

Whitehead's Unconscious Ontology

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ABSTRACT. Alfred North Whitehead's process metaphysics remain largely unknown to psychology despite his treatise on human consciousness, perception and the nature of the soul. What is of greater significance is that his process reality is governed by unconscious forces that form the a priori foundation for all modes of human experience to manifest. In this article, I attempt to show how Whitehead's unconscious ontology has direct implications for the way in which we understand his philosophical psychology, and specifically how this bears on the mind-body problem. I further show compatibilities with psychoanalytic thought on the nature and constitution of the psyche, thus demonstrating how process is an indispensable construct in the way we conceptualize the mind.

KEY WORDS: Freud, mind-body problem, ontology, psychoanalysis, unconscious, Whitehead

One of the most under-emphasized aspects of Alfred North Whitehead's metaphysics is that it embodies an unconscious ontology.¹ The fundamental activity that comprises and underlies the cosmology of actual entities is the eternal process of unconscious experience. The cosmos is alive insofar as it is active,² constituted through a dynamic flux of microcosmic orderly events, much of which are non-conscious organizations as 'drops of experience, complex and interdependent' (Whitehead, 1929/1978, p. 18).³ Whitehead specifically refers to the realm of unconscious process as the basis for human consciousness, yet the broader treatment of unconscious occasions that underlie his metaphysical system remains only peripherally addressed. Despite the fact that Whitehead did not articulate a formal theory of unconscious ontology, it is embedded in the most basic fabric of his philosophy.

Throughout this article, I will attempt to show that Whitehead's system rests on an unconscious ontology of actual entities exemplified through the activity of prehension, thus constituting the experiential process of becoming. Not only does unconscious activity undergird the most basal operations of actual occasions, but unconscious processes are responsible for higher

modes of self-conscious life. Therefore Whitehead's entire cosmology rests on an appeal to unconscious activity. This has significant implications for appreciating his general metaphysical scheme as well as specifically contributing to our understanding of his philosophical psychology, a topic that brings him into dialogue with Freud. In what follows, I will explicitly examine Whitehead's rather terse treatment of psychological physiology in relation to the question of embodiment, and thus show how he responds to the mind-body problem. We will further see how he complements psychoanalytic thought. Through our understanding of the role of unconscious processes in Whitehead's system, we may hope to gain greater appreciation of the dynamic ontological configurations that constitute human psychology.

Nature as Mind

Although it was Hegel who first argued systematically that reality is a process of becoming, it is Whitehead who is most commonly referred to as the founder of process philosophy. For those readers not familiar with the nuances of Whitehead's system, a brief account is in order. Having a long accomplished career as a mathematician, logician, philosopher of science and metaphysician, Whitehead is probably best known for his speculative metaphysics.⁴ Discontented with materialism and the physical paradigms of his day, he reconceptualized the notion of experience and thereby attempted to integrate various disciplines as diverse as the natural sciences, logic, theology and anthropology within a revisionist framework of evolutionary cosmology. Whitehead argued that the fundamental activity that comprises and underlies the cosmos is the eternal process of experience organized through an ongoing and interactive trajectory of dynamic patterns instantiated in all aspects of the universe. In other words, everything that exists is comprised of active units of experiential complexity, from the robust psychological processes of human cognition, to the elementary particles inherent in a stone. Whitehead's system emphasizes the creative and novel advance of nature as a continuously transforming and progressive series of events that are purposeful, directional and unifying. Like Heraclitus and Hegel before him, Whitehead stresses the dialectical exchange of oppositions that advance the process of becoming.

Whitehead's invented technical language is tedious and at times inaccessible to the non-specialist, therefore it will become important to understand some basic concepts before addressing the more intricate aspects of his psychology. For Whitehead, the cosmos is comprised of what he refers to as 'actual entities' or 'actual occasions', which are 'the final real things of which the world is made up' (p. 18). Actual entities constitute the flux of energy continuous throughout nature and are the fundamental

building blocks of the universe: they are ontologically undifferentiated in essence, distinguished only in form or by the mode in which they appear. This is why Whitehead (1933/1948) says there is only one genus of actual entities. In essence, 'each actual occasion is in truth a process of activity' (p. 254).

In *The Concept of Nature* (1920), Whitehead was concerned with addressing the place of mind in nature. This led to their initial reconciliation in *Science and the Modern World* (1925), which was resolved in his Gifford Lectures (1927–8), the subject matter of *Process and Reality* (1929/1978). Whitehead's solution to the question of mind and nature is a philosophy of organism, what he calls the doctrine of 'prehensions'. Although lacking articulation and development, the primacy of unconscious process is already prepared in his most elementary treatment of prehension. For Whitehead, prehending is pure activity: it may be understood as a process of seizing, absorbing and synthesizing the elements of the surround into an internal unity or organized emotional pattern. Prehending is equivalent to feeling: it is a purposeful, valuative, self-determined act. In Whitehead's (1927/1960) words, 'To be an actual entity is to have self-interest. This self-interest is a feeling of self-valuation; it is an emotional tone' (p. 97). Thus feeling becomes the expression of an actual entity's subjectivity. 'Concrescence', a similarly related concept, is a higher-order process of unification that underlies the internal constitution of an actual entity, a subject that feels and unifies its relation to experience through the act of prehending.

An actual entity is tantamount to an occasion because it is an instance—an 'event', 'stream' or 'throb' of experience arising out of data (pp. 190, 40), subsequently appropriating elements from its environment and making it part of its internal structure. In fact, Whitehead views the world as composed of endless 'societies' of actual entities that are constantly in flux and interpenetrate one another at any given time, thereby leading to vast transmogrifications and evolutionary developments. The infinite societies of occasions that comprise the universe embody every mode of electrodynamic energy explained through quantum mechanics to the highest instantiations of human consciousness. Through the philosophy of organism, Whitehead is able to show that nature is not inert or static substance, but rather a dynamic array of transactions constituted as actual agencies that respond to and express themselves in the flow of inter-relational activity that comprises all reality.

Whitehead cognizes nature: namely he lends cognition to microcosmic events and hence attributes mentation to all actual occasions. 'Mental activity is one of the modes of feeling belonging to all actual entities' (p. 56). In this sense, nature is mental or psychic process that is differentiated only in its level of manifest complexity, creativity and qualitative novelty. Elsewhere he states, 'I am using the term "mind" to mean the complex of mental operations involved in the constitution of an actual

entity' (p. 85). From Whitehead's account, nature *is* mind; what Catherine Keller (1989) refers to as a '*psychocosmic*' process (p. 134). Thus the human mind and consciousness are higher modified complexifications that have derived and evolved from the more primitive mental activity that constitutes the natural world.

With the exception of animate life possessing the capacities of consciousness, the pulsation of events that lends order to the process of prehension is an unconscious operation. Yet even with entities that possess consciousness, unconscious processes maintain ontological primacy. Whitehead specifically says that 'consciousness is not the order of metaphysical priority' (p. 162). Unconscious events constitute the formal structure of actual entities even when they possess consciousness. In other words, conscious acts involve unconscious prehensions. As Whitehead tells us, 'consciousness presupposes experience, and not experience consciousness. . . . Thus an actual entity may, or may not, be conscious of some part of its experience' (p. 53). Prehensive activity is first and foremost organized unconscious experience. Therefore, the fundamental processes that comprise the nature of reality have an unconscious ontology.

Whitehead uses the word 'unconscious' in a few limited contexts, in which it carries different meanings. While not formally distinguished by him, we can say that there are five distinct usages of unconsciousness: (1) that which lacks consciousness, such as most of the natural universe; (2) a state or condition of non- or *unself*-consciousness; (3) a realm other-than or dialectically opposed to consciousness; (4) that which is beyond or outside an occasion in its current constitution or moment, which we may either attribute to (a) the realm of pure potentiality not yet actualized by an entity, that is, a non-prehended eternal object (which could apply to the second definition), or (b) that which is negativity itself and thus a central feature in the creative development of an occasion; and (5) a pre-rational, emotive unconscious ground that serves as the foundation for higher forms of consciousness to materialize. For Whitehead, consciousness emerges from and is the logical completion of an unconscious ontology.

The Ontological Principle

The doctrine of prehensions rests on what Whitehead calls 'the ontological principle'. For him, this is the definition of actuality (p. 80). By this he means that 'actual entities are the only *reasons*; so that to search for a *reason* is to search for one or more actual entities' (p. 24). He further says that 'the reasons for things are always to be found in the composite nature of definite actual entities . . . no actual entity, then no reason' (p. 19). There is a rational nature to the universe and it is located in brute fact. Whitehead is a realist: the universe is a presupposed given actuality comprised of objective data.

For him, the reason for an actual entity is simply expressed in the nature of its being: whatever exists is actual and 'in potency everywhere' (p. 40). There is nothing behind the veil of appearance: whatever appears must be actual.⁵

Utilizing the ontological principle, Whitehead is attempting to address the question of original ground. The reason or ground of an actual entity is construed by its determinate character as an actively constituted agency. It is from this primordial ground composing the basic constituent activity of all actual entities that other forms of complexity and novelty emerge and derive. Whitehead is clear: 'actual occasions form the ground from which all other types of existence are derivative and abstracted' (p. 75). Because actual occasions are largely unconscious organized feeling states expressed as unifying acts, the ontological principle points toward an unconscious ontology or experiential ground that makes higher forms of prehension and concrescence possible. The ontology of an entity is pure unrest that takes subjective form and instantiates itself as objective fact. It is from this original ground of unconscious subjectivity that the nuances of prehension are realized.

If activity and experience underlie all actual events, then the essence of an actual entity may be said to be its transformative 'power' (p. 19), a process of becoming. The ontological principle assumes the objective actuality or bare fact of the universe as a 'solidarity of many actual entities', each arising out of data as complex orders of experience (p. 40). Whitehead explains that prehending or feeling is the elementary operation of emerging from objective data into subjective form. Thus an actual occasion comes into being as feeling subjectivity out of the field of actual objects. 'Feelings are variously specialized operations, effecting a transition into subjectivity' (pp. 40–41). On the most generic level, this is a process of unconscious mentation: an entity is alive by virtue of the fact that it feels and is felt by other actual entities. Moreover, the universe may be said to be a composite of collective unconscious entities insofar as it is a system composed of the plurality of actual feeling entities as a unified totality whereby each entity enters into the internal constitution of all others (p. 41). Thus Whitehead is able to blur the distinction between universals and particulars by dissolving their bifurcation and making them interpenetrating instances of a unified system—a composite unity (see p. 48).

Unconscious Teleology

Not only does Whitehead assign mind to nature but he rescues it from the bane of reductive materialism: nature is not unintentional mechanism, but rather teleological self-expression. The prehensive activity constitutive of a concrescing occasion is a telic, purposeful, self-creative process. *Telos*

(τέλος) underlies cosmic order and is largely the product of unconscious intension. Telos is not aberration, nor is it a preformed design: the universe flourishes as a self-determined, self-disclosed act. Each actual entity is an epigenetic achievement; it comes into being as feeling subjectivity from objective data and evolves into a dynamic self-articulated complex unity within the universe itself as a complex whole. Prehension is a basic unconscious teleological operation: 'it involves emotion, and purpose, and valuation, and causation' (p. 19). For Whitehead, the life of each actual entity is a self-chosen path which 'functions in respect to its own determination' (p. 25).

Unconscious teleology is intimately linked with the 'ontological principle', which Whitehead equates with efficient and final causality (pp. 24, 47). In fact, efficient causal forces are in the service of final teleological aims. Yet the final cause of an actual entity is not a fixed, predetermined course of action; it is an internal process by which the entity becomes itself, while efficient causation effects the transition of one actual entity to another. The final end, purpose or goal of an actual occasion is to seek 'satisfaction' in a novel fashion of self-creation, which is the impetus behind its force or drive as intentional self-determination. The aim of each individual act becomes fully actual when it evokes a response in other acts. As the final phase of concrescence, satisfaction leads to a process of 'perishing' whereby the subjective occasion becomes a transposed objective entity. Whitehead says that in the final phase of concrescence, an actual entity 'is *fully determinate* (a) as to its genesis, (b) as to its objective character for the transcendent creativity, and (c) as to its prehension—positive or negative—of every item in the universe' (p. 26, italics added). The prehensive act is *affirmative* in that it feels and seizes upon particular elements in its milieu and negates other elements that are not essential to its satisfaction.

A concrescing occasion is selective in what it chooses, absorbing and retaining certain data in its internal constitution while rejecting other elements in its milieu that become 'valued down'. Each decisive prehensive act enjoys a degree of volitional choice. As such, an actual entity is free to define its internal structure and its specific advance into novelty. Whitehead reinforces the point that entities are self-determined experiences: 'Actual occasions in their "formal" constitutions are devoid of all indetermination' (p. 29). The more elaborate and inventive the hierarchies of societies become, the more freedom they acquire in their internal organization, nexūs, self-expression and choice.

An actual entity is a teleological agent by virtue of the fact that it *decides* a course of action to take that brings about an intended event; although the effects of what may be intended are subject to external contingencies. Whitehead is unequivocally specific when he says that an actual entity 'asserts the relativity of decision' (p. 43). Moreover, the act of deciding 'constitutes the very meaning of actuality'. Once again, this process is

expressed through the ontological principle: the very essence of an actual occasion is its drive to choose. Furthermore, it may choose what it sees fit to choose within the parameters of its subjective form and objective environment, despite that its choice may be 'blind'.⁶ In effect, it chooses the ground for the sake of which to behave. As Whitehead (1927/1960) informs us, it does so out of 'self-interest' and 'self-valuation' (p. 97). From this standpoint, an actual entity is *desirous*—it wants, it seeks, it finds.

It is somewhat surprising that Whitehead himself did not depict an actual occasion as a desirous entity despite the fact that he canonized feeling as its principle mode of expression. This may be in part due to his need to defend metaphysical realism despite the cryptic idealism that saturates his system. As I have argued at length elsewhere (Mills, 2002), an entity is desirous in that it feels—it longs, it craves satisfaction. Self-interest and self-value presuppose desire, as does the very *need* for satisfaction itself. If an entity did not desire, it would not seek—it would not experience, hence it would exhibit no activity at all; it simply would not be. The experience of an actual entity is pure activity that desires insofar as the expression of such activity—its emotions, decisions, valuation and appreciations—is desire. Since desire cannot emerge *ex nihilo*—out of a lack of desire—desire is an ontologically preconditioned craving. An occasion is satisfied when it perishes into objectivity: it becomes data which give rise to new subjective forms. Before it becomes an object—an eternal return—it lacks the unity and self-expression it so craves. Thus before the unifying threads of concrescence transmute the feeling subject into a new entity, an actual occasion is being in relation to *lack*.

Whitehead uses this language gingerly, careful not to animate nature—presumably because he wishes to avoid further criticism that he anthropomorphizes nature; yet he nevertheless supports my claim that the basic ontological foundation of a prehending entity is unconscious desire. It is not enough to say that the universe is composed of active events that experience without speculating as to why. Whitehead gives us a clue: it is to be found in the nature of 'appetition'. For Whitehead, appetite involves 'unrest'—the 'realization of what is not and may be' (p. 32). This unrest is an entity's being in relation to what it is *not*—what it lacks—and hence what it wants to become. Whitehead also refers to this desire as a 'subjective passion' and 'urge', what he further calls an 'impulse' or drive. He states that 'the urge towards the future [is] based upon an appetite in the present': the immediate goal is to 'procure' (p. 32). He argues that all physical experience is governed by the 'appetite for, or against, its continuance': an example of this is the desire for 'self-preservation'.

Whitehead's attributions of 'appetite', 'urge' and 'passion' as motives of an occasion's internal constitution clearly shows the Platonic pole of his thought. By evoking the Greek notion of appetite or desire (*eros*), he is able to stress the complex holism that an entity strives to achieve first

emanating from within the unconscious subjective contours of its prehending nature and then progressing to higher shapes of developmental achievement. In fact, he himself specifically uses this language when discussing an actual entity's yearning for God as 'the eternal urge of *desire*' (p. 344, italics added). He himself acknowledges the danger associated with the use of the technical term 'appetition', which he even extends to Freud's psychology; yet he consistently refers to the enjoyments and novelty of desire belonging to the teleological motives and feeling intensities of actual entities. In fact, Whitehead says, 'the primary meaning of "life" is the origination of conceptual novelty—novelty of appetite' (p. 102).⁷ The qualia of appetite affecting choice may take a special form, what Whitehead calls a 'propositional prehension' (p. 184). Feeling propositions are 'theories' that provide immediate enjoyment and purpose to a concentering occasion: they direct the telos of decision and guide object choice. Prehensive propositions are not to be construed as conscious judgments that belong to intelligent self-conscious life; they are largely physical purposes belonging to the internal constitution of an entity, such as heat is to fire. On this level, propositional feeling entities don't think; they are 'unconscious elements in the aesthetic supplement of an actual occasion' (Kraus, 1998, p. 95). Hence, propositional feelings are largely unconscious purposes that serve as the sediment for higher forms of societies to emerge. This is exemplified in the phenomena of conscious and self-conscious life. As Whitehead avouches, unconscious propositions provide the a priori conditions for consciousness to arise.

Consciousness and the Unconscious

Up until now, we have been largely concerned with delineating the ground and telic functions of non-conscious subjective experience that constitute the inner structure and activity of an actual occasion. It is important to show, however, how these unconscious processes become fertile soil for more sophisticated forms of complexity to transpire. Whitehead attributes higher phases of experience to human consciousness exemplified as perception, thought and rational judgment. Yet he clearly shows that the achievement of consciousness is rooted in an unconscious ontology:

Consciousness flickers; and even at its brightest, there is a small focal region of clear illumination, and a large penumbral region of experience which tells of intense experience in dim apprehension. The simplicity of clear consciousness is no measure of the complexity of complete experience. Also this character of our existence suggests that consciousness is the crown of experience, only occasionally attained, not its necessary base. (p. 267)

Whitehead is saying that unconscious experience is the ground of consciousness; therefore, the unconscious is a necessary presupposition. Recall that

for Whitehead, consciousness presupposes experience (p. 53); thus consciousness is the differentiated evolutionary outgrowth of unconscious structure that is realized through intricate matrices and unified strands of complex social integration. As Whitehead puts it, consciousness is a developmental achievement that 'illuminates the more primitive types of prehension' (p. 162). This is why he says consciousness is not the order of metaphysical priority: 'the philosophy of organism . . . relegates consciousness to a subordinate metaphysical position' (p. 139).

Unconscious processes not only developmentally precede conscious organizations, but they also command ontological primacy. Whitehead attempts to show that every aspect of the universe participates in the same underlying essence differentiated only by form. Actual occasions are architectonic: they build on their most primitive enactments and gain richer complexity and dynamic integrity as they advance toward higher tiers of creative self-expression and synthetic integration. Consciousness is only a late derivative phase of unconscious subjectivity: 'Those elements of our experience which stand out clearly and distinctly in our consciousness are not its basic facts; they are the derivative modifications which arise in the process' (p. 162). These derivative modifications are the structures, operations, properties and attributes assigned to conscious perception, attention, thought, understanding, and so on, that only a few entities enjoy among the vast sea of occasions that remain within the turbid recesses of unconscious void. But as Whitehead continues to explain, unconscious elements 'remain components in the higher phase'; they are absorbed, preserved and incorporated as the lower relation passes over into the higher relation. Occasions have the capacity to surpass their previous shapes while retaining the nuances of their previous morphology. This is not unlike Hegel's (1807/1977) notion of *Aufhebung*, with one noted addition: an actual entity has the capacity to *choose* which elements it wishes to retain and which it wishes to reject. In effect, consciousness is the coming into being of unconscious choice, yet the unique configurations inherent in each conscious entity vary with respect to content and qualitative self-determination.

Whitehead mainly uses the word 'unconscious' to signify unawareness or non-conscious process, but he alludes to a realm or agency that we may properly call 'the unconscious'. He patently states that feeling propositions take place at the physical level of 'unconsciousness'. It is within the pit or abyss of this original subjective ground that we can locate the 'source for the origination of feeling' (p. 186). Not only is the source unconscious, it is an organized unconscious agency—an aggregate of complex societies—affecting transitions into conscious awareness. The complex hierarchy of societies constituting conscious life is the product of a systemic unconscious infrastructure that is formed out of previous 'structured' and/or 'subordinate' societies (p. 99). As hierarchies gain in complexity, supported by structured subordinate societies that lend order to the interdependent environment,

more sophisticated societies may emerge, what Whitehead calls 'regnant' societies (p. 103).

Regnant societies are sophisticated organizations that may belong to unconscious, conscious and self-conscious organisms. The confluence of many sophisticated societies gives rise to even higher regnant societies, each effecting their own autonomy within the interpenetrating ocean of actual entities. Within the unconscious human mind, for example, regnant societies may be delicate and transitory or well formed enduring fantasy systems that seek fulfillment via displacement into conscious reality. While they are themselves sophisticated modes of orderly activity seeking creative self-utterance, they are also subordinate to higher constellations of mental activity; yet they still make their presence felt as they too are feeling entities. Whitehead even tacitly refers to the realm of fantasy and our tendency to project unconscious wishes:

Anyone who at bedtime consciously reviews the events of the day is subconsciously projecting them against the penumbral welter of alternatives. He is also unconsciously deciding feelings so as to maximize his primary feeling, and to secure its propagation beyond his immediate present occasion. (p. 187)

An occasion is concerned with maximizing its primary pleasure feeling—its enjoyment—as well as sustaining its continuance by procuring a future state of satisfaction. This is not at all incongruous with psychoanalytic doctrine: the ego must secure boundaries for the fulfillment of unconscious wishes governed by the pleasure-principle.⁸ But Whitehead most vividly acknowledges the reality of unconscious agency when he remarks on conscious recognition: 'Whenever there is consciousness there is some element of recognition. It recalls earlier phases from the dim recesses of the unconscious' (p. 242). Note the use of the demonstrative word '*the*'. Here, Whitehead is reminded of Plato's theory of reminiscence, but his insight could as easily be applied to Freud's (1923/1995f) doctrine of repression—'the prototype of the unconscious' (p. 15). There can be no doubt that Whitehead purports an ontology of unconscious agency that he attributes to both the characteristic activity of an actual entity as well as a concealed province within the domain of the human mind. For Whitehead, 'consciousness is how we feel the affirmation-negation contrast' (p. 243), or in other words, the dialectic of being and nothingness within the realm of perceptual judgment. But the dialectic of affirmation and denial also transpires on the unconscious level: preliminary grades of affirmation and negation (e.g. what Whitehead calls positive prehension, valuing-up and aversion vs negative prehension, valuing-down and aversion) occur on the most elemental level of decision making for an actual entity. By situating a preliminary, archetypal affirmation–negation dialectic in the most basic movements constituting the internal process of an unconscious occasion, Whitehead is able to

extend this ontological model to the development of consciousness. Thus the unconscious is the template for consciousness. Consciousness is a more elaborate and sophisticated dialectic—‘the crown of experience’, but, as Whitehead concludes, unconscious experience is its ‘necessary base’ (p. 267). The epigenesis of consciousness out of unconscious structure will become more lucid once we turn our attention to how Whitehead describes the developmental process of perception.

Whitehead’s theory of consciousness is illuminated in his treatment of three modes of perception: (1) the mode of causal efficacy; (2) the mode of presentational immediacy; and (3) the mixed mode of symbolic reference.⁹ Perception in the mode of causal efficacy is a very ‘crude’, pervasive feature of reality that comprises the earliest phase of concrescence known as conformal feeling. Prehensions are one-way internal relations; thus prehensive relations must take account of something. In this crude form of perception, prehensions take account of data that are inherited from their past. The past pours itself into the present, which is felt as the efficaciousness of past feelings; yet the feelings it transmits are ill-defined, massive and inarticulate. Whitehead (1929) states:

[When] we descend the scale, it seems that we find . . . a dim unconscious drowse . . . of undiscriminated feeling. . . . Experience loses its illustration of forms, and its illumination by consciousness, and its discrimination of purpose. It seems finally to end in a massive unconscious urge derived from undiscriminated feeling, this feeling being itself a derivation from the immediate past. (pp. 63–64)

Perception in the mode of presentational immediacy, on the other hand, is the clear and distinct apprehension of the extensive relations of the manifold of objects presented in the contemporary world. They lack the power and massiveness of causal efficacy but provide sharp qualities and definition to objects perceived in space and time. It is not until the final stage of perception in the mode of symbolic reference that the previous two modes are combined to lend clarity, structure and meaning to objects typical of our perceptive awareness.

What is important to emphasize here is how the unconscious past informs the present conscious modes of presentational immediacy and symbolic reference. As Whitehead (1933/1948) states: ‘There is nothing there apart from the real agency of the actual past, exercising its function of objective immortality’ (p. 243). Because perception and conceptual meaning evolve out of earlier movements and become supplemental phases of experience, the past imports its causal inheritance into an occasion’s present relation. We may view this as a form of unconscious projection of a repressed piece of psychic constitution from the life-history of an actual occasion that another entity identifies with, selects as a feeling value, and incorporates into its being. An occasion directly inherits from those occasions in its immediate past, as do they *ad infinitum*. As the past is projected into the present

moment, the entity's subjective emotional pattern transmutes in response to the appropriated data. Each occasion puts its stamp of subjectivity on whatever it appropriates from its past, which may be as trivial as a simple reiteration or as complex as the most sophisticated self-created novelty. This is the aspect of perception that becomes transposed in the objectification of data in that contemporary region for that particular percipient occasion. This is why an occasion is internally related to its past and externally related to its future.

One way this operates in the unconscious mind is that whenever an occasion encounters a new contemporary relation, it must look to its past modes, which inform its present state. In sense perception, this would entail being confronted with the immediacy of sense certainty directing consciousness to fix attention on the manifold, and thus retrieve images and impressions from the depths of the unconscious that are recollected, brought forth as representations, and attached to the sensory objects being experienced. This mediated dynamic gains fuller force in the mode of symbolic reference when objects are imbued with signification and conceptual meaning.¹⁰ Perceptual experiences in presentational immediacy are pre-reflective acts of consciousness: the subject is not self-consciously aware of the perceptive process in that moment. Because images and associations are brought up from the bowels of the mind, thus feeling the presence of the causal efficacy of the past, it would follow that an unconscious agent must be performing these synthesizing operations that effect the transition to symbolic reference and finally self-conscious awareness. This is why Whitehead says that unconscious 'prehensions are still elements in the products of [conscious] integration . . . consciousness only dimly illuminates the prehensions in the mode of causal efficacy, because these prehensions are primitive elements in our experience' (p. 162).

Whitehead's (1927/1959) expatiation of perception is first advanced in *Symbolism*, where the two primary modes of experience are called perceptive and the final symbolic phase called the mode of conceptual analysis (pp. 17–19). The primitiveness of causal efficacy has greater implications for understanding the most primordial regions of the unconscious mind, namely that of instinct (*Trieb*). Whitehead (1927/1959) tells us that during this primitive phase of experience, the subject conforms to the realities of its environment and the demands of its 'bodily organs imposing their characters on the experience in question' (p. 50). While perception in presentational immediacy is definite, crisp and ready at hand, the previous type of experience is 'vague, haunting, unmanageable' (p. 43). Whitehead (1927/1959) clarifies the ubiquity of unconscious causal efficacy:

Those periods in our lives—when the perception of the pressure from a world of things with characters in their own right, characters mysteriously moulding our own natures, become strongest—those periods are the product of a reversion to some primitive state. . . . Anger, hatred, fear,

terror, attraction, love, hunger, eagerness, massive enjoyment, are feelings and emotions closely entwined with the primitive functioning of 'retreat from' and of 'expansion towards.' They arise in the higher organism as states due to a vivid apprehension that some such primitive mode of functioning is dominating the organism. (pp. 44–45)

We are justified in interpreting this passage as a direct allusion to the most primitive and intensified features of our unconscious instinctual life that we may regress to during times of 'pressure', fueled by the libidinal and aggressive inclinations 'moulding our own natures', those 'dominating the organism'. The tempestuous nature of our primitive processes that inform consciousness leads Whitehead (1927/1959) to conclude: 'The present fact is luminously the outcome from its predecessors. . . . Unsuspected factors may have intervened; dynamite may have exploded' (p. 46).

There can be no doubt that the unconscious inheritance of our previous primitive experiences may lead to disarray and chaos. As Whitehead (1927/1959) puts it, 'the deep significance disclosed by Causal Efficacy is at the root of the pathos which haunts the world' (p. 47). In other words, unconscious conflict is the germ of mental disease and collective psychopathology. Elsewhere, Whitehead (1929/1978) tells us that the creative element of process can be deflected by an 'impulse' that, if not properly managed by the self-preservative reactions of a society, can lead the society into the 'province of pathology' (p. 102). The priority of unconscious energies operative within causal efficacy is given further voice when juxtaposed to Whitehead's notion of the soul. It becomes important for us to now turn our attention to the broader dimensions of psychic experience that Whitehead attributes to the human animal.

Psychological Physiology

As one of the great Cambridge Platonists, Whitehead was interested in the human soul. In *Adventures of Ideas* (1933/1948), he nicely summarizes the cardinal features of the psyche: 'The primary factors in experience are first the animal passions such as love, sympathy, ferocity, together with analogous appetitions and satisfactions; and secondly, the more distinctly human experiences of beauty, and of intellectual fineness, consciously enjoyed' (p. 19). Whitehead further tells us that 'the moral element is derivative from the other factors in experience'. Compare this to Plato. From the *Republic*, Plato informs us that the soul is the locus of our inner world, 'whereby it reckons and reasons the rational, and that with which it loves, hungers, thirsts, and feels the flutter and titillation of other desires, the irrational and appetitive—companion of various repletions and pleasures'.¹¹ Plato also ascribes to the soul the cause of our moral qualities,¹² ends and virtues,¹³ and the influence over our character and habit,¹⁴ as well as mental sickness.¹⁵

It is rather remarkable that over two thousand years later, Whitehead's, as well as Freud's, vision of the psyche mirrors the Platonic view. Perhaps the best allusion to Plato's conception of the soul by Freud (1923/1995f) is his analogy of the ego (*Ich*) and the id (*Es*) as a rider on horseback (p. 25), whereas Plato refers to the soul as a charioteer with a pair of steeds.¹⁶ It seems rather prophetic that our understanding of human psychology would become, in Freud's (1933/1995j) own words, 'the science of the life of the soul'.¹⁷

A proper appreciation of Whitehead's psychology of the soul entails an understanding of what he termed 'psychological physiology'. This concept may be extended to his philosophy of organism as a whole—the psychophysical doctrine of prehensions,¹⁸ but Whitehead uses it in a particular context. His discussion of psychological physiology hinges on the question and meaning of *embodiment*. His psychological physiology may be said to be an abbreviated solution to the mind–body problem, a doctrine 'still in the process of incubation' (p. 103), much of which remains cryptic and undeveloped. Whitehead suggests that his conception of psychological physiology 'answers to the Platonic notion of the soul': '“Psychological Physiology” seeks to deal with “entirely living” nexūs, partly in abstraction from the inorganic apparatus, and partly in respect to their response to the inorganic apparatus, and partly in regard to their response to each other' (p. 103). Nexūs are typically thought of as macrocosmic entities composed of subordinate occasions held together formally, usually referred to as societies that enjoy social order (p. 34). Structured societies are complex patterned societies with structural inter-relations that include subordinate societies and/or nexūs (pp. 99–102). According to Whitehead, an 'entirely living' nexūs addresses 'the theory of the animal body' (p. 103), which involves nexūs that are inorganic. When Whitehead refers to the inorganic apparatus, he is referring to an animal body such as a single living cell or a composite of such. An 'entirely living' nexus is subordinate: it requires protection from the whole society in order to survive. As such, it is not composed of enduring objects that are personally ordered in which its past efficaciously informs its existence. While 'entirely living' nexūs are affected by their immediate complex environment—hence, from animal bodies, they do not inherit from their immediate past generations in temporal succession. Thus an 'entirely living' nexus is *non-social* and purely spatial, what Whitehead says 'answers to the notion of “chaos”' (p. 72).

Whitehead's psychological physiology attempts to explain the relationship between non-social nexūs and their animal bodies both in isolated abstraction and in their interaction. Because an 'entirely living' nexus cannot independently support itself apart from the environment constituted by the structured society that sustains it (p. 99), it is dependent on the material bodies in its immediate surround. The non-social nexus can enjoy intense physical experience derived from the complex order of its material body

'without the shackle of reiteration from the past' (p. 105). Thus a non-social nexus enjoys a degree of freedom that a personally ordered nexus does not: it is the locus of 'spontaneity'. And for Whitehead (1933/1948), 'spontaneity is of the essence of soul' (p. 66). But how does this answer to the notion of the soul? For Whitehead, this depends on the significance, meaning and nature of 'life'.

In *Symbolism*, Whitehead (1927/1959) states: 'The emergence of life is better conceived as a bid for freedom on the part of organisms, a bid for a certain independence of individuality with self-interests and activities not to be construed purely in terms of environmental obligations' (p. 65). Recall that a non-social nexus depends on its material body for survival, but it is free from the temporal inheritance of past generations; thus 'life' must not be confined or 'shackled' to its mere determined corporeality. While a non-social nexus relies on its greater regnant society, it also has influence over how that society is to be mentally realized in a novel fashion. As Whitehead (1933/1948) says, an organism seeks autonomy and 'individuality' apart from its material embodiment. Here we have a partial solution to the question of soul: 'The essence of life is the teleological introduction of novelty' (p. 241).

For Whitehead, the fundamental question of the soul is not whether it can exist as an independent agent apart from its material counterpart, but whether or not it can freely introduce novelty into the holistic process that constitutes the human being.

Life is a bid for freedom: an enduring entity binds any one of its occasions to the line of its ancestry. The doctrine of the enduring soul with its permanent characteristics is exactly the irrelevant answer to the problem which life presents. That problem is, How can there be originality? And the answer explains how the soul need be no more original than a stone. (p. 104)

Remember, for Whitehead, '“life” means novelty' (p. 104); it need not be necessarily bound to its physical ancestry. As Donald Sherburne (1969, p. 403) cogently points out, this argument has force against a substance view of the soul; but it also militates against a view of the soul as an enduring, personally ordered regnant society. This is further complicated by the fact that elsewhere Whitehead (1933/1948) equates the soul with an enduring, personally ordered society:

Each animal body is an organ of sensation. It is a living society which may include in itself a dominant 'personal' society of occasions. This 'personal' society is composed of occasions enjoying the individual experiences of the animals. It is the soul of man. (p. 245)

Originality needs a body; as Whitehead says, 'it is the organ of novelty'. As such, life is the introduction of novelty that depends on a body; yet it also permeates non-social nexūs that stand free from the serially ordered,

personally antecedent past that constitutes the burgeoning process of a structured society. This is not to say that a non-social nexus is not embodied; yet it is free from the chains that bind prehensive novelty to its serially ordered ancestry. Then what about the nature of the soul's embodiment? Whitehead speculates that a non-social nexus wanders through empty space in the brain connected by some 'thread of happenings' that it inherits from its biological environment (p. 339). So a second partial solution to the riddle of soul emerges. Not only is novelty wed to life, but the life of a non-social nexus sustains the material bodies in a structured society. It appears that in that space that constitutes the non-social nexus lies the necessary inter-relation between mind and body. Thus, non-social nexūs mediate between body and soul.

The central issue is not whether there is an ontological difference between mind and body, but rather the degree of the *qualitative* power of freedom that each enjoy as part of a unified system. For Whitehead, 'the difference between a living organism and the inorganic environment is only a question of degree; but it is a difference of degree which makes all the difference—in effect, it is a difference of quality' (p. 179). Therefore, Whitehead's introduction of a non-social nexus that enjoys the freedom of novelty allows for both causal and qualitative differences to permeate the interaction between 'entirely living' nexūs and their inorganic components. While the production of novelty constitutes the prehending activity of all actual entities on some crude level, the qualitative degree of freedom makes all the difference between the soul and a stone.

Recall that Whitehead is concerned with *how* there can be originality. While a non-social nexus derives experience from the complex order of its material body, such as the sensory organs penetrating the 'interstices of the brain' thus producing feeling intensities, it nevertheless has the telic freedom to produce its own brand of novelty independent from the succession of its own prior generations. This is the condition for spontaneity—how originality occurs. But what of the enduring personally ordered society Whitehead equates with the human soul? Because a non-social nexus derives from its complex environment—its regnant society—but is sheltered from the constrictions of the past, it has the liberty to generate its own creative novelty in its own purely determinate moment. This process allows the 'entirely living' nexus to have a relational effect on the personal enduring society of occasions that pour into and through the subordinate non-social nexus. In effect, the non-social nexus is the medium that allows the personally ordered society to endure, flourish and evolve into a more complex social structure. This is why Whitehead says that an 'entirely living' nexus:

. . . may support a thread of personal order along some historical route of its members. Such an enduring entity is a 'living person'. It is not of the

essence of life to be a living person. Indeed a living person requires that its immediate environment be a living, non-social nexus. (p. 107)

Non-social nexus are those purely spatial entities that support the existence of the enduring personally ordered human soul. Thus the question of the soul's embodiment is explained through the 'entirely living' nexus's relation to its material corporeality and the spontaneity of life it generates within its immediate environment. This is why Whitehead (1933/1948) is justified in saying:

In a man, the living body is permeated by living societies of low-grade occasions so far as mentality is concerned. But the whole is co-ordinated so far as to support a personal living society of high grade occasions. This personal society is the man defined as a person. It is the soul of which Plato spoke. (pp. 241–242)

It would be more accurate to say that the soul is the unification of the physical and mental polarities that constitute a personal society of actual occasions: 'the succession of my occasions of experience, extending from birth to the present moment, . . . a complete person embodying all these occasions' (Whitehead, 1938/1966, p. 163). This is why Whitehead (1933/1948) includes within the soul the animal passions and bodily impulses residing within the deepest regions of the unconscious mind—'the animal body ministering to the soul' (p. 335). These primitive features of the psyche are primary processes from which the human mind emerges, only to evolve into a more refined and sophisticated regnant society. Whereas the non-social nexus meanders through parts of the brain registering and emitting physical activity, the soul is the unified personality that reigns over the entire complex structured society we know as the human being. In effect, Whitehead's solution to mind–brain dependence is to (a) make the soul a freely determinant activity *within* its own corporeality that is (b) qualitatively differentiated and enhanced from its material counterpart, and which (c) furthermore enjoys greater degrees of novelty and self-expression.

Whitehead's concept of the non-social nexus becomes the bridge linking the divide between the mind and the body. Sherburne (1969) interprets this connection in the following manner:

The regnant nexus answers to the notion of the conscious ego while the supporting non-social nexus answers to the dimly conscious regions of the 'depth' dimension of the psyche, flittingly illuminated by the movements of the ego . . . probing . . . in the largely obscure psychic depths. (p. 406)

The regnant nexus is the organized sentient agency supported by unconscious processes, what Freud (1923/1995f) also equates with the ego, for 'the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego' (p. 26). The ego is derived from bodily sensations, which Whitehead and Freud would both emphatically confirm. As Whitehead (1938/1966) says, 'The body is mine, and the

antecedent experience is mine. Still more, there is only one ego, to claim the body and to claim the stream of experience' (p. 161). But we must not conclude that the non-social nexus is the only unconscious entity, because, as Freud (1923/1995f) tells us, 'the ego is also unconscious' (p. 23). Yet the non-social nexus answers to a specific aspect of unconscious mentation, that of alienated mind, which Freud equates with the *It* (*Es*). In fact, the it, like the non-social nexus, is non-temporal, enduring, impersonal and immortal. Freud (1933/1995j) asserts:

There is nothing in the it that corresponds to the idea of time; there is no recognition of the passage of time, and—a thing that is most remarkable and awaits consideration in philosophical thought—no alternation in its mental processes is produced by the passage of time. Wishful impulses which have never passed beyond the it, but impressions, too, which have been sunk into the it by repression, are virtually immortal. (p. 74)

Here Freud and Whitehead are on the same page: the primitive forces of desire appear alienated from the conscious ego, where they enjoy adventures of change and novelty within their own underworld. The ego may illuminate these primitive features but they remain largely unconscious, which further serves to fuel and sustain conscious life. Even Whitehead (1933/1948) gives primacy to these primordial drives that support the sustenance of the psyche, for 'Eros urges the soul' (p. 317). But just as Whitehead (1929/1978) equates a non-social nexus with 'the notion of "chaos" ' (p. 72), Freud (1933/1995j) too views the *It* as 'the dark, inaccessible part of our personality . . . we call it chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations' (p. 73).

For Freud, the soul is the unification of the structural and temporal processes that comprise and nourish human experience: namely the trinity of the *It*, ego and superego. Like Plato's conception of the psyche, the soul derives from the interplay between passion, rationality and moral judgment. The dual drives—libido, falling under the principle of Eros, and aggression, the expression of the death drive (*Todestrieb*)—comprise the basic dialectical force behind mental process originating in the *It*. This dialectic is generally captured in Whitehead's depiction of the positive and negative valuation of prehension, but also in the greater dimensions of Harmony and Discord that govern cosmic process. It is rather remarkable that Whitehead (1933/1948) himself would portray the dialectical nature of harmonious and destructive forces that emanate from the unconscious *It* to characterize the soul.

The key to the explanation [of Harmony and Discord] is the understanding of the prehension of individuality. This is the feeling of each objective factor as an individual '*It*' with its own significance. The emotional significance of an object as '*It*', divorced from its qualitative aspects at the moment presented, is one of the strongest forces in human nature. It is at the base of family affection, and of the love of particular possessions. . . . But the original *It* commands a poignancy of feeling. (pp. 301–302)

The unconscious *It* becomes the objective actual occasion for the subjective prehending ego leaving an emotional residue of intense magnitude. As Whitehead (1933/1948) continues to describe, the *It* resonates through the soul in 'successive immanence' and produces generalized emotional qualities of love, hate, admiration, worth, horror, and so on, that are 'intertwined within one's own existence' (p. 302). This process underscores the significance of the immediate press of instinctual forces as well as the causal efficacy of the past that saturates the life of the enduring soul. The *It* is prehended as an individual entity despite the fact that it is an impersonal thrust—a pulsation of experience. And it is precisely this unconscious thrust that sustains 'a thread of personal order' that we identify as the human soul.

If Freud Read Whitehead

We do not know if Freud ever read Whitehead, but he would have likely frowned upon the cosmological vision of *Process and Reality*. Both men had much in common as empiricists and scientists, yet Freud distrusted metaphysics and particularly loathed speculative philosophy. While Whitehead saw the value of religion, Freud looked down on it with contempt, dismissing it as an infantile wish ensconced in the futility of repetition compulsion. Yet if Freud would have taken care to read Whitehead devoid of personal bias, he may have appreciated the fact that Whitehead's system encompasses an unconscious ontology.

At first glance, Freud's and Whitehead's systems may seem as far apart as one could imagine, but both fundamentally rely on the primacy of unconscious process that conditions all subsequent development of the organism. While I have no intention of stressing a complete convergence of their respective thoughts, which is neither possible nor desirable, there are many interesting points of connection between Freud and Whitehead, a full account of which is beyond the scope of this immediate project. Nevertheless, I wish to highlight a few theoretical compatibilities between their respective systems that may have some relevance for the contemporary reader. Freud frequently refers to the tripartite structures of the soul (*Seele*) as psychical 'agencies', 'provinces', 'regions', 'realms', 'instances', 'systems' and 'powers' (1900/1995a, p. 537; 1933/1995j, p. 72; 1940/1995k, p. 146). This is not unlike Whitehead's use of the terms 'entities' and 'occasions'. Both Freud and Whitehead conceive of the internal activity, events and psychic experiences that belong to these agencies to be self-constitutive and self-determinate in nature. Hence, they are not static, inert or antiseptic substances, but rather burgeoning telic processes of becoming.

For Freud, the tripartite agencies of the soul comprise the necessary features of personality as the ontological fabric of mind. It is important to

note that these provinces are frequently interpreted as three (ontologically) distinct psychological agents, hence separate entities, when they are in fact epigenetic achievements that derive from the same monistic ontology. While Freud himself was ambiguous through much of his early writings with regards to psychic ontology, in his mature theory he is, like Whitehead, very clear that the ego develops out of its natural unconscious immediacy. In *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926/1995g), Freud states:

We were justified, I think, in dividing the ego from the it, for there are certain considerations which necessitate that step. On the other hand *the ego is identical with the it, and is merely a specially differentiated part of it*. If we think of this part by itself in contradistinction to the whole, or if a real split has occurred between the two, the weakness of the ego becomes apparent. But if the ego remains bound up with the it and indistinguishable from it, then it displays its strength. The same is true of the relation between the ego and the super-ego. In many situations the two are merged; and as a rule we can only distinguish one from the other when there is a tension or conflict between them. . . . the ego is an *organization* and the it is not. *The ego is, indeed, the organized portion of the it.* (p. 97, italics added)

Freud clearly explains that the ego is a modally differentiated aspect of the it that becomes the mental organization of its prior shape—in Whitehead's terms, a regnant society. For Whitehead too, conscious organizations are 'derivative modifications' (p. 162) of unconscious subjectivity, which is its 'necessary base' (p. 267). Elsewhere Freud (1933/1995j) says: 'the ego is that portion of the it that was modified . . . tak[ing] on the task of representing the external world to the it' (p. 75). This may be said to correspond to Whitehead's notion of perception, where the sensuous material encountered in presentational immediacy and symbolic reference is mediated, stored and retrieved from the inner depths of the mind, those regions imbued with the lingering affects of causal efficacy. Furthermore, Freud (1923/1995f) says that 'the ego is not sharply separated from the it (*das Es*); its lower portion merges into it' (p. 24). This corresponds to the relation between a regnant society—the ego—and its non-social nexus, the former merging into the latter, which supports its existence. The two interpenetrate each other, undifferentiated in essence, yet modally differentiated in form.

Like the basic prehending activity of an actual entity, the ego's main feature is that it is a mediatory synthesizing agent: 'what distinguishes the ego from the it quite especially is a tendency to *synthesis* in its contents, to a *combination* and *unification* in its mental processes' (Freud, 1933/1995j, p. 76, italics added). This activity corresponds to the sophisticated operations of the soul whereby lower-grade occasions devolve into higher-grade societies unified within the complex totality of the living person (Whitehead, 1933/1948, pp. 241–242). But the acts of synthesis and unification also

belong to the most elementary constituent experiences of a prehending occasion whereby the purpose is to achieve a 'synthesis in the final unity of one actual entity' (Whitehead, 1929/1978, p. 44).

Both Whitehead and Freud adhere to a developmental ontology: the mind acquires increased dynamic complexity and organization as modally differentiated shapes of earlier processes assume new forms. Freud's recognition that organized psychic processes develop from unorganized hence undifferentiated natural determinations insulates him from criticism that his theory of mind purports three ontologically distinct agents that participate in mutual causal relations. Here, Freud, like Whitehead, is a monist: all higher-level mental organizations derive from the same genus. Because the trinity of the three provinces consists of modally differentiated forms or shapes from its original undifferentiated being, each participates in the same essence and thus none is an independent nominal agent. Rather they are interdependent forces that *appear* as separate entities, when they in fact together form the unification of the dynamic temporal processes that govern mental life.

Not only do Freud and Whitehead share a developmental monistic ontology, but Whitehead's characterization of prehending may be compared to Freud's (1915/1995c) profile of a drive. In 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes', Freud describes four principle features of a *Trieb*, namely its (a) pressure, (b) aim, (c) object and (d) source. The pressure or force (*Drang*) corresponds to its urge or wish, which Freud identifies as its 'very essence' (*Wesen*). 'Every drive is a piece of activity' (Freud, 1915/1995c, p. 122). Compare to Whitehead (1933/1948): 'each actual occasion is . . . a process of activity' (p. 254). Recall earlier that Whitehead also refers to such activity as an 'impulse' and 'urge'. The aim (*Ziel*) of a drive is unwaveringly to achieve 'satisfaction', the fulfillment of which results in a reduction in the amount of tension it experiences. Here, too, Whitehead delineates the telos of an actual entity to seek 'satisfaction'. The object (*Objekt*) is anything that is capable of being used through which its aim may be achieved, and it is the most fluid or variable aspect to a drive. The source (*Quelle*) of a drive is somatic processes or any 'part of the body and whose stimulus is represented in mental life by a drive' (Freud, 1915/1995c, p. 123). Freud is very careful to note that the exact nature of a drive's source may not be fully known by material reductive explanations such as those that refer to chemical or mechanical forces; rather, in mental life we can know them only by their aims. Furthermore, 'sometimes its source may be inferred from its aim' (Freud, 1915/1995c, p. 123), which is the 'need' itself.

Freud's depiction of a drive captures the very process by which an actual occasion operates. An actual entity is pure activity—an impulse to express itself as determinate being. Indeed, an actual entity is a constant force or pressure as essence that prehends objects in its surround, the aim of which is

to fulfill itself, hence achieve self-completion, a primordial need for 'satisfaction'. For Whitehead, the locus of such unrest is 'appetition'. An actual entity is a continuous dynamic force that experiences: it values, desires, seeks and decides. Furthermore, it chooses and seizes specific objects for its pleasure, negating others that are not essential to its aim. Like Freud, who explains that drive discharge brings pleasure as tension reduction, Whitehead (1929/1978) also informs us that 'termination is the 'satisfaction' of the actual entity' (p. 44). Its will to procure satisfaction is the manifestation of desire. Whitehead, like Freud, cannot deny the body—our natural foundation—which may be taken as its source but only known as its aim, its own stimulus as need. Indeed, for Whitehead (1938/1966), 'nature in general and the body in particular provide the stuff for the personal endurance of the soul' (p. 162).

On a few occasions, Whitehead discusses the role of instinct in personality and in the process of human civilization, a subject matter Freud revolutionized. Whitehead's (1927/1959) explication of instinct rests on his emphasis on the primacy of the past, 'the response of an organism to pure causal efficacy' (p. 78). Elsewhere Whitehead (1933/1948) refers to instinct as 'the mode of experience directly arising out of the urge of inheritance, individual and environmental' (p. 61). Here Freud would agree that the significance of the past, the unabated striving of desire springing forth from the drives, from the lair of repression, from the return of conflict—repetition—is a steady causal influence on the functioning of the organism. 'Pure instinct is the most primitive type of response which is yielded by organisms to the stimulus of their environment' (Whitehead, 1927/1959, p. 78). But both Whitehead and Freud would contend that such instinct is not a fixed or rigid predetermined path of behavior, but rather is a malleable, flexible and dynamic impetus that is purely telic, responding to its milieu with determinate choice no matter how primitive its aim. This is why Whitehead (1927/1959) says that instinct is the 'function of directing action for the purposes of the living organism' (p. 79).

Freud (1920/1995e, 1923/1995f) tells us of two competing forces in human nature: the will toward life and the will toward death, manifested as Eros or libido, the sexual force responsible for erotic life, and its antithetical companion, conceived under the drive toward destruction. This dual class of innate drives comprise those that seek to preserve and unite and those that seek to kill and destroy. 'Neither of these drives are any less essential than the other; the phenomena of life arise from the concurrent or mutually opposing action of both' (Freud, 1932/1995i, p. 209). Furthermore, they scarcely operate in isolation, both borrowing from the resources of the other as an accompanied or alloyed counterpart, drawing a certain quota from the other side, which in turn modifies its aim or is even used to achieve its aim.

This union between life and death is the ontological fabric of the human mind to which all other dialectical polarities arise, including the universality

of love and hate. Self-preservation is clearly an erotic impulse, but it must have aggression at its disposal in order to accomplish its task; just as in love, the aggressive drive is utilized in order to gain mastery and possession over an object in which the attachment to it brings about. While the self-preservation drives stand in stark opposition to destructive ones, the two are dialectical complementarities that effect their confluence.

Yet this poses a problem. If instinct is not checked or transformed, it may lead to atrophy, decay and annihilation, thus leading to the ruin of society. This is the proper subject matter of *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930/1995h), where Freud declares that 'civilization is built upon a renunciation of instinct, how much it presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction (by suppression, repression or some other means?) of powerful instincts', or else it will destroy itself (p. 97). Whitehead (1927/1959) seems to be in agreement with Freud when he affirms that

... a social system is kept together by the blind force of instinctive actions, and of instinctive emotions clustered around habits and prejudices. It is therefore not true that any advance in the scale of culture inevitably tends to the preservation of society. (pp. 68–69)

In history and in nature, decay is the language of life. But discord and destruction also bring the positive significance of the negative: civilization could hardly advance without the negation of its previous modes of existence, 'processes which all but wreck the societies in which they occur' (Whitehead, 1927/1959, p. 88).

For both Freud and Whitehead, civilization is a *process*, a process of becoming (see Freud, 1930/1995h, pp. 96–98, 139). It requires destruction in order to build, consensus in order to behave, and temperance in order to survive. For Freud (1930/1995h), social advance is scarcely possible without a redirection of our libidinal investments through the transformative powers of *sublimation*:

Sublimation of instinct is an especially conspicuous feature of cultural development; it is what makes it possible for higher psychical activities, scientific, artistic, or ideological, to play such an important part in civilized life . . . sublimation is a vicissitude which has been forced upon the instincts entirely by civilization. (p. 97)

Whitehead would aptly agree: it is through our advanced capacities of symbolization that our more primitive mental states are transfigured into rational, political, aesthetic and moral affiliations that constitute cultured life. For him, the social reverence of symbols with the 'freedom of revision' leads to a creative advance into novelty, the sublimation of instinct. Through symbolization, 'pure instinct is superseded' (Whitehead, 1927/1959, pp. 80–81).

Freud's somewhat pessimistic attitude about the fate of civilization hinges on our capacity to sublimate our nature through the commandments of reason. 'Our best hope for the future is that intellect—the scientific spirit, reason—may in process of time establish a dictatorship in the mental life of man' (Freud, 1930/1995h, p. 171). Whitehead (1933/1948) extends this process to include wisdom, the 'modifying agency' that unites instinct with the intellect (p. 61). We may venture to say that this is the proper goal of psychoanalysis: 'Where it was, there I shall become' (*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*) (see Whitehead, 1933/1948, p. 80). And with the pursuit of wisdom, the purpose of the examined life is to make what is unconscious conscious. For Whitehead (1933/1948), 'Wisdom is [a] persistent pursuit of the deeper understanding' (p. 62), an understanding that brings us face to face with our unconscious ontology. Whitehead recognizes the controlling and unmanageable presence of our instinctive processes lurking within the dim recesses of our minds; and like Freud, it is precisely this underworld of unconscious experience that we wish to understand.

But for all their vagueness, for all their lack of definition, these controlling presences, these sources of power, these things with an inner life, with their own richness of content, these beings with the destiny of the world hidden in their natures, are what we want to know about. (Whitehead, 1927/1959, p. 57)

Whitehead's process philosophy is a treatise on the inner life of the organism, an attempt to describe the innate power of existence, to articulate the richness of content, and to disclose the inner reality that remains hidden within nature, a desire to know. Symbolization is the externalized expression of instinct, an articulation of the inner world—the manifestation of unconscious structure. This is why Whitehead (1927/1959) says 'the symbolic expression of instinctive forces drags them out into the open: it differentiates them and delineates them' (p. 69). Whitehead's language of prehension is itself the symbolization of that part of unconscious experience that 'we want to know about'.

Both Whitehead and Freud despised simplicity: when encountered, it was dismissed. This is typified by Whitehead's (1925) observation of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, when high-order abstractions are mistakenly presumed to quantitatively inhere in the simply located particle (pp. 49, 51, 58). Freud (1900/1995a) also warns us to 'avoid the temptation to determine psychical locality in any anatomical fashion' (p. 536), insisting that the mind should not be reduced to 'anatomical, chemical or physiological' properties alone (1916–17/1995d, p. 21). Whitehead extends this dictum to include all reality: nature is not inert matter, but rather a purposeful, valuative and dynamic instantiation of subjectivity. Unconscious mental activity is the base experience of all events that comprise the nature of the real.

Concluding Remarks

Throughout this project, I have attempted to show how Whitehead's metaphysical system rests on a philosophy of unconscious experience responsible for every conceivable element in the universe, including the higher-order aspects of refined organic life. I have further tried to emphasize that the most elementary cosmic processes governing the unconscious activity of actual occasions are ubiquitous features enacted in human consciousness. In other words, the human being participates in the same essence that sustains the universe, namely the universality of unconscious process. As I have demonstrated, this has direct implications for understanding Whitehead's philosophical psychology and its extension to psychodynamic thought.

For Whitehead, as for Freud, consciousness arises out of the unconscious and is perennially conditioned by instinct and the presence of the past. Furthermore, both Whitehead and Freud stress the epigenetic and architectonic dynamic movements inherent in psychic development that evolve from more primordial unconscious configurations: human subjectivity—self-conscious rational life—is the cultivated outgrowth of actualized complexity. Both of their systems build on the most primitive aspects of mental organization and progress to more robust manifestations, accounting for transmutations in form and qualitative experience. This is especially evinced in Whitehead's adumbrated attempt to answer to the mind-body problem: the soul is free to choose the objects of its satisfaction without the causal constraints from the past. In other words, the soul is *not* determined by its embodiment; rather, it teleologically actualizes itself within its corporeality. Whether the soul (identity) transcends the body and endures a personal immortality is not a question Whitehead would particularly entertain, because, for him, when actual occasions attain satisfaction, hence perish, they are incorporated into the cosmos as objective data that become the foundation for other actual occasions to materialize and thrive, thus ensuring the 'immortal fact' of the soul. What is most germane to both Whitehead and Freud is that the soul is a psychodynamic process of actualized freedom. Just as the goal of psychoanalysis is to make the unconscious conscious, the aim of an actual occasion is to advance in creative novelty by actualizing its possibilities. With regard to the self-conscious human soul, we may only be free through knowledge.

Throughout *Process and Reality*, Whitehead reminds us time and again that actual occasions do not necessarily require consciousness in order to function, and in fact mainly operate on unconscious levels of organization and zest. This is why he chooses the language of feeling: feeling symbolizes the more primordial dialectical activity of internal experience and its inherent inner relations, which our human language can only attempt to specify. He lends sentience to nature as a way of showing that the

phenomena of consciousness are merely modifications of more primitive, less abstract orders of experiential hypostatized events. Within the world of brute fact, there is an underworld of marbled creative vision impregnating the undulating streams of energy that constitute cosmic order.

But did he go far enough? Could he not have extended the language of prehension to include that primordial element of inner reality that feelings signify, namely *desire*? We want to be sensitive not to over-anthropomorphize existence or animate nature in a crude fashion, but as Whitehead himself says, speculative philosophy is a coherent systematic attempt to account for 'every element of our experience' (p. 3). We have already determined that an actual occasion is a desirous, appetitive entity by virtue of the fact that it hungers and seeks satisfaction in order to enjoy, to complete itself, to fill the inner lack in being. Thus desire becomes the impetus behind the process of becoming. As a self-related, purposeful act of valuation, desire constitutes the inner essence of an actual entity whose aim is to achieve 'novelty of appetition' (p. 102). And for Whitehead, desire is ultimately the desire for God—the 'initial "object of desire" '; for 'He is the lure for feeling, the eternal urge of desire' (p. 344).

However we care to verbalize that which cannot directly verbalize itself, we are abandoned to the limitation of our own language that endeavors to capture those basic elements of all experience. We are justified, I think, in extending the language of prehension to signify the adventures of unconscious desire, the most primitive process of all inner experience. Therefore, even the most low-grade occasions desire. But we must remember Whitehead's dictum that the qualitative differences of originality and self-articulation make all the difference between the human soul and a stone. While the universe desires, its qualitative expression is merely a matter of degree.

But shall we dare to go even further? One is left with curious speculation about whether or not a non-human entity, even the inorganic, could have some form of consciousness, some crude mode of self-awareness. Whitehead himself is suggestive: 'a pure concept does not involve consciousness, *at least in our human experience*' (p. 243, italics added). Could it be possible that on some muffled level an actual entity has some vague or primitive sense of felt familiarity with itself, a muted type of pre-reflective self-realization that it is a feeling being; perhaps what might not be inappropriately called *unconscious self-consciousness*? As Whitehead says, the pure unrest or appetition of an occasion possesses the '*realization of what is not and may be*' (p. 32, italics added). Would it not be fantastic—ineffable—that the most elemental processes of the universe desire and are aware of their desire? Perhaps this is merely a fantasy. I wonder. This could lead us into the absurd, or broach a wonder beyond wonder itself.

Notes

1. But with a few exceptions, the role of unconscious processes underlying the constitution and activity of actual entities has not been sufficiently emphasized. Cf. Pearl Louise Weber (1940, p. 179); Percy Hughes (1941/1951, p. 290); John W. Blyth (1941/1967, Part II: 'Unconscious Perception'); Elizabeth M. Kraus (1998, pp. 8, 25).
2. Whitehead (1929/1978) himself says that 'the difference between living and non-living occasions is not sharp' (p. 109); but given that 'mental activity' (p. 56) belongs to all actual entities, we may be justified in saying that the universe is alive. In fact, Whitehead says 'a single occasion is alive when the subjective aim . . . introduce[s] a novelty' (p. 104). Furthermore, Whitehead (1929) says that 'the root principles of life are, in some lowly form, exemplified in all types of physical existence' (p. 17). Also see Whitehead's seventh and eighth lecture on the status of life in *Modes of Thought* (1938/1966).
3. Because I will be mainly relying on a close reading of Whitehead's *Process and Reality* (1929/1978), all page numbers listed after direct quotes will be referring to that work unless otherwise specified.
4. Whitehead established himself early in his career as an outstanding mathematician and logician, having co-authored with Bertrand Russell their groundbreaking three volume-set *Principia Mathematica*, which literally launched the field of modern symbolic logic. While Whitehead's middle period was occupied with the question and meaning of nature and science, it was not until he was appointed professor of philosophy at Harvard that he formally initiated his metaphysical system represented in his magnum opus, *Process and Reality*.
5. William Ernest Hocking draws a similar conclusion about Whitehead's metaphysics in 'Whitehead on Mind and Nature' (1941/1951, p. 389). But Whitehead (1933/1948) himself supports this claim: 'There can be no general metaphysical principles which determine how in any occasion appearance differs from the reality out of which it originates' (p. 245). It may be observed, however, that it was originally Hegel who dissolved the bifurcation of reality and appearance. From *The Encyclopaedia Logic* (1817/1991), Hegel makes this clear: 'Essence must appear. . . . Essence therefore is not *behind* or *beyond* appearance, but since the essence is what exists, existence is appearance' (§ 131, p. 199). Also see the *Phenomenology* (1807/1977, § 147, p. 89).
6. Whitehead states that 'blind prehensions, physical and mental, are the ultimate bricks of the physical universe' (p. 308).
7. This sentence may be said to be self-revealing, because it nicely summarizes Whitehead's own novel and ingenious metaphysical system.
8. See Freud's discussion of the pleasure-principle in 'Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning' (1911/1995b, pp. 218–226).
9. Whitehead's discussion of perception is scattered throughout *Process and Reality*, but is more thematically presented in *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect*. Donald Sherburne also provides a useful discussion of perception in *A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality* (1966, pp. 98–99).
10. Whitehead gives a full account of this process in *Symbolism*; especially see ch. I.
11. *Republic*, 4: 439d; also see *Laws*, ib. 9: 863b sq.; ib. 5:727c. Cf. Plato (1961).

12. *Laws*, 10: 896d.
13. *Republic*, ib. I: 353d sq.
14. *Laws*, 10: 904c sq.
15. *Gorgias*, 479b.
16. *Phaedrus*, 246 sq.
17. Freud's concluding remarks in his Preface to *New Introductory Lectures* is more appropriately translated 'the life of the soul' (*Seeleleben liebt*), rather than 'the science of mental life' as rendered by Strachey's translation in the *Standard Edition* (1933/1995j, p. 6).
18. Robert C. Whittemore (1961) implies this when he says that Whitehead's philosophy of organism has become 'the new psycho-physiological orthodoxy' (p. 110). Whitehead himself also suggests this when he says: 'The philosophy of organism, "the soul" as it appears in Hume, and "the mind" as it appears in Locke and Hume, are replaced by the phrases "the actual entity," and "the actual occasion," these phrases being synonymous' (p. 141).

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