning of the language when used for God leaves the meta-physical meaning of the concepts entirely intact. They remain univocal. In this way, Whitehead succeeds in thinking and expressing the radical

otherness of God, thereby remaining faithful to his position that "God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification" (*PR* 343).

In conclusion, Whitehead is convinced, and with reason, that the interpretation of our (aesthetic, moral, religious, scientific) experiences asks for a completely different perspective on all metaphysical questions, which is what he wanted to offer by proposing his philosophy of organism. This sophisticated philosophical project results among many other things in a God-talk that is seemingly carelessly univocal. The present study shows, however, that on closer examination Whitehead's God-talk is fundamentally analogical: it exhibits a breakdown of the "normal" meaning of the language, notwithstanding the fact that it remains metaphysically precise and without exceptions. From a theological point of view, this is highly interesting and deserves much more attention in the theological reception of Whitehead.

Notes

1. A previous version of the present article appeared in *Open Theology*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2015, pp. 342–53.

2. Here are a few of the many studies: Ramsey; Ferré, *Language*; Burrell; Palmer; Ross; De Pater; and Rikhof, *Over God spreken*. In addition, here are some of the noteworthy articles (partly from the perspective of process thought): Hartshorne, "Idea" and "Three Strata"; Ferré, "Analogy"; Reinelt, "Whitehead" and "Whiteheadian"; Tracy, "Analogical" and "Analogy"; Ogden, "What Sense" and "Experience"; and Thomas.

3. The expression that God should not be spoken of "carelessly" is derived from Herwi Rikhof's "Over God spreek je niet zomaar."

4. Here the term "analogy" is taken in a broad sense, covering all those instances of language in which both similarity and dissimilarity of meaning play a part. Actually, such a broad sense also characterizes the traditional understanding of "analogy," for the meaning of "analogy" was itself far from univocal (see Ross).

5. For another short introduction into Whitehead's philosophy, see Oomen, "God's Power."

6. In Whitehead's model, God is necessary for, among other things, the provision of an initial aim by which each event is constituted (*PR* 244) and hence for the existence of the actual world (*RM* 104–05) and for the possibility that there be an actual *concrete* course of events (*SMW* 172, 173–79). Regarding the last mentioned aspect, see Oomen, "No Concretion."

7. For an exploration of this view on God's agency, and the nature and scope of God's power, see Oomen, "God's Power." For a better understanding of these opposite roles of God and World, the comparison with the different roles of the conductor and the members of the orchestra, respectively, may be helpful (88).

8. The crucial importance of the reversal of God's poles was first argued for and elaborated by Suchocki.

9. For a more extensive argumentation and discussion of the reversal of God's poles, see Oomen, "Prehensibility," especially 114–19.

10. The term "actual occasion" denotes *all worldly* actual entities, that is, all actual entities with the explicit *exclusion* of God (*PR* 88).

11. Whitehead formulates the fact that the occasion cannot be prehended during its concrescence, and therefore cannot function as a cause, by saying that "[t]his genetic passage from phase to phase is not in *physical* time" (*PR* 288; emphasis added).

12. When Whitehead speaks of "God's consequent nature," he denotes by this notion God in full concreteness, in whom God's consequent physical prehensions are integrated with God's primordial conceptual prehensions: "The primordial nature is conceptual, the consequent nature is the weaving of God's physical feelings upon his primordial concepts" (*PR* 345).

13. This passage of *Process and Reality* on page 31 is at best the only one (and rather obscure) instance where Whitehead actually speaks of the "concrescence" of God's consequent nature. Usually, he speaks of God's consequent nature in terms of "evolving" (*PR* 12) or "growth" (*PR* 346). For this linguistically difficult passage, see Oomen, "Prehensibility," 113–14n17.

14. See note 25.

15. For the impact of the reversal of poles on the issue of the prehensibility of God's consequent nature, see Oomen, "Prehensibility."

16. For comparison: a model of human blood pressure, for example, may lead to the conclusion that, according to the model, given a certain stimulus, the blood pressure "must" go up, and thereupon one may check whether this deduction agrees with observation in a living human being. Of course, the model intends to clarify something in real blood pressure control, but the fact remains that the factor "blood pressure" in the model is related to the real blood pressure only indirectly, that is, through the assumptions of the model. Thus, the blood pressure factor in the model may behave differently from the real blood pressure, and this difference will lead to an adjustment of the model. In other words, a direct link between blood pressure as a factor of the model and the real blood pressure is something aimed at, but not something given.

17. Compare this with "white" and "black," which, in spite of their fundamental opposition, belong to the one category of "colors." Therefore, whatever applies to colors as such will equally apply to white and to black, but nevertheless it may mean something fundamentally different. For instance, the statement "the color of a nontransparent object is determined by the wave length of the light reflected by such object" applies equally to "white" and "black," but with this difference, what is "white" reflects all the incident light, whereas "black" reflects no light.

18. Whitehead too speaks of "analogous" in this context: "Thus, analogously to all actual entities, the nature of God is dipolar. He has a primordial nature and a consequent nature. . . . The primordial nature is conceptual, the consequent nature is the weaving of God's physical feelings upon his primordial concepts" (*PR* 345).

19. Herbert R. Reinelt gives a very clear presentation of a Whiteheadian theory of analogy ("Whiteheadian"). Earlier, Reinelt had already written on the significance of Whitehead for "theistic language" ("Whitehead").

20. Conversely, Whitehead thinks that the discovery of "analogy" as "not mere diversity" plays a crucial role in (scientific) development. For instance, at first "days" and "fishes" are not related at all. The observation that this diversity nevertheless bears some resemblance amounts to a discovery:

> Thus the differences arising from diversities are not absolute. The procedure of rationalism is the discussion of analogy. The limitation of rationalism is the inescapable diversity. The development of civilized thought can be described as the discovery of identities amid diversity. For example, the discovery of identities of number as between a group of days and a group of fishes. (*MT* 98)

21. See the above section on mutually reversed polarity. For a full and detailed discussion of the statements, see Oomen, "Prehensibility" (especially its sections *B* and *C*).

22. In his conversations with Whitehead in 1936, Johnson asks Whitehead: "You refer to the everlasting nature of God, which is, in a sense, non-temporal, and in another sense temporal. . . . In what sense is God 'temporal'?" And he renders Whitehead's opinion in the following manner: "Whitehead replied that by 'temporal' he here means '[exhibiting] growth,' not coming to be and passing away. He stated that God grows, and thus in a sense is historical. God is everywhere (in time). God is not historical in the sense of having a definite 'whereness' or existing as a merely 'present' being who fades" (Johnson 7).

23. See note 25.

24. In order to avoid too great complexity, no argumentation is given here why this is the case. It can be found in Oomen, "Prehensibility," 117–19.

25. To put it roughly, "concrescence" denotes the "microscopic" process of the self-constitution of an actual entity out of its many data, whereas "transition" denotes the "macroscopic" process in which an actual entity on its satisfaction functions as a datum for new actual entities (*PR* 210–15). As a datum for the new actual entities it does not vanish, that is, in itself, as objectively given for other actual entities—it is "immortal." Hence, the term "objective immortality" that Whitehead gives to this way of enduring functioning as object.

26. For the incompatibility of a reversed polarity with a society, see Oomen, "Prehensibility," 15. The above discussion makes clear that a Hartshornean interpretation of God as a society has potentially far-reaching theological implications. For such a conception of God as a society does not allow for the described categorial dissimilarity, nor for the polar opposition.

27. In the chapter "Speculative Philosophy" (*PR* 3–17), Whitehead writes with regard to the requirement of "necessity" that applies to metaphysics:

> Thus the philosophic scheme should 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. But what does not so communicate is unknowable, and *the unknowable is unknown*; and so this universality defined by "communication" can suffice. (*PR* 4; emphasis added)

Somewhat ironically, Whitehead adds the following footnote to the italicized passage: "This doctrine is a paradox. Indulging in a species of false modesty, 'cautious' philosophers undertake its definition."

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