

### 3. God and Process

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The central philosophical thesis of process philosophy is that process is a fundamental element in the constitution of all actualities, both worldly and divine. However, process thinkers do not agree about the nature of process itself, especially in its application to God. The enduring contribution of process theology will be the insight that process or time is a fundamental feature of divine actuality, not some specific analysis of the nature of process or time. What is really important is that God is in process, rather than any particular way of conceiving of that process. As commonly recognized, in his philosophical maturity, Whitehead conceived of two kinds of process: (1) the internal development or becoming of individual occasions or entities, and (2) the relation of succession between two or more individual occasions. The former he called “becoming”, “genetic process” or “concrecence;” the latter he called “time”, “change”, or “transition”.<sup>1</sup> Later, these notions will be further explained.

Recent process theology has been sharply divided between two views of God and process. The dominant view, developed by Charles Hartshorne and shared by John Cobb, applies both of the foregoing types of process to God. It conceives of God as an everlasting society of concrecence actual occasions. Whitehead’s alternative view conceives of God as a single, everlasting, non-temporal, actual entity. It recognizes no time or transition in God because God is not composed of a plurality of successive occasions. Whitehead’s view is susceptible to more than one interpretation, however.

Bowman Clarke is perhaps the ablest proponent of one version of Whitehead’s view that God is a single, non-temporal, actual entity. In four important articles, he developed and defended a version of this view and repudiated Hartshorne’s understanding of God as an infinite series of divine actual occasions. Clarke maintains that if we are to comprehend Whitehead’s view of God’s relation to process we must understand his contention that there are *two* types of process. Clarke’s essay titled “God and Whitehead” begins with these words.

It is generally recognized by Alfred North Whitehead’s interpreters that in

*Process and Reality* he has two types of process: the genetic process of becoming which is nontemporal, and the temporal process of transition. Not keeping these two types of process distinct has, I fear, caused some confusion in interpreting Whitehead, particularly his conception of God.<sup>2</sup>

Clarke believes that Whitehead's understanding of God is distorted if we liken Divine process to the plurality of occasions constituting transition or time. The only proper analogy is with the internal becoming of a single actual entity. Whitehead's epochal theory of *time* does not apply to God, but his concept of *becoming* does apply. As Clarke explains:

For Whitehead, God is an actual entity. This means that God, like any other actual entity, does not change. He is where he is and what he is; he neither changes position nor definiteness. In short, no characteristic or relation of God changes, they merely become. This immediately raises the question: How are the two processes, the genetic process of becoming and the temporal process of transition, illustrative of God?<sup>3</sup>

In many published articles, Clarke has answered his own question in depth. I will examine three elements of Whitehead's position according to Clarke, which I also believe to be Clarke's position, each of which denies what Hartshorne affirms about God. I shall call these (1) The No Time Factor, (2) The No Future Factor, and (3) The No Efficient Causation (or Wimp) Factor. If Clarke protests that he has only been explaining Whitehead's views, but not his own, he has not made *that* distinction clear in his published writings.

#### 1. THE NO TIME FACTOR

Both Whitehead and Clarke affirm the paradoxical view that concepts of time, change, or transition do not apply to God, yet seemingly temporalistic concepts such as becoming, process, flux, supersession, duration, etc. do apply to God and all other actual entities. Clark affirms that in two senses the temporal relationship of "before and after", i.e., McTaggart's "B series", does not apply to God. It applies to the world as known by God, but not to God himself.

First, "No before and after in God" means that nothing comes before or after God, though God knows that events within the world are ordered in before and after relationships. Clarke explains that

as for the process of transition, God is not a spatio-temporal part of a process of transition. There is no actual entity before him and no actual entity after him. He is not located in any B series. For this reason Whitehead refers to God as the "nontemporal actual entity". He is not a member of the field of the relation, "x is before y".<sup>4</sup>

Next, “No before and after in God” means that in the constitution of God as a single actual entity, there is no time, i.e., no succession of actual occasions or activities and experiences, some of which precede or follow others. Contra Hartshorne, God is not self-surpassing with respect to his own past states.<sup>5</sup> In explicating this view, Clarke refers to three pages in *Process and Reality* where Whitehead characterizes God as “non-temporal” (*Corrected Edition*, pp. 7, 32, 46; Clarke cites the 1929 edition, pp. 11, 47, 73). In the last two of these, “non-temporal” is clearly applied to the *primordial* nature of God, leaving open the possibility that the *consequent* nature is temporal. In the first reference, God is characterized as the “primordial, non-temporal accident” of creativity. Whether this applies only to the primordial nature is at least a matter of interpretation. In denying temporality to God on textual grounds, Clarke ignores one important passage from *Adventures of Ideas* in which Whitehead refers to “The everlasting nature of God, which is in a sense non-temporal and in another sense is temporal”.<sup>6</sup> Where temporality involves futurity, Clarke cannot admit that the everlasting nature of God is temporal.

It is peculiar, to say the least, that in some passages Whitehead seems to deny that both God and individual actual occasions are temporal, while applying to both such temporalistic terminology as “process”, “becoming”, “flux”, “supersession”, and “duration”. This oddity is partly resolved if we realize that Whitehead is not speaking ordinary English. Instead, he is speaking his own technical Whiteheadianese. What did *he* mean by both “time” and “becoming?”

Whitehead first introduced his “epochal theory of time” in the revisions which he added to the initial Lowell Lectures in *Science and the Modern World*. There he distinguished between epochal durations<sup>7</sup> or actual occasions<sup>8</sup> on, the one hand, and their succession, on the other. Time was defined as “sheer succession of epochal durations”.<sup>9</sup> This definition of time illuminates Whitehead’s puzzling remark in *Process and Reality* that the “genetic passage from phase to phase is not in physical time”,<sup>10</sup> for here the topic is the becoming of a single epoch. Since time is a relationship of succession between two or more epochs, a single epoch, i.e., a single term of that relationship, is not in time.

Though not in time, each epoch is nevertheless a quantum of becoming or process with temporal duration. How then does becoming differ from time in more than terminology? This has not been an easy question for Whitehead’s interpreters to answer. Whitehead believed that a certain minimal quantum or atom of spatio-temporal duration is required for there to be anything actual at all, as Clarke himself acknowledges.<sup>11</sup> Actual occasions, these minimal durations, have a specious or extended present. In Whitehead’s words, they have “temporal extensiveness”, or “temporal thickness”,<sup>12</sup> i.e., they *take* time, though they are not *in* time.

Although whole occasions are not in fact infinitely divided, they are nevertheless conceptually divisible into an infinite number of successive parts. As Whitehead explained, “In every act of becoming there is the becoming of something with temporal extension; but ... the act itself is not extensive, in the

sense that it is divisible into earlier and later acts of becoming which correspond to the extensive divisibility of what has become".<sup>13</sup> Here "temporal" applies to the epoch of becoming as a finished product, but not to its internal becoming. Presumably, Whitehead distinguished between the "first *temporal* half" and the "second *temporal* half" of the satisfaction of an actual entity only from the perspective of the finished product.<sup>14</sup>

Yet, we must ask, is there no real internal succession, no application of earlier and later, to the process of becoming itself? Granted that "temporal" applies technically to the succession of occasions, might there not be another kind of succession, a sense that is internal to the self-development of occasions? If so, it would be temporal in some more ordinary sense that takes all metaphysical processes of succession to be temporal.

What could the elements of internal succession be? Clarke denies that Whitehead's "phases" in the process of self-development of occasions are temporally successive.<sup>15</sup> He tells us that It

would be ... nonsense to say of Whitehead's three phases that first in time we have the conformal phase, and later in time this phase is supplemented, and after this supplementation, later in time, we have the satisfaction. As we have suggested, it is the first phase, the phase of inheritance, that locates the experience in space-time, and these spatiotemporal relations hold throughout the process of becoming and are exhibited in the satisfaction.<sup>16</sup>

It is difficult to determine whether to agree or disagree with Clarke in denying that the phases in the development of an occasion are successive. Clarke acknowledges that Whitehead himself used such words as "successive", "earlier" and "later" in describing the phases. However, Clarke reminds us that Whitehead was a mathematician and insists that his terminology was mathematical or logical in import, but not temporal.<sup>17</sup> Of course, this is an *interpretation* that goes beyond the language of the text itself. Yet it is a plausible interpretation. An *equally plausible* interpretation would be that there is a sequence of phases in the self-creative process of becoming. I doubt that we know which interpretation was that of Whitehead himself, and I see no way to settle this dispute merely by being faithful to the texts.

Perhaps we must turn to our own *experience* of time to determine whether Whitehead's phases follow one another, but even here I get little help. My own experience of time is much more Bergsonian than Whiteheadian. Hartshorne recognized that Dewey, Bergson, Peirce, Husserl, and Heidegger "found no definite discreteness in the becoming of human experience".<sup>18</sup> I too experience specious presents as interpenetrating rather than distinct.<sup>19</sup> Of course, the interpenetration is directional and causal, moving from past toward future. I do experience the present moment as specious, extended, not infinitesimally thin. Yet (to use a spatial metaphor), the leading and trailing edges of the present moment are not sharply defined; and a sequential and self-causal reckoning with data and with possibilities seems integral to what is happening now.

Thus, my experience of time fails to confirm the thesis that data, determination, and definiteness do not succeed one another within a single atomic occasion. Actually, I have never been able even to *find* or to *inspect* a single atomic occasion or to tell whether I have one of them, two of them, or several of them on hand. I have no clear answer to the question of what individuates occasions or how they develop, for I am not at all sure that events are sharply individuated or atomized in Whitehead's sense.

If, as Clarke suggests, occasions are individuated by their subjective aims,<sup>20</sup> this might explain why God, who has an infinite subjective aim at the creation of and intensification of intrinsic value, can be only a single infinite and inexhaustible actual entity. However, it might open the door to the possibility and probability that entities within the world with prolonged projects (e.g., human subjects) are enduring actual entities with durations lasting years instead of mere fractions of seconds.<sup>21</sup> It might even open the door to subjective immortality for human persons if some of our aims or projects are inexhaustible. After all these years of exposure to process thought, I for one still suspect at times that I might be a single enduring subject having many experiences rather than being a vast society of subjects every second, each having only one experience. And from the fact that there seems to be a minimal temporal threshold to our perceptual abilities (about ten or so flashes per second), I suspect that the only thing that follows is that there are minimal limits to our abilities to perceive, but not that there are minimal atomic limits to our existence. Normally, however, I just try to suppress such thoughts.

Although Clarke denies that the relation, *x* is before *y*, applies to the phases of concrescence, he affirms that this relation does hold between "prehensions within an actual entity".<sup>22</sup> Let us recall that Whitehead defined prehensions as "concrete facts of relatedness".<sup>23</sup> According to Clarke, many prehensions, many concrete facts of experienced relatedness, may come before or after one another within a single concrescence. With this I agree, at least to the extent that I am able to singleize specious presents.

As we have seen, Clarke insists that "process" in God be understood by analogy with the becoming or concrescence of a single actual occasion, not by analogy with time or transition.<sup>24</sup> We must now ask: Does Clarke hold that God is a single actual entity whose own everlasting process of concrescence consists of an infinite sequence of "before and after" prehensions, i.e., of concrete facts of experienced relatedness to the world, in God's consequent nature? As best I can determine, he holds that this is false but that something like it is true. His position is that the world that God prehends consists of "before and after" occasions, but that God's own experienced prehensions of this world are not ordered into "before and after" relations.<sup>25</sup>

Whitehead wrote that God's consequent nature is "always in concrescence and never in the past".<sup>26</sup> Clarke emphasizes the "never in the past" aspect of this quote, but what could he mean by "always in concrescence"? There are actually at least *two* views of God as a single, everlasting, actual entity who is always in concrescence. The first I shall call the theory of Continuous Concre-

cence. The second I shall call the theory of Completed Concrecence, which is Clarke's view, though Clarke himself does not use the label.

The theory of God as Continuous Concrecence, which I believe to have been Whitehead's own view, is that God is a single everlasting and continuously concrecing actual entity, but not an infinitely rich society of perishing actual occasions. God is everlasting, without beginning and without end. Nothing comes before or after God, but God's prehensions of and decisions about occasions in the world, as well as those worldly occasions themselves, do come before and after one another. Without perishing as a subject, without loss of subjective immediacy, and without loss of objects prehended, God continuously interacts with the world and is continuously enriched by it.

Whitehead wrote that in process thought: The ancient doctrine that "no one crosses the same river twice" is extended. No thinker thinks twice; and to put the matter more generally, no subject experiences twice. This is what Locke ought to have meant by his doctrine of time as "perpetual perishing".<sup>27</sup>

Since "perpetual perishing" does not apply to God, according to Whitehead, it is clear that "no subject experiences twice" is true only of occasions within the world which can and do perish, but not of God.

As I understand him, Whitehead conceived of God as an enduring subject who experiences and acts more than once, one who is always in concrecence in relation to a constantly developing world, one whose prehensions of that world succeed one another, one who experiences and acts twice – indeed an infinite number of times – but without ever perishing as a subject, without ever losing subjective immediacy. On the Continuous Concrecence view, God is in immediate, i.e., contemporary and independent, unison of becoming with each occasion in the world *as it enjoys* its own "moment of sheer individuality"<sup>28</sup> and creative self-development. While never losing subjective immediacy, God receives all worldly happenings into God's consequent nature *as they perish*, thereby giving them enduring objective immortality and making them thereafter everlasting in God.<sup>29</sup>

Some features of the theory of Continuous Concrecence were developed by William Christian, though with complications with respect to "satisfactions" which I do not accept. I have expressed my own preference for this theory in one published article;<sup>30</sup> but it is not the view of Bowman Clarke. In contrasting Christian's position with that of John Cobb, who shares the societal view with Hartshorne, Clarke wrote:

What Christian is doing – in saying that actual occasions do not change and perish, but God changes and does not perish – is to atomize the everlasting satisfaction into a sequence of finite satisfactions. As he puts it, God's satisfaction "is not *timelessly* one, determinate, and final. It is a living experience. But it is *always* one, determinate, and final" (300) .... In other words, the everlasting actual entity is not one. His satisfaction is shattered

into a sequence of finite specific satisfactions, each different for each finite occasion. At this point, I must confess, I would be hard pressed to distinguish between Cobb's and Christian's resolution of Cobb's difficulties. What Christian calls an everlasting actual entity which changes by virtue of a *sequence of finite specific satisfactions*, Cobb calls a *society of finite actual occasions*, sequentially ordered.<sup>31</sup>

My own position differs from Christian's, and agrees with Clarke's, in focusing on prehensions rather than satisfactions; and it does not reduce God to a society of actual occasions. I am not even sure that the world is reducible to societies of actual occasions! God is a continuously concreseing, unperishing, and everlasting unitary subject of prehensions that are in principle interminable, for God's creativity can never be exhausted. Thus, I agree with Clarke that God's prehensions are successive, but my differences with him about God will become apparent as I now move to discuss both the "No Future Factor" and the "No Causation (or Wimp) Factor".

Clarke holds a theory of Completed rather than a theory of Continuous Divine Concrescence. He insists that, contrary to St. Thomas Aquinas, God knows events within the world to be ordered in before and after relations. Yet, Clarke maintains that Whitehead's God is *like* the God of Aquinas and other classical theologians in containing or including all time all at once.<sup>32</sup> Clarke explains that the

difference in terminology between "eternal" and "everlasting" is important for Whitehead. It allows God in his fullness to be, in contrast to St. Thomas's simultaneous whole, an everlasting whole, one present, comprising all time and having duration of succession.<sup>33</sup>

An important difference, however, is that, according to Whitehead, the consequent nature of God is "incomplete;"<sup>34</sup> whereas Clarke's God, who comprises *all* time, is complete and changeless from eternity. Clarke's God has no indeterminate future because his God has no future at all.

## 2. THE NO FUTURE FACTOR

When Clarke explains how there can be transition and supersession in God, he tells us that all the "before and after" relationships in nature are known to be such by God, but there are no "before and after" relations in God's own experience, that "In short, all the B series are tenselessly in God's consequent nature and there ordered temporally in the vivid immediacy of one 'here-now'".<sup>35</sup>

Clarke denies that McTaggart's "A series", i.e., the ordering of events into past, present, and future, applies to God at all. The *objects* of God's experience are in "serial order", but "past, present, and future" do not apply to the order of

God's experiences themselves. Thus "all of nature" is present in its entirety to God, but none of it is past, and none of it is future.<sup>36</sup> Clarke clearly subscribes to the theory of what I call Completed Concrescence. His notion of a serial order of before and after relations which are knowable as present is extremely helpful in the attempt to understand Whitehead's claim that in God there is no past,<sup>37</sup> but I find it very troublesome if extended to the claim that in God there is no future.

In several articles,<sup>38</sup> Clarke endorses passages from Whitehead's early work *The Concept of Nature*, published in 1920 before he developed his own distinctive process metaphysics. There Whitehead referred to an "imaginary being" whose awareness embraces all the facts of time "as in their temporal serial order", whose mind "suffers no transition", and is "free from passage", who contemplates "all nature as an immediate fact", and whose present moment is specious, like ours, except that for the imaginary being "all nature shares in the immediacy of our present duration".<sup>39</sup> Clarke repeatedly affirms that the God of *Process and Reality* is identical with the "imaginary being" of *The Concept of Nature* who embraces all of time all at once, though in serial order, and for whom all nature is an immediate fact. He says that "This imaginary being of *The Concept of Nature* becomes the God of *Process and Reality* ...".<sup>40</sup> I wish to challenge this claim on several grounds.

First, with the loss of *any* future, and thus of an *open* future in God, it seems to me that *all* the important gains of process metaphysics and theology are lost in one "swell foop". While admitting that Clarke's theory of Completed Concrescence is a plausible interpretation of Whitehead, especially in light of the obscurity of many of Whitehead's pronouncements, I would like to develop an interpretation which preserves the gains.

Most interpreters of Whitehead would agree that we can conceive of God's present experience as specious or extended without going to the extreme of making its duration co-extensive with all of time all at once. I do not wish to speculate here about the duration of God's specious present,<sup>41</sup> but I am convinced that the classical view of a God who timelessly experiences all time is precisely what Whitehead *abandoned* when he began to reflect on theological themes in *Process and Reality*. Clarke acknowledges that his argument for the thesis that God is timeless process is largely textual.<sup>42</sup> However, there are important texts in Whitehead which cannot be reconciled with Clark's identification of the "imaginary being" of *The Concept of Nature* with the God who is both primordial and consequent in nature in *Process and Reality*. The latter God is an enduring subject who continuously assimilates novel data from the world as time marches on without losing subjective immediacy. However, this God is not timelessly complete with respect to an awareness of the entire past, present, and future of the universe. Whitehead wrote that "The most general formulation of the religious problem is the question whether the process of the temporal world passes into the formation of other actualities, bound together in an order in which novelty does not mean loss".<sup>43</sup> Whitehead found God to be the ultimate solution to this religious problem.<sup>44</sup> However, on Clarke's view of



Completed Concrescence, there can be no solution, for the simple reason that there can be no novelty for the God who timelessly is what is yet to be. Whitehead wrote that God “shares with every new creation its actual world; and the concrescent creature is objectified in God as a novel element in God’s objectification of that actual world”.<sup>45</sup> Yet, there can be no novel elements for a God whose present embraces all the future.

Contrary to Clarke, the Whitehead of *Process and Reality* does not say that God prehends the whole of time, past, present, and future, all at once. Instead, God prehends the world only as the world develops, but not in advance. Whitehead affirms that God’s consequent nature “evolves in its relationship to the evolving world”, and that only the primordial conceptual nature has “eternal completion”.<sup>46</sup> According to Whitehead, God’s “derivative nature is consequent upon the creative advance of the world”.<sup>47</sup> Yet on Clarke’s theory of Completed Concrescence, the eternally complete world makes no creative advance. Clarke can make no place at all for the following extremely important text from *Process and Reality*:

Neither God, nor the World, reaches static completion. Both are in the grip of the ultimate metaphysical ground, the creative advance into novelty. Either of them, God and the World, is the instrument of novelty for the other.<sup>48</sup>

Clarke’s God with no future *has* reached static completion without novelty, but this is not Whitehead’s God.

In the concluding theological chapter of *Process and Reality*, Whitehead clearly distinguished his own concept of God from that of theologians who make God’s perspective on the fluent world static or complete, thereby making fluency or time itself ultimately an illusion. He wrote that

The vicious separation of the flux from the permanence leads to the concept of an entirely static God, with eminent reality, in relation to an entirely fluent world, with deficient reality. But if the opposites, static and fluent, have once been so explained as separately to characterize diverse actualities, the interplay between the thing which is static and the things which are fluent involved a contradiction at every step in its explanation. Such philosophies must include the notion of ‘illusion’ as a fundamental principle – the notion of ‘mere appearance’.<sup>49</sup>

Clarke’s temporally complete God with no indeterminate future seems to me to be just such an entirely static God, in relation to whom the flux of the world is reduced to illusion or mere appearance, even if that illusive flux is ordered into “before and after” relations.

Most seriously of all, Clarke’s interpretation of Whitehead rules out free and creative creaturely choices, and it deprives process theology of all of the advantages of the “free will defense” in resolving the problem of theodicy.<sup>50</sup> If God’s knowledge of the world is complete even with respect to the future, this

implies that from some ultimate point of view, all the “before and after” relationships of the future are fully actual and fully determinate. From God’s perspective of Completed Concrescence, there is no indeterminate or open future, even though there might *appear* to be from our limited perspective in space-time. If it is objected that this misses the whole point, which is that the concept of the future just does not apply to God, the response is that however it is worded, Clarke assumes that there is a timeless and inclusive divine perspective on the world within which all the occasions and decisions made in all of time are fully concrete and determinate. This feature of classical theology, incorporated by Clark into the thinking of Whitehead himself, rules out free and creative acts of choice; for they simply are not there to be known until they are made, from *any* point of view, timeless or not. Clarke’s view of God loses two of the principle advantages of process theology: (1) its reconciliation of Divine Actuality with human freedom by making a place for Divine Potentiality, and (2) its account of human, not Divine, responsibility for *our* choices of good and evil.

Now, I do not doubt that Clarke wants to believe in human freedom and responsibility, for he tells us that

The past, relative to a particular event, is fixed and settled; it is what has become actual. The present, relative to a particular event, is what is becoming actual. But future events must wait to see how the present becomes actual. There is freedom, to some degree, in the becoming of any actual entity, and consequently, in any event. Thus the B series becomes fixed in its tenseless manner as events become.<sup>51</sup>

The difficulty, as I see it, is that this is all relative to the perspective of particular events within the world. The crucial question is whether the future is indeterminate relative to the ultimate perspective of God. Since the God of *The Concept of Nature* contemplates “all nature as an immediate fact”, there is no open future from the ultimate divine point of view. Any finite perspective which believes otherwise is mere illusion. Clarke’s position implies that for God the future is not future because it is present, and it is not open because it is fully determinate and complete. Any universe in which *all* events are absolutely ordered in “before and after” relations is still what William James would have called a “block-universe” with no open possibilities, incompatible with human freedom and creativity.

Clarke is committed to the dubious metaphysical thesis that from our point of view in the world, free and creative future decisions *appear* as not yet made; nevertheless, *in reality* they already have been made and exist in God timelessly but sequentially in their full concreteness. My own view, which I share with Hartshorne, is that free and creative future decisions which have not yet been made are simply not there to be known from *any* point of view, divine or otherwise.

In his early book titled *Language and Natural Theology*, published in 1966,

Clarke was more under the influence of Hartshorne than Whitehead. There Clarke rejected the very theology to which he now subscribes on the grounds that it does not take time seriously. To quote Clarke against Clarke:

There is ... an alternative interpretation of God and omniscience which follows Whitehead's admonition to take time seriously, and an interpretation which itself needs to be taken seriously. This view maintains that the content of God's knowledge changes with the changing, contingent facts of the world. If omniscience means to know, at any moment, all that there is to know and if time is not an illusion, then to know future contingents as indeterminate and future, relative to some past and fully determined actuality, is certainly an acceptable meaning of the term 'omniscience'. But does this imply that God is ignorant of the future? No; as Hartshorne points out, "... this implies that he (is) 'ignorant' *only* if it is assumed that events are there to be known prior to their happenings".<sup>52</sup>

It is only the most recent Clarke who presumes that future events are timelessly there to be known. Finally, Clarke offers at least one serious philosophical argument against the idea that the future is indeterminate for God. If we conceive of God's *present* experience of the world as

extended through all of space during its duration, ... then contrary to the theory of relativity, absolute space and time have been reintroduced into the physical world. We have a definition of absolute simultaneous spaces, namely, those in the divine experiences. By way of them it is easy to define an absolute past and an absolute future, namely, God's past and future of each simultaneous space in his divine experiences. And this, of course, is what Newton did call absolute space and time, namely, the sensorium of God.<sup>53</sup>

Well, a unified divine perspective on all of space is *not quite* what Newton meant by absolute space and time, for Newton's absolute space and time were something actual and completely uniform quite apart from any spatio-temporal contents or events, as Whitehead himself pointed out.<sup>54</sup> Process theology is not encumbered by such assumptions. Nevertheless, giving God a present experience of all of space does have the effect, as Lewis Ford has expressed it, of undermining "the foundations of relativity physics and its definition of simultaneity". Presumably Clarke would agree with Ford in finding "the conceptual costs" of this metaphysics to be "far too high".<sup>55</sup>

I see no reason why relativity should be a problem for an omnipresent God, even if it is assuredly a problem for localized observers traveling in different space-time frames who have no way of correlating their watches. If God's specious present were sufficiently extended to give an experience of a cosmic present moment, nothing would be different for *physics* as a human enterprise, though God's physics might be quite different from ours. At least we should ask

this question, with Hartshorne: “can physics, judging reality from the standpoint of localized observers, give us the deep truth about time as it would appear to a non-localized observer?”<sup>56</sup>

Frankly, I do not see how the problem of avoiding absolute space and time is solved by Clarke’s God who is “an everlasting whole, one present, comprising all time”.<sup>57</sup> Instead of appearing at the level of McTaggart’s “A series” of past, present, and future, absolute space-time reappears for Clarke at the level of the “B series” in which all worldly events have absolutely fixed “earlier or later” relations in God. If each worldly event has a determinate “earlier or later” position in a timelessly complete B series, that seems to be just about as non-relativistic as anything that Hartshorne has to offer, if not more so.

### 3. THE NO CAUSATION (OR WIMP) FACTOR

According to Whitehead, the world acts upon God, and God acts upon the world. In his words, “It is as true to say that God creates the World, as that the World creates God”.<sup>58</sup> In describing the “consequent nature” of God, Whitehead tells us that “there is a reaction of the world on God. The completion of God’s nature into a fullness of physical feeling is derived from the objectification of the world in God”.<sup>59</sup> Whitehead describes the “superjective nature” of God as “the character of the pragmatic value of his specific satisfaction qualifying the transcendent creativity in the various temporal instances”.<sup>60</sup> He wrote that after the multitude of worldly events have gained objective immortality in God, there is a final creative phase in which

the creative action completes itself. For the perfected actuality passes back into the temporal world and qualifies this world so that each temporal actuality includes it as an immediate fact of relevant experience. For the kingdom of heaven is with us today. The action of the forth phase is the love of God for the world. It is the particular providence for particular occasions. What is done in the world is transformed into a reality in heaven, and the reality in heaven passes back into the world.<sup>61</sup>

Oddly enough, Clarke denies that God and the world ever act causally upon one another. His view is that God acts upon the world only as a final cause, but not as an efficient cause, and that the world acts upon God through a non-causal variety of physical prehensions.

Now it is true that Whitehead’s God acts upon the world as a final cause. He described God as “the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness”.<sup>62</sup> God provides each worldly occasion with its initial subjective aim, its possibilities for decision, weighted (but not irresistibly so) toward the good.<sup>63</sup> However, I have difficulty with Clarke’s claim that God acts upon the world *only* as final cause and never as efficient cause. He informs us that “God has no causal past, no causal future, and no

causal contemporaries .... God is not a member of any causal chain of efficient causality .... God influences the temporal occasions by final causality".<sup>64</sup> Clarke presupposes that an absolute separation of final and efficient causation is possible within a Whiteheadian framework. However, Whitehead explained that occasions receive their aims from God through "hybrid physical feelings" of God's conceptual feelings.<sup>65</sup> This means that every transmission of God's ideas to occasions within the world involves a degree of efficient as well as final causation, and that Clarke is mistaken in thinking that the latter is possible without the former.<sup>66</sup>

I suppose that part of my objection to Clarke's rejection of divine efficient causation is a religious one, though I also think that it is adequately grounded in Whiteheadian texts and sound philosophy as well. The language used in texts previously cited dealing with the world's effects on God and with God's superjective nature is most plausibly interpreted as causal language, and so too when Whitehead says that the "consequent nature" of God "results from his physical prehension of the derivative actual entities", and that it "receives a reaction from the world".<sup>67</sup> I do not agree with Clarke that all this seemingly causal terminology can be written off as merely "poetic language".<sup>68</sup>

On religious grounds, rejecting divine efficient causation and making God only a final cause has its uses in theodicy, as David Griffin has shown.<sup>69</sup> If God's power over the world is "merely persuasive and not coercive", then God is not causally responsible for evil since God is not causally responsible for anything. Yet, we must ask whether this is the ideally desirable form of divine power over the world, whether a God who exercises only persuasive and no efficient causation over the world could be that being than whom none greater could be conceived. In his younger days, Clarke himself emphasized the religious importance of the idea of a supremely worshipful being who can command or merit "the love of *all* our heart, soul, mind and strength, that is our total devotion".<sup>70</sup>

Surely there are many thoughtful believers who would expect more than final causation of a supremely worshipful divinity. Who could worship such a wimp? According to the "only final causation" view, God is merely a super-celestial George Bush who expounds exalted ideals concerning domestic well-being like a Democrat but who budgets to support them like a chintzy Republican. A God of final causation alone proliferates inspirations but *does* nothing – hardly a God than whom none greater can be conceived, just as George Bush is hardly a President than whom none greater can be conceived.

Just how far process theologians should go in assigning efficient causation to God is a matter for honest disagreement, but surely not so far as to undermine human freedom, creativity, and responsibility. Hartshorne gives God a limited efficient causal role in establishing those basic laws of nature<sup>71</sup> that would make for a worthwhile world. He tells us that "Adequate cosmic power is power to set conditions which are maximally favorable to desirable decisions on the part of local agents".<sup>72</sup> Miracles have been unpopular with most modern thinkers, including process theologians. I suggest that process theologians

should reconsider the possibility that God might work an occasional miracle or two – just enough to announce God’s presence, but not so many as to make us depend on God to solve our problems for us and deprive us of responsibility for managing our own affairs.

As for the world’s effects on God, one of the most religiously attractive features of process theology is Hartshorne’s “doctrine of contributionism”, i.e., the doctrine that the world acts upon God and ultimately contributes to God all of the intrinsic value achieved in the world; that our love, worship and glorification of God do somehow make a real and important difference to God.<sup>73</sup> Clarke once felt the allure of contributionism. He wrote in his early *Language and Natural Theology* that

Such a conception of God and time has serious implications also, for religion. One of the major elements in worship is the act of sacrifice – the contributing to that which inspires our total commitment and devotion. If we cannot change the content of God’s experience and knowledge, how can it be said that we contribute anything to him .... To contribute, if it means anything, means to add something which was not there before. And is not Hartshorne right when he says of religion, “the basic religious view is that man’s good acts and happiness have a value to the supreme being which our bad acts and misery do not”. (*Man’s Vision of God*, pp. 134–135). Unless our moral acts and religious acts of worship can contribute something real to the knowledge and experience of God which was not there *before*, in short, unless time is real, morality and religion are in danger of becoming less than empty gestures; they are in danger of becoming a meaningless activity and a sham.<sup>74</sup>

Has the more recent Clarke, who cannot make a place for something “which was not there *before*” in God, abandoned contributionism entirely. I think not, but I also fear that he is on the brink of having done so. The latest Clarke would like to save the doctrine that the intrinsic goodness of the world is ultimately contributed to God and preserved and cherished by God forever. He does so through the implausible claims that there are non-causal modes of physical prehension of concrete actualities, and that it is through such a non-causal mode of prehension that God prehends the world and its worth. In his 1986 article titled “Hartshorne on God and Physical Prehensions”, Clarke argued very persuasively that although Hartshorne regards all prehension as involving efficient causation, Whitehead himself distinguished “between two types of physical prehensions, causal and presentational”.<sup>75</sup> Presentational prehensions, like our sensory perception of the *contemporary* world, are non-causal, for contemporaneity simply means causal independence by definition.<sup>76</sup> Clarke maintains that God’s physical prehensions of the world are not causal, that they are only presentational, involving conformation or reproduction but not time and causation.<sup>77</sup>

Clarke has convinced me that Whitehead believed in non-causal physical

prehensions of concrete actualities. He has not convinced me that such non-causal prehensions really exist. Surely we are not to accept them merely on Whitehead's authority. All experienced concrete facts of relatedness with which I am familiar are causal in nature, including experience of the *near* contemporary world given to us in sensation, a world so near in the past that for practical purposes we take it to be present. Without non-causal prehensions of concrete facts, only causal prehensions remain to explain how the world can contribute something to God, and how God can contribute something to the world. I can make no sense of the claim that the world and God affect one another without affecting one another.

In conclusion, it seems to me that process theology could survive a significant modification of the epochal theory of time as applied to both God and the world. However, if its gains are to be preserved, God must be assigned an infinitely prolonged, creative, and incomplete future, and both God and the world must be understood to act causally and creatively upon one another.

NOTES

1. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, corrected ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1978), pp. 210–215.
2. Bowman L. Clarke, "God as Process in Whitehead", in Bowman L. Clarke and Eugene T. Long, eds., *God and Temporality* (New York: Paragon House, 1984), p. 169.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 180; Bowman Clarke, "Process, Time and God", *Process Studies* 13 (1983): 258.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
6. Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 208.
7. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and Modern World* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 124.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 124. See also p. 126.
10. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 283.
11. Clarke, "God as Process in Whitehead", p. 173; "Process, Time and God", p. 247. Bowman Clarke, "Hartshorne on God and Physical Prehensions", *Tulane Studies in Philosophy* XXXIV (1986): 34, 35.
12. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, pp. 77, 169.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Clarke, "God as Process in Whitehead", pp. 178, 179. "Process, Time and God", pp. 251–255. "God and Time in Whitehead", pp. 570–571.
16. Clarke, "Process, Time and God", p. 253.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 259, n. 4.
18. Charles Hartshorne, *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method* (La Salle: Open Court Publishing Co., 1970), p. 192.
19. In his *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, describing the successive moments of the flux of experience, Bergson wrote that "they were so solidly organized, so profoundly animated with a common life, that I could not have said where any one of them finished or where another commenced. In reality no one of them begins or ends, but all extend

- into each other. Harold A. Larrabee, ed., *Selections from Bergson* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949), p. 6.
20. Clarke, "God and Time in Whitehead", p. 572; "Process, Time, and God", p. 255; "Hartshorne on God and Physical Prehensions", p. 39.
  21. For further development of this suggestion, see Rem B. Edwards, "The Human Self: An Actual Entity or a Society", *Process Studies* 5 (1975): 195–203.
  22. Clarke, "God as Process in Whitehead", p. 178.
  23. Clarke, "Hartshorne on God and Physical Prehensions", pp. 30, 31.
  24. Clarke, "God as Process in Whitehead", p. 180.
  25. Clarke, "Process, Time, and God", p. 258.
  26. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 180.
  27. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
  28. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, p. 177.
  29. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 347.
  30. Edwards, "The Human Self: An Actual Entity or a Society?", pp. 195–203.
  31. Clarke, "God and Time in Whitehead", p. 568.
  32. Clarke, "God as Process in Whitehead", pp. 183–185; "Hartshorne on God and Physical Prehensions", p. 36.
  33. Clarke, "God as Process in Whitehead", p. 184.
  34. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 345.
  35. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
  36. Clarke, "Hartshorne on God and Physical Prehensions", p. 35.
  37. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, pp. 31, 87.
  38. Clarke, "Process, Time, and God", pp. 255–256; "God as Process in Whitehead", pp. 180–181; "Hartshorne on God and Physical Prehensions", p. 35.
  39. Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 67, 69.
  40. Clarke, "Process, Time and God", p. 256.
  41. I have discussed this problem in my "The Human Self: An Actual Entity or a Society", p. 203.
  42. Clarke, "God and Time in Whitehead", p. 564.
  43. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 340.
  44. *Ibid.*, p. 350.
  45. *Ibid.*, p. 345.
  46. *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.
  47. *Ibid.*, p. 345.
  48. *Ibid.*, p. 349.
  49. *Ibid.*, pp. 346, 347.
  50. I am aware that Clarke himself has made full and eloquent use of the "free will defense" in his essay titled "A Whiteheadian Theodicy", in John K. Roth and Frederick Sontag, eds., *The Defense of God* (New York: Paragon House, 1985), pp. 32–47.
  51. Clarke, "God as Process in Whitehead", p. 177.
  52. Bowman L. Clarke, *Language and Natural Theology* (The Hague: Mouton & Company, 1966), pp. 115–116. The quote is from Charles Hartshorne, *Man's Vision of God* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1964), p. 98.
  53. Clarke, "Hartshorne on God and Physical Prehensions", p. 37.
  54. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, pp. 70–72.
  55. Lewis Ford, "God as a Temporally-Ordered Society: Some Objections", *Tulane Studies in Philosophy* XXXIV (1986): 45.
  56. Charles Hartshorne, *Creative Synthesis & Philosophic Method*, p. 125.
  57. Clarke, "God as Process in Whitehead", p. 184.
  58. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 348.
  59. *Ibid.*, p. 345.
  60. *Ibid.*, p. 88.



61. Ibid., p. 351.
62. Ibid., p. 346.
63. Ibid., pp. 108, 224, 244, 283.
64. Clarke, "Process, Time, and God", pp. 257, 258.
65. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, pp. 246–47, 250.
66. I am indebted to a conversation with Don Sherburne for this insight.
67. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 31.
68. Clarke, "Hartshorne on God and Physical Prehensions", p. 38.
69. David Griffin, *God, Power and Evil, A Process Theodicy* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 280, 281.
70. Clarke, *Language and Natural Theology*, pp. 103–107.
71. Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), p. 118.
72. Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), p. 135.
73. See Charles Hartshorne, "The Ethics of Contributionism", in *Responsibilities to Future Generations: Environmental Ethics*, Ernest Partridge, ed. (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1981), pp. 103–107. See also Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity*, pp. 46, 58, 124, 128, 130, 131, 133, 141.
74. Clarke, *Language and Natural Theology*, pp. 113, 114.
75. Clarke, "Hartshorne on God and Physical Prehensions", p. 32.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid., p. 38.