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**Title:** The paradox of process philosophy

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**Keywords:** process philosophy; relation; difference; Harman; dialethism

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# The paradox of process philosophy

Friso Timmenga<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This essay critically discusses the rising interest in process philosophy in recent years. I argue that the appeal of process philosophy lies in its ability to circumnavigate the binary dichotomies pervasive in European philosophy and defend an interpretation of process philosophy in terms of relationality, difference, and change. After outlining the central tenets of process philosophy, Graham Harman's critique of a relational account of process philosophy is examined, particularly his assertion that this type of philosophy cannot fully explain genuine change. Despite the merits of Harman's critique, I will show that his object-oriented ontology faces similar limitations. Turning to Graham Priest's dialethism I suggest that philosophy, instead of striving for a consistent representation of fundamental metaphysics, must embrace paradox to some extent. This leads the philosophical discipline to understand itself as a transformative process.

**Keywords:** process philosophy; relation; difference; Harman; dialethism

A recent literature review by Walsh, Böhme and Wamsler concludes that relational ontologies are gaining momentum across a wide spectrum of disciplines in the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences.<sup>2</sup> They characterize relational ontologies as viewing relations between entities more fundamental than the entities themselves, and indicate that these ontologies “aim to overcome the bifurcation of nature/culture and various other dualisms (e.g. mind/matter, subjectivity/objectivity) shaping the modern worldview.”<sup>3</sup> This means that the growing enthusiasm for relational thinking conversely coincides with a growing deprecation for dualist thinking. Nevertheless, Wildman adds that, despite this enthusiasm, “there is persistent confusion in almost all literature about relational ontology because the key idea of *relation* remains unclear.”<sup>4</sup> This philosophical article aims to provide some clarity on the matter by defending an understanding of relationality in terms of *difference* and *change*. The concepts of relationality, difference, and change – fundamental to human thought – have been explored across intellectual history, especially beyond the European context, as Walsh, Böhme, and Wamsler have not forgotten to point out.<sup>5</sup> They are often used to replace dichotomies with relations, more precisely: with *differential relations*. These differential relations, I will go on to show, imply a preference for *change* over stasis as well.

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<sup>2</sup>Walsh, Böhme, and Wamsler, “Towards a relational paradigm in sustainability research, practice, and education.”

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>4</sup>Wildman, “An introduction to relational ontology,” 1.

<sup>5</sup>Op.cit., 77.

Therefore, I conclude that most relational ontologies must necessarily amount to some sort of *process philosophy* as well.

This article explores the dynamics of relation, difference and change within process philosophy. The first section draws on the work of Rescher to argue that the notions of relation, difference and change are metaphysically linked. The second section critically evaluates this link and the paradoxical ‘process stew’ to which, according to Harman, this could lead.<sup>6</sup> Harman’s critique is that an overemphasis on relationality in process thought renders change inexplicable. Despite the merits of Harman’s argument, I maintain that every consistent explanation of change will necessarily fail, *inter alia* by pointing to Harman’s own object-oriented ontology. Therefore, I turn to dialethism in section three, and show that process philosophy must necessarily embrace paradox to some extent. However, this loss in consistency is precisely what makes the philosophical discipline relevant and transformative.

## Substance and process

Tristan Garcia differentiates between two types of metaphysics: one emphasizes “substances and essences, individuals and persons, great separations and categories, orders and hierarchies,” the other “differences and variations, infinite multiplicities and alliances, interactions and transitions or transgressions, relations and hybridations.”<sup>7</sup> Despite Garcia’s acknowledgment that this distinction is a ‘quick sketch’, most philosophers will intuitively understand which thinkers or traditions are implied by each category. I shall refer to the first as

*substance* thinking and to the second as *process* thinking.<sup>8</sup> Underneath, I will explain this difference using key concepts in the process framework (i.e. relation, difference and change) and inquire into their interrelation.

Process philosophers frequently stress the historical inclination of European philosophy towards substance thinking. Plato, for instance, relegated the True, the Good, and the Beautiful to a separate realm beyond the complexities of daily existence. In an everchanging world, truth finds no abode, or so the prevailing consensus of centuries of European philosophical discourse seems to be. Consider the following remark by Whitehead:

All modern philosophy hinges round the difficulty of describing the world in terms of subject and predicate, substance and quality, particular and universal. The result always does violence to that immediate experience which we express in our actions, our hopes, our sympathies, our purposes, and which we enjoy in spite of our lack of phrases for its verbal analysis. 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[.]<sup>9</sup>

Bergson similarly remarked that our intelligent minds demand sharp definitions and stable essences, meaning the movement and change that characterize the ceaseless flux of our daily experience, have to be reduced to mere illusions.<sup>10</sup> Deleuze picked up this thread and char-

<sup>6</sup>Harman, “Whitehead and Schools X, Y, and Z,” 243 & 246.

<sup>7</sup>Garcia, *Laisser Être et Rendre Puissant*, my translation, 310.

<sup>8</sup>In doing so, I follow Rescher. Garcia himself actually refers to the first group as metaphysics of result (*‘metaphysiques de résultat’*).

<sup>9</sup>Whitehead, *Process and Reality. Corrected edition*, 49–50.

<sup>10</sup>Bergson, *L’évolution Créatrice*, 313–314

<sup>11</sup>Deleuze, *Nietzsche et La Philosophie*, 113–120.

acterized the European philosophical tradition by passivity, reactivity and negativity.<sup>11</sup>

Nicholas Rescher, a process philosopher who subscribes to this diagnosis of European philosophical discourse,<sup>12</sup> articulates the essence of substance thinking in his ‘Process Reducibility Thesis’. The Process Reducibility Thesis holds that “[t]he only sorts of processes there are are *owned* processes – processes that represent the doings of substances. There just are no processes apart from those that constitute the activity of identifiable agents. All process is reducible to the doings of (nonprocessual) things.”<sup>13</sup> An example of a philosopher who accepts this thesis is Aristotle, who, despite his concern for the phenomenon of change, thought that all change is in the end retraceable to the activity of a first mover that is, itself, unmoved.<sup>14</sup> Process philosophers, on the other hand, reject this thesis and give primacy or priority to processes over things or products instead.<sup>15</sup> In doing so, they avoid the distinction of the world in substances and qualities and, as Whitehead notes, instead opt for a description of the world in terms of dynamic process.<sup>16</sup>

This means that the major challenge for process thinking is not explaining movement by stability, but rather stability by movement.<sup>17</sup> That is: how a world in constant flux nevertheless appears to showcase some degree of stability.<sup>18</sup> Process thinkers have generally responded to this challenge by providing theories of *individuation*. Given the brevity of this article, I will not dwell upon the various theo-

ries that have been proposed (e.g. by Simondon), but limit myself to the observation that at this juncture, process philosophy reveals its pragmatist inheritance. Let’s turn to Rescher once more, for his summary of these theories of individuation: “Unity is as unity does: The unity of things is a unity of process.”<sup>19</sup> Needless to say, process philosophers only accept stable unities within their ontology as long as these are not understood as independent and unchanging substances.<sup>20</sup>

A major appeal of process philosophy is its apparent avoidance of dualisms, as Rescher explains: “It replaces the troublesome ontological dualism of thing and activity with an internally complex monism of activities of varying, potentially compounded sorts. If simplicity is an advantage, process ontology has a lot to offer.”<sup>21</sup> Every process is *one* process, which constitutes its particularity. At the same time, however, the *repeatability* of every process gives it some degree of universality. This combination of particularity and universality leads Rescher to conclude that every process is a *concrete universal*.<sup>22</sup>

The Hegelian undertone of Rescher’s conclusion is telling, but not surprising, given that Rescher himself views Hegel as an important thinker in the evolution of process thinking.<sup>23</sup> However, it also highlights how Rescher views the concept of ‘process’ as an important tool in overcoming binary, oppositional, dichotomous thinking. In light of the findings of Walsh, Böhme and Wamsler, it seems, therefore, that

<sup>12</sup>Rescher, *Process Metaphysics. An introduction to process philosophy*, 29 & 51.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>14</sup>Aristotle, *Physics*, VIII.6.

<sup>15</sup>Rescher, *Op. cit.*, 2; Rescher, *Process Philosophy*, 6.

<sup>16</sup>Whitehead, *Process and Reality. Corrected edition*, 8.

<sup>17</sup>Mason, “Becoming-Religion: Re-/Thinking Religion with A.N. Whitehead and Keiji Nishitani,” 16.

<sup>18</sup>Debaise, “Qu’est-ce qu’une pensée relationnelle?”

<sup>19</sup>Rescher, *Process Metaphysics*, 57.

<sup>20</sup>C. Robert Mesle, *Process-Relational Philosophy*, 44.

<sup>21</sup>Rescher, *Process Philosophy*, 8.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 10-11.

<sup>23</sup>Rescher, *Process Metaphysics*, 13.

Rescher and other advocates of process thinking actually understand process philosophy first and foremost as a relational philosophy, where ‘relation’ means both difference and change. Let me briefly explain this last point.

The key in overcoming dualisms is recognizing that every dualism implies a difference and every difference implies a relation. If P and Q constitute an exclusionary binary, then P and Q have to be different. At the same time, however, this difference cannot be absolute, as the very difference between P and Q indicates that they share at least one relation (namely, a differential one). Because of this, every difference implies relation. Conversely, however, it seems there can be no relation without difference. For two things to relate to each other, they have to possess some degree of difference. This would mean that difference is relation and relation is difference. Many process thinkers, such as Hegel, have taken this route and concluded that the differential relation is more or less essential for every being: were I not different from the things that surround me, I would not be me. Hence, no matter how intense A and B oppose each other, they both require the other in order to exist. In other words: their existence can only be grasped through their difference, their relation.

From here, it is easy to see how relation and difference imply change as well. As Garcia points out, relational thinking almost always ends up with the affirmation that everything is related to everything else.<sup>24</sup> This is because, as we have seen, for P and Q to be discrete entities, they have to enter into a differential relation. This extends to all entities from which P (but also Q) is distinct, meaning P is differentially related to everything else.

The fundamental philosophical question that arises at this point is: what about P’s relation

to *itself*? Can P have a differential relation with itself? Intuitively, the answer seems to be negative. The logical principle of identity dictates that  $P = P$ , so if relations are by nature differential, then reflexive relations cannot exist. This would, after all, imply that entities would have to differ from themselves, be themselves and not-themselves, which seems contradictory. However, against this conclusion, I contend that this reflexive differential relation is precisely what *change* entails. Change is the becoming-different of entities, the transformation of relations, where there is always continuity and discontinuity, meaning some sort of paradox is always implied.<sup>25</sup>

Our everyday experience of change is perhaps the best proof that binary oppositions can be overcome. Garcia is therefore not far off when he groups together philosophies that emphasize relation, difference, and change under the heading of ‘process philosophy’. That is because these three concepts are fundamentally linked to each other, and play a major role in the contemporary mobilization of process philosophy against substance philosophy.

## Process and change

Based on the previous section, one can provide three reasons for process philosophy’s appeal. Firstly, it allows for the reconceptualization of binary oppositions – such as men and women, whites and blacks, bourgeoisie and proletariat – as relational configurations.<sup>26</sup> Secondly, process philosophy accounts for the existence of more or less durable discrete entities, via its theory of *individuation*. Thirdly, as Rescher points out, process philosophy seems to navigate between the continental and analytic philosophical tradition, as it “requires the sort of evaluative appraisal and historical contextualization that

<sup>24</sup>Garcia, *Laisser Être et Rendre Puissant*, 352.

<sup>25</sup>Think, for example, of Hegel’s account of the becoming-reflective of consciousness, which constitutes the transformation of consciousness into self-consciousness.

<sup>26</sup>Arguably, this is the essence of contemporary critical theory.

characterizes Continental philosophy,” but also “the sort of conceptual clarification and explanatory systematization that characterize Analytic philosophy.”<sup>27</sup> With all these advantages, we should not overlook Graham Harman’s criticism of the sort of process philosophy I am proposing, which I will discuss now.

Above, I explained that there are strong indications that central terms in process philosophy, such as relation, difference and change, actually imply each other. That is why ontologies of difference, of process, of change, of relation, of becoming etc. usually show great similarities and are sometimes used interchangeably. Harman, on the other hand, argues that we have to neatly separate these ontologies in order to understand the key choices continental philosophy is presently facing. He resists the ‘current fashion’ of lumping together Whitehead, Bergson, Deleuze, Latour, James and others under the name of ‘process philosophy’, as it actually obscures their fundamental differences.<sup>28</sup>

Harman proposes to distinguish between philosophies of process (which replace underlying substances with concrete events); of becoming (where entities are the product of a more primordial dynamism);<sup>29</sup> and of relation (where “the thing is not an autonomous reality apart from its interactions with other things, but is instead constituted by those interactions”).<sup>30</sup> According to Harman, this distinction will highlight “not some vast alliance of philosophers of becoming, but rather [...] two groups of recent thinkers separated by a profound internal gulf: those who take individual entities as primary and those who view them as derivative.”<sup>31</sup> This distinction matches the Process Reducibility Thesis, according to

which every process is ultimately the work of an identifiable agent and which, according to Rescher, process thinkers reject.

Harman however argues that Whitehead views individual entities as lying at the core of reality.<sup>32</sup> This means that Whitehead, the thinker most associated with the term ‘process philosophy’, would in fact validate Rescher’s Process Reducibility Thesis and should therefore not be considered a process thinker (by Rescher) at all. Harman himself praises the fact that individual entities arguably form the basis of Whitehead’s ontology, because it allows for change:

Objects are somehow deeper than their relations, and cannot be dissolved into them. One of the reasons for my saying so is that if an object could be identified completely with its current relations, then there is no reason that anything would ever change. Every object would be exhausted by its current dealings with all other things; actuality would contain no surplus, and thus would be perfectly determinate in its relations. As I see it, this is the major price paid by the ontologies of Whitehead and Latour. If you deny that an object is something lurking beneath its current state of affairs, then you end up with a position that cannot adequately explain change; you will have an occasionalist theory of isolated, discrete instants. This is not to say that Whitehead and Latour say nothing about change: of course they do, since every philosopher must. But change for them is something produced after the fact, by the work of individual entities.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Rescher, *Process Philosophy*, 46.

<sup>28</sup>Harman, “Response to Shaviro,” 291.

<sup>29</sup>Harman, “Whitehead and Schools X, Y, and Z,” 232.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>31</sup>Harman, “Response to Shaviro,” 294.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 295.

The upshot of Harman's argument is clear: if things are their relations, then change would imply a change in relations. However, if everything is already related to everything else, how could new relations possibly emerge? Harman asserts that change can only be accounted for if things are, to an important extent, *not* relational:

I contend that becoming happens only by way of some non-relational reality. An object needs to form a new connection in order to change, and this entails that an object must disengage from its current state and somehow make contact with something with which it was not previously in direct contact. My entire philosophical position, in fact, is designed to explain how such happenings are possible.<sup>34</sup>

Harman's critique of Whitehead is not that his process philosophy doesn't allow for change. Rather, he seems to criticize Whitehead for his *inconsistency*. Whitehead admits that change requires individual entities, but fails short of accounting for the existence of these individual entities, as he reduces entities to their (processual) relations.<sup>35</sup> As Harman puts it: "Everything is a perpetual perishing for Whitehead—and when everything changes, nothing does."<sup>36</sup>

At this point, one may wonder how Harman himself intends to tackle the philosophical issue of change. He is clearly aware of the difficulties that such an undertaking entails, when he speaks of real objects that are "by definition incapable of touching each other," which would have to "*touch without touching*, through some sort of indirect contact."<sup>37</sup> Against this posi-

tion, one could of course remark that indirect contact is contact nevertheless. The Islamic doctrine of indirect causation or *occasionalism*, on which he relies in this regard, merely displaces the paradox of change within objects themselves, as he points out: "Instead of trying to eliminate the paradox of objects and relations, we need to understand the polarizations at work in objects themselves."<sup>38</sup>

Harman goes on to divide objects between real objects and sensual objects, where real objects enter into relation with other real objects through mediation of sensual objects. Harman goes on to affirm that every new relation generates a new object.<sup>39</sup> In other words, every relation can be reduced to objects. This leads Shaviro to speak of an "infinite regress of substances" in Harman's object-oriented philosophy. Harman himself has responded to this criticism by comparing Whitehead's philosophy to a pyramid scheme:

In financial pyramid schemes, no wealth exists independently of the scheme, but must always be provided by the next set of investors. In Whitehead's reverse-order version of the pyramid scheme, the supposed private reality of an entity apart from its prehensions turns out to be made only of a previous set of prehensions. In other words, reality never appears at any point in the chain. By contrast, in the second case my proposed infinite regress of objects is financially harmless, even if rather strange. If we say that a tree is made of certain pieces, that these are made of other pieces, and so on ad infinitum, there is actually no difficulty. [...] If we use the phrase 'infinite regress' to describe both,

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

<sup>35</sup> Harman, "Whitehead and Schools X, Y, and Z," 232.

<sup>36</sup> Harman, "Response to Shaviro," 300.

<sup>37</sup> Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology*, 150.

<sup>38</sup> Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 69.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

then this is little more than an intellectual pun, since the two cases are completely different, even opposite.<sup>40</sup>

Harman's final assertion seems rather dogmatic, as it is, in fact, far from clear why relational regress is problematic, whereas substantial regress is not. Harman simply takes for granted that relations are always in need of objects to sustain them, but objects can be self-sufficient, substantial, Absolute. But if, as Harman suggests when it comes to sensual objects,<sup>41</sup> it is precisely relations that create objects, then it seems Harman's account is the problematic one, not Whitehead's.

## Dialethism

This leaves us in a difficult position. Either behind every process there is an object (substance philosophy, Harman), or the other way around (process philosophy, Rescher). One might think that, because of their similar problems, they are in fact not that different. However, in this section, I will argue that process philosophy is, in fact, the more appealing of the two. This has, once again, to do with the particular approach to the philosophical problem of change. As we have seen in section one, change always implies some sort of paradox: something is both itself and not itself, which I called a reflexive differential relation. In this section, I will consider the possibilities of embracing paradoxes like these in philosophical reasoning, by turning to Graham Priest's dialethism.

Priest observes that the root cause of most, if not all, logical paradoxes lies in self-referentiality: propositions that refer to their

own content.<sup>42</sup> A notable example is the liar paradox, which revolves around determining the truth value of a statement that asserts its own falsehood. The result is well-known: it is true if it is false, and false if it is true. In other words, it appears that there is no resolution to this paradox that does not, in some way, violate the (classical) law of non-contradiction.

In Priest's view, the only way to address this problem is by embracing contradiction;<sup>43</sup> or more precisely, to embrace what he terms 'dialetheism' – the idea that some contradictions can be true.<sup>44</sup> The key word here is 'some', as Priest's position is not that *every* contradiction is true. The point of Priest's dialetheist stance is not to reject the classical logic of Frege and Russell wholesale; instead, it seeks to contextualize and refine this classical logic by putting it in its proper place.<sup>45</sup> The same applies to the law of non-contradiction: Priest does not advocate for its complete dismissal but rather aims to show that it does not universally and necessarily apply.<sup>46</sup>

For an example of dialetheist logic, Priest turns to Buddhist *catuṣkoṭi* logic, which offers four possible interpretations of a proposition P: (i) P, (ii) not P, (iii) P and not P, (iv) neither P nor not P. It is clear that this logic, notably option (iii), violates the principle of non-contradiction, as it allows for the possibility that something is and is not the case. Buddhist philosophy relies on this logic to address the difficult question of no-self (*anātman*); how, after all, can the self reach *nirvāṇa* if the self – strictly speaking – does not exist?

Garfield points out that the *Madhyamaka* thinker Nāgārjuna, one of Priest's favourite sources, solves this issue by distinguishing be-

<sup>40</sup>Harman, "Response to Shaviro," 297.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 301.

<sup>42</sup>Priest, *In Contradiction*, 9.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>45</sup>Priest, *In Contradiction*, 207.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 208.



tween conventional and ultimate reality: “all phenomena are empty of essence, but exist conventionally, interdependently, and impermanently.”<sup>47</sup> This conventional existence, Priest notes, implies a relational existence.<sup>48</sup> When Nāgārjuna speaks of the emptiness, or *śūnyatā*, of all things – including the self – he means that substances merely exist conventionally, but are ultimately all relational. Nāgārjuna however radicalizes this emptiness by concluding that, if everything is indeed empty, then emptiness itself must be empty as well.<sup>49</sup> Garfield and Priest refer to this conclusion as Nāgārjuna’s ontological paradox; a paradox they presume to be unique in the history of philosophy.<sup>50</sup>

What the ontological paradox amounts to, is that every metaphysical discourse is *itself* dependent on the reality it describes. Nāgārjuna would view both process and substance philosophy as conventional discourse, unable to touch the ultimate reality of things. As Garfield points out:

True assertions of dependence depend themselves on the descriptions under which things are explained and hence the sortals and interests we bring to the explanatory enterprise. Regularities are only explanatory to the degree that they are explained by other regularities, in a bottomless web of explanation.<sup>51</sup>

This bottomless web of explanation echoes Harman’s critique of relational philosophy: it only ends up in infinite regress. The crucial differ-

ence is however, as Priest points out, that process philosophies like *Madhyamaka* Buddhism embrace this regress, as they consider it an integral part of philosophy as a *process* in its own right: “If the process does, indeed, go on to infinity, there is no final goal – at least, if this is understood as a last state. Perhaps, then, we might understand the thought as being that the whole process *shows* us something about ultimate reality: that it is ineffable, this being the ‘final goal’.”<sup>52</sup>

The crucial insight is therefore that process philosophy is *itself* a process.<sup>53</sup> Unlike substance philosophy, which, according to Whitehead, judges philosophical propositions over their truth/false value,<sup>54</sup> process philosophers view propositions as effectuating a “lure to creative emergence in the transcendent future.”<sup>55</sup> Simply put: philosophical propositions are supposed to *do* something, to “intensify, attenuate, inhibit, or transmute.” This rather pragmatist understanding of the role of philosophical propositions implies the metaphilosophical understanding that metaphysical discourse is not fundamentally about painting a perfect picture of reality, but about effectuating *change* by understanding *itself* as process.<sup>56</sup>

This leads to the conclusion that the question is not only how metaphysics understands reality, but how we understand metaphysics – and by extension: philosophy – as well. Do we understand philosophy as a transformative process, as for example Nāgārjuna (and Hadot)<sup>57</sup> did? Or do we view philosophy as striving for an adequate description of ultimate reality? In true

<sup>47</sup>Garfield, “Nāgārjuna’s Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way)”, 26.

<sup>48</sup>Priest, *The Fifth Corner of Four*, 57.

<sup>49</sup>Garfield, “Nāgārjuna’s Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way)”, 27.

<sup>50</sup>Garfield and Priest, “Nāgārjuna and the Limits of Thought”, 18.

<sup>51</sup>Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism*, 31.

<sup>52</sup>Priest, *The Fifth Corner of Four*, 105.

<sup>53</sup>Rescher, *Process Metaphysics*, 166.

<sup>54</sup>Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 189.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>56</sup>Sehgal, “Diffractive Propositions”, 191.

<sup>57</sup>Hadot, “Exercises Spirituels.”

process fashion, I would argue that we need not choose between the two. Just as Nāgārjuna affirms that *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra* are actually the same thing,<sup>58</sup> and just as Priest harmonizes classical logic with his own dialetheist logic, we can (and should) make explicit the transformative potential of substance philosophy *by means of* process philosophy. My point in this article has been that this transformation will not come about unless philosophy understands itself as a *process* as well.

## Conclusion

This article reflected upon the rising interest in process philosophy. I explained how this rise in interest is related to process philosophy's supposed ability to overcome dualisms by thinking relationally instead. By highlighting how all relations contain a differential element, I could not only ground the proposition that 'everything stands in relation to everything else', but also explore why this implies that change is fundamental to every relational philosophy. Harman's objection, that this sort of process philosophy leads to the impossibility of change, should be headed, even though his own alternative, as I pointed out, falls into the same regress that process thinking does.

I therefore proposed the metaphilosophical view that metaphysical discourse must view itself as a process as well, rather than as an undertaking that aims at a perfect representation of fundamental reality. As I pointed out, the moment that process (i.e. relation, difference and change) is understood *reflexively*, is precisely the moment change becomes possible. It is through this understanding of philosophy, namely as entangled and embedded in myriad (social, political, spiritual etc.) relations and processes, that dualisms can be overcome – even if temporarily – and philosophy can find itself as a transformative practice that sets out to change the world.

<sup>58</sup>Nagarjuna, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, XXV, 19-20, 331-333.

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