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The Problem of Creativity, God and the World

INTRODUCTION

Creativity, God, and the world—Whitehead presents and challenges us with scattered remarks about his unorthodox yet haunting trinity throughout *Process and Reality*. As the most important deposition of Whitehead's understanding of the relationship of three foundational notions of his thought, Part V of *Process and Reality* contains some of the most beautiful, evocative, and ultimately ambiguous passages Whitehead ever wrote. His formulation of the relationship of God as the ultimate divine reality, creativity[1] qua cosmic generativity, and the world has defined a prime challenge to the coherence of first principles within his mature system. Likewise, its metaphorical and poetic prose account issued an invitation to and demanded a response from orthodox and unorthodox process philosophers and theologians to make sense of his doctrine of God–creativity–world relations.

So crucial was Whitehead's focus on the processive nature of the cosmological reality defined by the complex relationships of God, world, and creativity that the name "process thought," beginning with Bernard Loomer, has been affixed to a whole school of thought deriving its inspiration from Whitehead's initial exposition. Whitehead characterized his system as a form of organicism, but to most later scholars process thought seems more apt because it highlights the most original contribution of Whitehead's work. As philosophers came to ponder the place of process thought in the development of modern Euro-American philosophy, they also began to notice similarities with philosophies from other cultural areas, most specifically East Asia. While there is something incurably Western, even English, about Whitehead, there are the salient themes of process, creativity, the curiously world-dependent nature of the divine reality, and whole-part relations that link his thought to the Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian traditions of East Asia, a fact that Whitehead himself noted in passing (*PR*, 7)

This essay embraces Whitehead's insight concerning the importance of "process" and "creativity" as cross-cultural philosophic and theological comparative conceptual metaphors.[2] Further, it defends the thesis that, as a specific instance of such comparison, East Asian Neo-Confucianism may be examined

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with profit to shed light on some internally perplexing aspects of Whitehead's thought. The contrast of God, world, and creativity invites the cross-cultural comparison as different expressions of what can be increasingly considered a global tradition in the making, namely modern process thought.[3]

Yet, as we shall see, it is just at the apex of Whitehead's supreme rhetorical definition of the interconnections of creativity, God, and the world in Part V of *PR* that many critics of process thought find the wedge they need to demonstrate the lack of rigor tempering the whole Whiteheadian edifice in terms of the coherence of first principles. In short, many critics of process thought believe that Whitehead's wonderful Edwardian prose about God and creativity obscures profound problems of systemic coherence. The crux of the problem has to do with the role creativity is supposed to play in Whitehead's process thought, a role that is essential in linking the divine reality or God in theistic terms with the realistic and pluralistic world of finite creatures by means of a primordial, ceaseless, and creative advance into novelty. What is not always recognized in this heady mix, but which will be crucial for our analysis, is the irreducible comparative aspect of the contrast of God–world relations mediated and provoked by the incessant creativity of the cosmic process. Fundamental to any Whiteheadian analysis of reality, I will argue, is the recognition of comparison, contrast, and connection as a crucial aspect of system building.

As Whitehead reminds us, the supreme point of contrast and comparison for any Western religious thinker is the question of God's nature.

> To-day there is but one religious dogma in debate: What do you mean by "God"? And in this respect, to-day is like all its yesterdays. This is the fundamental religious dogma, and all other dogmas are subsidiary to it. (*RM*, 67–68)

While this statement holds true for all of the great West Asian theistic traditions, it requires a drastic and analogical translation to encompass the nontheistic traditions of South and East Asia that also lay claim to being part of a larger global process tradition. One point that I seek to make in the Neo-Confucian sections of the study is that Whitehead's formulation of the problem of creativity qua divine process also finds analogies in Chu Hsi's (1130–1200) Sung Neo-Confucian philosophic essays, letters, commentaries, and dialogues. The cultural terms of reference for Chu are dramatically different, yet some of the philosophic points are similar enough to warrant comparison and in fact signal persistent issues for any process thinker trying to work in a cross-culturally comparative manner.

The fundamental problem for disclosing creativity for Chu Hsi revolved around defining the proper role for *hsin*, the Neo-Confucian term for what is

often translated as the mind–heart. The mind–heart was problematic because it was defined as the seat of consciousness, the emotions, potentially guided by normative principles, and above all else, creatively responsive to the myriad influences of the cosmos. In trying to define the creativity of the mind–heart, Chu inherited a discussion of the mind–heart common to the late T'ang and Sung matrix of Confucian discourse (Bol 1992; Metzger 1977). Whereas the later historians of Neo-Confucianism traditionally labeled Chu's school as *li-hsüeh* or the teaching of principle because Chu was so concerned about the role of normative principle in *hsin*, no Neo-Confucian worried more than Chu about the definition, nature, cultivation, and role of the mind–heart.[4] His reasons for this, as were Whitehead's, were both internal to the history of the development of Neo-Confucian discourse and particular to Chu's own engagement with the tradition. In terms of the focus of this essay, Chu needed to show how the mind–heart was able to provide the fulcrum of creativity for human beings within a cosmos itself characterized by ceaseless productivity (*sheng sheng pu-hsi*). Chu thus explained how the sages were able to harness the creative process of the cosmos while remaining finite beings. In Neo-Confucian terms, what is the relationship of the mind–heart of the Tao (*tao-hsin*) as an expression of the way the world ought to be and the human mind–heart (*jen-hsin*) as the all too mundane manifestation of human ignorance, finitude, and error?

The problem of balancing God, creativity, and the world within the Neo-Confucian wing of the process tradition is more cosmological than theological from the perspective of Western speculative discourse. Yet the Sung problem of the nature of creativity, as expressed in the Chu Hsi's Sung school of principle, is conceived in radically different intellectual and historic forms and is addressed by an analytic method and a commentary so different from the Western tradition that even commonplace Western philosophic terms such as *metaphysics, ontology*, and *cosmology* conceal and confuse as much as they reveal about Neo-Confucian ultimate concerns.

So much of the conversation about the process tradition has been carried on within the purview of the Western philosophic tradition that the intrusion of Neo-Confucian discourse seems strange, decentering, even exotic. However, at one point in *Religion in the Making*, Whitehead likened the dogmas of the church to the ark upon which it rides through tides of history (*RM*, 145–146). His counsel was that even the best boat needs to open its windows from time to time to let in some fresh air. It strikes me as being useful to open these windows as widely as possible when dealing with such complex and difficult matters as fundamental ontology and cosmological questions, especially when there is something to be gained from the exercise.

What seems so inspiring and sensible to modern relational sensibilities in Whitehead's mature philosophy and natural theology on first reflection fades into the mists of poetic incoherence as one tries to make the central pieces like God, creativity, and the world fit together. Frustration overcomes enjoyment and inspiration. The Whiteheadian vision is so appealing in terms of its cosmology, and yet somehow religiously remains incomplete because of the separation of creativity from the primordial and consequent natures of God as well as the fundamental constitution of the world. For those who have found in Whitehead a stimulus for theological reflection, the abrupt, staccato cadences of Part V of *Process and Reality* leave the reader at once stimulated, tantalized, and perplexed. This is especially true for those who have been persuaded about the fundamental philosophic and theological genius of Whitehead's ontological principle: to ask for the reason for anything is to ask about the decisions, the choices of some actual entity. For those who believe that Whitehead is correct in refusing actual, real agency to anything less than the object–events[5] or actual entities of the cosmos, it seems strange or even incoherent to have creativity somehow outside, beyond, or disconnected from the supreme actual entity, God.

There is an analogous moment in Chu Hsi's tradition too. Most Neo-Confucians gravitated to Chu's vision of reality because it seems both open and complete at the same time. Chu's creative appropriation of the work of the great Northern Sung masters, and especially his reformulation of Ch'eng I's (1033–1107) seminal definition of principle in the Neo-Confucian synthesis, struck the Sung, Yüan, Ming, and Ch'ing Confucians as inspired discourse. Generations of Chu Hsi scholars in China, Korea, and then Japan were serene in the confidence that Master Chu must have answered their questions somewhere in his voluminous writings.[6] And where an obvious answer was not forthcoming, there was a deep conviction that the answer could be generated by tinkering a bit with the machinery, so that a few minor modifications would suffice to overcome the momentary flash of doubt.

The full nature of the problem became clear when Chu Hsi and his students continued to probe the various shades of meaning that Chu applied to principle, matter–energy, and the mind–heart. While Chu himself believed that he learned the most from Ch'eng I's theory of principle, he also relied heavily on Chang Tsai's reflections on *ch'i*/matter–energy and the mind–heart. In fact, it was Chang's definition of the mind–heart as being a combination of principle and matter–energy that allowed Chu to realize fully how crucial and illuminating Ch'eng's theory of principle really was. Of course, all of Chu's discourse was aimed at helping the student cultivate the mind–heart in order to recognize the principles embedded in matter–energy. Only

once this kind of self-cultivation was achieved would the student be able to fully realize the Confucian ethical program.

A typical definition of Chu Hsi's program in search of the sage's mind–heart is found in the famous short essay "The Treatise on the Completion of Mind–Heart [*Chin-hsin shuo*]."

'The completion of mind–heart is knowing nature. Knowing nature is knowing heaven.' We say that a person can complete his mind–heart when he knows his nature and this capacity to know his nature is to know heaven. Now, heaven is the spontaneity of principle and the source from which humanity is born. Nature is the essence of principle which man receives to become human. The mind–heart is the way a person controls himself and fully sets forth this principle. 'Heaven is great and boundless,' and nature receives [this boundlessness] completely. Therefore the essence of the fundamental mind–heart itself is expansive and without limitation. Only when it is fettered by the selfishness of concrete things, hemmed in by seeing and hearing pettiness, does it becomes concealed and incomplete. Man can in each event and in each thing exhaustively examine these principles until one day he will penetratingly comprehend them all without anything being left out: then he can complete the broad essence of the fundamental mind–heart. The reason for a person's nature being what it is and the reason for heaven being heaven is not beyond this and is connected to its unity. (Berthrong 1979, 107)[7]

The essay on the mind–heart formulates the agenda for the Neo-Confucian discourse on the nature of human creativity and its connection to the cosmos in relation to the cosmology of the *li-ch'i* connection.

On the other hand, there was a chorus of persistent critics of Chu Hsi's philosophy of mind–heart and principle from the beginning of Chu's career in the Southern Sung.[8] These philosophers comprise an equally famous place within the tradition, beginning with such luminaries as Hu Hung (1106–1162), Lu Hsiang-shan (1139–1193), Wang Yang-ming (1472–1529), Tai Chen (1723–1777), and ending with modern critics such as Mou Tsung-san and Tu Wei-ming, representatives of the modern New Confucian movement. The critics' collective doubts about Chu's synthesis were and are severe and persistent; they sensed that there was something profoundly wrong embedded in the very logic of Chu's analysis of the mind–heart and the broader cosmology of *li-hsüeh* discourse. These critics have pointed out that Chu's famous theory of principle appears to drive a wedge between the reality of creative life and the cultivation of the mind–heart, the ethical and social essence of the Confucian Way. For instance, Mou Tsung-san argues that however brilliant Chu

was, there is deep incoherence in his rationalistic, systemic overdependence on principle qua intellectual norm that simply but elegantly misses the mark of the main philosophic thrust of the classical Chou tradition of Confucius and Mencius, as well as the Sung-Ming Confucian revival of Confucianism.

I will seek to demonstrate why it is important to open these Neo-Confucian windows on the global process tradition as part of an expanding cross-cultural conversation. While I do not hold that every Western philosophic problem profits from comparison to East Asian material, there are some cases when this is true. For instance, if recourse to Chu Hsi will help in responding to Neville's sharp criticism of the process view of creativity and God, then it would be foolish not to make use of this resource. Furthermore, I believe that process thought offers an interesting way to carry out comparative philosophy and natural theology given its characteristically broad intellectual concerns. Process thought has proved to be one of the least parochial of modern Western philosophic and theological schools.[9] Its common themes—the classical questions of metaphysics, cosmology, causation, consciousness, ethical conduct, and social order—are universal enough that, along with some forms of continental philosophy, East Asians have made use of it to find links to their own traditions. For instance, Cheng Chung-ying, more a modern Chinese partisan of Chu's thought than either Mou or Tu, makes use of Whitehead to illustrate many features of Chinese philosophic discourse, as well as to suggest where such comparison is useful for the Western tradition (1991). I ask, why should international computer designers and automobile manufacturers have all the fun framing the cross-cultural nature of the new world order?

Whitehead was obviously struggling with the problem of fundamental cosmological coherence in Part V of *Process and Reality* as he sought to weave together a religious and philosophic vision faithful to his constructive endeavor to frame a coherent, logical, applicable, and adequate interpretation of human experience, including the massive deposition of the religious history of humankind. The problem is that the three themes of creativity, God, and the world remained an incomplete puzzle; they did not fit together nearly as well as so many other parts of the vision. But we must remember that there is nothing surprising about the fact that Whitehead leaves us with the themes of creativity, God, and the world at the conclusion of *PR*. As Lewis Ford has shown in such convincing detail, this was how the unfinished, evolving logic of his own speculation unfolded in the Gifford lectures.[10] Whitehead often changed his mind or drastically revised a previous position. The real problem is that the final triad does not fit together in a way that satisfies Whitehead's own admonition that "Speculative Philosophy is the endeavour to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every

element of our experience can be interpreted" (*PR*, 3). As with his own description of colors in a spring forest, we are haunted by the greenness of it all, even if we cannot give perfect reasons why this should be the case.

We need to remember that one of the primary appeals of Whitehead's philosophic theology is that it offers a unified view of a process cosmos. It claims to be an expansive, inclusive, and reasonably coherent worldview. It is a vision that has a place for the world of modern human beings in terms of their religious aspirations, their scientific quest, and their ethical and social endeavors to build humane civilizations. The vision's allure is the creative unity offered by a process understanding of meaning that is multidimensional and responsive to all of the diverse areas of human experience.[11] When the purported unity of the system begins to fray at the edges, the whole appeal wears thin from the rational point of view. Or even worse, one begins to wonder if the whole wonderful vision will really sustain a major theological and philosophic movement committed to coherence, applicability, and adequacy in the late twentieth century. At the other end of the Eurasian world, such a promised range of encompassing vision was also one of the prime appeals of Chu Hsi's mature thought. Chu's synthesis allowed for the interpretation not only of the texts of the Confucian tradition but also of all of the other object–events of the world. It provided a relational, processive, and rational schema and curriculum for the task of becoming a Neo-Confucian worthy—or at least pass the civil service examinations in order to enter the literati class.

Why bother to expend so much effort on a comparison between Chu Hsi and Whitehead? Would it not be better to focus more attention on the internal resolution of the problems of coherence in Whitehead's thought? Is there anything to be gained by such a cross-cultural comparison beyond the fact that it can be done? Are the similarities anything more than a trivial case of seeming congruence between such radically different worldviews? Do the results warrant the effort? What is really at stake in a cross-cultural philosophic comparison anyway?

I will argue that while it is true that the differences between Chu and Whitehead are profound, there is something in the spirit of the process (or organic, as Whitehead liked to call it) movement that draws attention to the comparative aspect of human life. Pragmatically, the intellectual world of any modern scholar in Boston, London, Moscow, Delhi, Mexico City, Beijing, Tokyo, Tunis, or Nairobi simply has become conceptually vaster than either the world of the Enlightenment or even the post–modern West have been willing to admit. We live in a time when more people are sensing that we do live in something like a global city of ideas, cultures, artistic sensibilities, scientific communication, and enabling and disabling technologies; we are

connected by the bureaucracies and technologies of commerce, travel, communication, intermarriage, immigration and, increasingly, the serious interchange of ideas. There is a self-consciousness about the dynamics of this interaction that has gained momentum and self-expression since the end of World War II.

In some cases we are no longer so sure about the rationality of the process enterprise—or any other philosophic vision. The shock of the Holocaust and other human perversities from Cambodia to Bosnia have shattered the humane glow of Whitehead's more gentle Victorian–Edwardian appeal to the function of reason. We may well be living in a world aglow with twenty-first-century decadence, a new *fin de siècle* that strives for holistic visions and yet lives out of the still individualistic mind-set of the late modern Cartesian experiment. Cyberpunk meets the Japanese corporation, giving rise to a strange kind of quasi-Zen noplace without reason, even if Western philosophy and modern English are the prime matrix of discourse. This is not the experiment in reason that Whitehead wrote about, though I suspect he would have found it somehow ironic and stimulating. Some modern philosophic movements such as deconstructionism and pragmatism suggest that we abjure holistic, foundationalist, or totalistic visions at all. Hence, some form of modest, warranted application of reason is all we can hope for.[12]

Furthermore, as Alasdair MacIntyre has demonstrated in *Three Rival Visions of Moral Enquiry* (1990), comparative and cross-cultural elements have been integral to the Western philosophic and theological tradition at many defining points. In fact, MacIntyre makes the point that when we examine St. Thomas we discover an exceptionally acute form of comparative theology, even if we do not often regard St. Thomas's achievement from this perspective. According to MacIntyre's analysis, the problem St. Thomas faced was profoundly dialogical and comparative. He was confronted by the need to compare and contrast his older Augustinian theology, the common form of thought of the learned West at that time, with the new Aristotelian texts that were just beginning to circulate at the University of Paris during his day. And, of course, behind these new texts of Aristotle were all of the various Islamic theological and philosophical commentators to put the seal on the comparative aspect of the project. MacIntyre then shows what a successful job St. Thomas did of facing and integrating the comparative challenge into the complex tapestry of his science of divine things.

One of the successful things St. Thomas did, according to MacIntyre, was to provide guidelines for what constitutes a successful comparative philosophy. MacIntyre argues that good comparative philosophy or theology must do three interrelated things. First, it must seek to describe, understand, and commend the system being compared in its best and most reasonable

terms. Comparative work cannot privilege some alternative system of thought immediately; it must seek to present the system under review in terms that make sense from within the world of discourse common to the system being compared. This demands both the highest ethical standards so as not to defame the other through ignorance or evil intent and the well-honed skill of dealing with materials outside the range of any one philosophic or religious system. The good comparativist must be an honest historian of religion. W. C. Smith (1981) also has argued that we do not really understand another tradition until and unless we can describe it not only in our own terms but also in terms that are regarded as being consistent with the other tradition as understood by its own members.

The second thing that the comparative philosopher must do is illumine the main problems of any system by making use of material from within the text itself. Mere external critique is not enough. The comparativist must get far enough within another system so he or she can describe accurately what is going on in the system, even far enough within to be able to see the problematic areas of interpretation, adequacy, and coherence. Furthermore, MacIntyre also argues that the good comparative philosopher has the obligation to defend the system being compared in terms of the best possible arguments available to that tradition. The vision of the tradition must be presented in the best possible internal light as well. The tradition must be given every chance to show how it can overcome its problems with its own tools or materials. The comparativist can even suggest moves internal to the tradition that may not have been articulated by members, as long as these suggestions arise from the description and understanding of the tradition itself.

Only after having completed the first two steps can the comparativist propose a new vision, the third stage of the engagement. The new vision must express the main problems of the other tradition and show how these problems cannot be solved completely by means internal to the tradition. The comparativist then suggests what needs to be done to rectify such problems. Often the modifications and suggestions have an equal impact on the scholar as well as on the target text. Comparative philosophy and theology are a dialogical enterprise if ever there is one. This is precisely what is happening on a global scale, as thinkers shuttle to conferences, publish papers, debate worldviews, and learn about new civilizations. David Lodge, the wonderfully perceptive and acerbic novelist of the academic world, is correct in saying that we live in a small world.

In many respects, this is the careful kind of comparative analysis that Neville has provided for the notion of God in process thought. He has described, understood, and commended many of the elements of process thought; but he then moves on to suggest what its problems are and how they cannot

be solved by means internal to the system. Neville argues that simply reshaping Whitehead's reflections on God in Part V of *PR* will not solve the problem. For his part, MacIntyre is clear that any solutions offered by comparative thought must arise from the dialogue itself and be matched to the truth-bearing aspects of the traditions in dialogue. Both sides must recognize each other, understand each other, and be transformed in the encounter. The new comparative philosophy or theology hence becomes a multiperspectival methodology for new analysis and synthesis, even though one party may be more transformed than the other in the encounter.

There is no suggestion in this three-stage comparative methodology that either tradition will disappear from the scene. Quite to the contrary, MacIntyre hopes that such careful work will allow for and encourage real dialogue between different philosophic and theological positions. It is expected that intelligent persons engaged in the dialogue will be given over to renewed reflection and even modification of their previous positions. As the Muslims remind us, reason is God's finger on the earth, and we ignore reasoned dialogue at our own peril. Because religion and philosophy often lie at the basis of all cultures, such comparative work will assist in civil discourse regarding the means and ends of humane life. This much we can claim for comparative thought in a pluralistic age.

To be realistic, none of this will come to pass without political will and the civil willingness to try to understand other people. But if there is a willingness for dialogue, then some form of comparative methodology is necessary to complete the task. Borrowing the wisdom of the Buddhist tradition, one can argue that comparative philosophy is an *upaya*, or a skillful means, for the search for truth and civilized behavior. Just because there are some glaring examples of the failure of dialogue—Bosnia, the Middle East, part of the former Soviet Union, Northern Ireland—does not absolve more fortunate cultures from engaging in dialogue. The intellectual interchange now going on peacefully between the North Atlantic world and East Asia may prove to be a good example of a more positive approach to intercivilizational exchange.

I claim that both Chu's and Whitehead's philosophies are relational, organic, and processive in nature. It strikes me that organic and relational philosophies are inherently dialogical in nature; their emphasis on communication between object–events is a logic of dialogue. They cannot afford to exclude anything that is relevant to the elaboration of their worldviews. If intercultural intellectual communication is now part of the modern reality, then anyone working out of the paradigm of process thought has an obligation to engage in comparative discourse. Even if the comparisons do not turn out to be fruitful, at least we will know the reasons why this is the case. On

the other hand, if the comparison leads to new insights, then we will have been faithful to a fundamental pattern, a rhythm of the process tradition, as well as having contributed to a truly global and modern civil discourse aimed at better philosophic and religious communication and transformation. Hence, some kind of modest comparative effort appears to be in order.

In terms of the Whiteheadian version of process thought, the seeming incoherence at such a foundational level of the system is a profound challenge, because Whitehead really does offer a vision of coherence in the midst of a Western intellectual landscape dominated by philosophies of incoherence, rupture, deconstruction, and difference or value-free analytic neutrality. The grand reductionistic, fashionable, and easy response is that Whitehead was just plain wrong about unity and coherence, as is the case for so many other Western metaphysicians before him. The dream of the presence of unity—organic, creative, processive, or otherwise—is just another illusion in the faulty logic of a discredited logocentric universe. What we really need to seek is a pluriverse of interpretations, a recognition that the best we can do is create edifying discourses that will keep us warm and cozy in a cold and complex world.[13]

This reductionism in either deconstructionist or analytic mode is truly a profound challenge. Some scholars argue that the best we can hope to do is avoid the modern intellectual version of the Balkans, to retreat to quasi-civil solitudes wherein we do not try to reach other peoples and cultures from within our own worlds of discourse. Even with this model we must still talk together for the purposes of international law, order, economics, technology, and peace, despite our disagreements with each other. However profound I believe this modern deconstructionist or analytic challenge is, it is not really the main problem to be addressed in this essay—for the simple reason that to address these alternative philosophic visions would unreasonably expand what is already a lengthy study.

The second challenge to Whiteheadian process thought is even potentially greater because it comes from within the tradition itself as a form of self-critical inquiry. It is the question of internal coherence. Is there something so flawed in Whitehead's developing philosophy that makes him unable to escape the basic charge of fundamental incoherence concerning his essential insights into the nature of the divine reality? In some ways this is an even more devastating challenge to process thought than that of the post–modernist philosophers. One can argue with deconstructionists and neopragmatists such as Rorty about the adequacy of the process vision as being just one more version of foundationalism, but the more pressing issue is the query about its internal coherence. For this reason we must also seek to answer the coherence question of Neville's critiques of Whitehead's notion of God, based on his

exegesis of Whitehead's own best defense of the system.[14] Only if both the external and internal challenges can be met can we continue to defend process philosophy and natural theology as being viable members of the intellectual dialogue of the modern world.[15]

Although after writing Part V of *PR*, Whitehead never systematically returned in his later works to an exhaustive treatment of the topic of God's multifaceted nature, it is clear that the question of the relationship of God and the world continued to tease his speculative imagination. In this regard, I believe that it behooves process philosophers and theologians to revisit *Adventures of Ideas* and *Modes of Thought* in order to respond to philosophically astute critics of Whitehead such as Neville. Moreover, this is not merely an externally motivated apologetic move. If I am correct, there are solid internal reasons why we should explore the later Whitehead to better understand God, creativity, and the divine world relations. Nor should such an invitation be surprising at this point in the history of the process movement. One of the main philosophic and theological crises of process thought has to do with the apparent incoherence of the separation of God and creativity in *PR*.[16]

Many other Whiteheadians have gone this way before, the most exemplary being Charles Hartshorne, William Christian, John Cobb Jr., Lewis Ford, Robert C. Neville, and Jorge Luis Nobo.[17] For instance, Cobb tried to rescue the Whiteheadian vision of the divine reality from the charge of incoherence in his influential *A Christian Natural Theology* (1965).[18] As for Hartshorne, one can make a strong case that most of his constructive exposition of philosophic theology is directed toward making sense of Part V of *PR* as neoclassical discourse. No one has made more of an effort to clarify one possible coherent solution to the mysteries of Part V than Hartshorne, although his solution is no mere scholastic tightening of Whitehead's own position. While Hartshorne is deeply appreciative of Whitehead's position, he has tried to make it clear that he does not believe that his own constructive work is a slavish imitation of his teacher. Hartshorne pays Whitehead the highest intellectual compliment in taking Whitehead seriously enough to try to correct what he regards as an error in Whitehead's vision of process thought.[19] Much the same thing can be said about Neville's critique of process thought.

Other major defenses of the coherence of Whitehead's vision of God have been mounted by Lewis Ford and Jorge Luis Nobo. Along with the key contemporary study of the development of Whitehead's thought, *The Emergence of Whitehead's Metaphysics: 1925–1929*, Ford has also written *The Lure of God: A Biblical Background for Process Theism* to illustrate the usefulness of Whitehead's notion of God for constructive theological reflection.

Combined with Nobo's *Whitehead's Metaphysics of Extension and Solidarity*, Ford has carried out the most careful textual work on the development of Whitehead's system and the question of the complex nature of God. Both Ford and Nobo have been interested in defending the coherence of Whitehead's notion of God. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that both Ford and Nobo focus their research on Whitehead's position in *PR* as the basis of their reconstructive efforts. Neither Ford nor Nobo have made extensive use of themes suggested by *AI* or *MT* in trying to deal with critics such as Neville[20]—much less make use of material drawn from South or East Asian philosophic traditions.

Nonetheless, the problem of the relationship of creativity, God, and the world is a persistent theological and philosophic issue. As we shall see in chapter 3, this is the key question of the most internally astute critic of Whitehead's theology, Robert C. Neville. One of the main aims of this essay is to answer Neville's trenchant attack on this crucial theological issue in process theology. I believe that no one from the process camp has really responded adequately or in sufficient length to Neville's 1980 challenge to the coherence of Whitehead's notion of God.[21] It strikes me that unless this can be done, process philosophy and theology is not in a very good position to face its more distant external critics such as the deconstructionists, post–modernists, and neopragmatists.

My main thesis is that one reason for the lack of a satisfactory response to Neville is that no one can adequately answer Neville by merely repeating Whitehead's 1929 unmodified position. A flawed, incomplete, or incoherent position is just that, and someone as insightful as Neville will demonstrate the errors of the position with gusto to defend his own speculative Platonic, even Peircian, re-reading of the Western tradition. Whitehead once remarked that Hume's critique of traditional Christian theology was devastating if those traditional positions Hume outlined were the only voices in the dialogue. What Whitehead meant was that accepting Hume's version of theological discourse leaves no way to escape the logic of Hume's attack. The same can be said concerning Neville's critique of Whitehead's explanation of the relationship of God and creativity in its unmodified version based on Part V of *PR*.[22]

Twist and turn as they might, Neville has process philosophers and theologians on the run as long as they remain faithful to the Whiteheadian tradition as it is expounded on the basis of *PR*. But we need to remember that Whitehead wrote quite a bit after 1929, most specifically *Adventures of Ideas* and *Modes of Thought*. If we read these later works as indicators of a possible revisioning of the 1929 position in terms of further reflection, then we can modify the 1929 position rather than abandon it to Neville's critical attack. I believe that Neville carries out a successful flanking

attack on Whitehead, but that Whitehead's position can be strengthened on the basis of material found in *AI* and *MT*—as well as the introduction of cross-cultural material drawn from the East Asian philosophic tradition of Neo-Confucianism, which is in concord with this material.

I am not the first scholar to notice that there is a problem of God–creativity–world relations in *PR* or that Whitehead returned to these questions in both *AI* and *MT*. The problem that has complicated any appeal to material in *AI* and *MT* is that neither of these books is as philosophically technical nor systematic as *PR*. In a philosophic sense, one must always build upon *PR*, even if one recognizes that there are points of detail that need to be improved—even major points such as the relationship of God and creativity. In terms of the scholasticism of process thought, *AI* and *MT* are, it often seems to me, treated as something like nontechnical addenda to the serious detailed philosophic work of *PR*. They are interpreted as interesting studies of intellectual and philosophic history of ideas, but rarely is there an attempt to make use of them to modify or correct anything fundamental in *PR*. I believe this is a grave mistake if Whiteheadian scholars are going to debate successfully with astute critics such as Neville on the question of the divine reality. I will demonstrate that Whitehead makes enough suggestive hints in *AI* and *MT* to warrant an attempted reconstruction of the structure of the relationship of creativity, God, and the world as it bears on philosophic cosmology and theology, especially when this re-reading is combined with material drawn from Chu Hsi's Neo-Confucian philosophy. Such a reconstruction will provide one reasonable answer to Neville and other critics of process thought in terms of its coherence and adequacy.

It is at this point that I will also introduce Chu Hsi as another contributor to the modern global movement of process thought. Although Chu was dealing with a completely different culture of philosophic discourse, some of his insights and problems shed light on the question of God, creativity, and the world—or the relationship of the Tao, human nature, and the mind–heart to express the problem within Sung Neo-Confucian categories. If the Neo-Confucian materials serve to nudge the Whiteheadian debate along, they will have served one of the great purposes of comparative philosophy, namely the mutual enrichment of the conversation.

I believe that Whitehead knew he had a problem with his notions of God and creativity at the end of Part V of *PR*. However obliquely, Whitehead returns to these themes in both *AI* and *MT*, but not with the scope or precision, or even intent, of *PR*. This is the reason that much of Whiteheadian scholarship correctly ends its creative advance into process philosophy and theology with reflections based exclusively on *PR*. I will also argue that this problem is one of the reasons that causes independent thinkers such as

Hartshorne and Neville to move away from purely Whiteheadian solutions to the problem of the relationship of creativity, God, and the world. For instance, Hartshorne seeks to solve these problems through his redefinition of God as a society and not as an individual object–event in Whiteheadian terms. For his part, Neville strives to move beyond the whole Whiteheadian metaphysical and cosmological discussion toward a radical ontology of creation *ex nihilo*, designed in part to solve this Whiteheadian dilemma concerning the God–world relationship.

But this may be giving up too soon on an internally adequate and a coherent orthodox Whiteheadian answer to these questions. There are ways to defend the Whiteheadian vision on serious Whiteheadian grounds if we take *AI* and *MT* more seriously. I am mindful of David Hall's and Roger Ames's warning, found in a footnote in their book on Confucian discourse, that studies such as mine can be read as a form of eager scholasticism that much too quickly tries to force Whitehead's philosophy back into the safe confines of traditional Western metaphysics. Hall and Ames argue that Whitehead became a victim of his disciples, who used his process thought to find the One True System. According to Hall and Ames, much of the power of Whitehead's work came from his poetic style and metaphors. At least part of my argument is that a comparative study of Whitehead shows that seeking to remove incoherence from part of his system does not mean we must abandon process for a reaffirmation of some kind of "ultimacy of fact," as Hall and Ames allege.[23]

For instance, the Canadian theologian Laurence Wilmot has sketched just such a defense on the basis of his reading of the relevant theological sections of *AI*, buttressed further by reflections on selected Christian patristic texts. Wilmot's essay has not received much positive attention because of some very serious defects in its textual, hermeneutic, and general interpretation of Whitehead.[24] Nonetheless, it is a suggestive interpretation that, if purged of its shortcomings, provides a way to answer Neville's charge of a fundamental incoherence in Whitehead's notion of God by means of a creative use of themes drawn from *AI* and *MT*.

In all honesty, I must point out that for most competent Whiteheadian scholars these extensive flaws in Wilmot's analysis obviate any positive value for his suggested theological reconstruction. I have sympathy both for what Wilmot attempted and for his critics, who have pointed out where he went wrong. Yet Wilmot's basic instinct is helpful in indicating at least one way out of the problem on strictly Whiteheadian grounds, based on material taken from *AI* and *MT*. As Whitehead once noted, it is sometimes more important for a thesis to be interesting than strictly logically ordered. However, it is best if it is both interesting and true for it to count as a viable reconstruction.

The key to Wilmot's revisionist position is Whitehead's claim in *AI* about the development of the Western philosophic tradition after Plato. "These Christian theologians (Whitehead takes these to be the schools of Alexandria and Antioch) have the distinction of being the only thinkers who in a fundamental metaphysical doctrine improved upon Plato" (*AI*, 214–15). Anyone who knows Whitehead's veneration of Plato should take immediate note of this confession. Whatever this improvement is, it deserves careful attention. While Whitehead does not spell out in detail precisely what he means, Wilmot observes that Whitehead explicitly believes that the early patristic theologians offer some kind of solution to the problem of the relationship of God and the world that will make sense of the claims of Part V of *PR*. Wilmot makes a strong case, based on impeccable Whiteheadian grounds, for the creative use of *AI* in order to work on the problem of God, creativity, and the world. That Wilmot is rash in his attempt to show that Whitehead was an orthodox trinitarian Christian should not be taken to prove the completely different thesis that Whitehead in *AI* never offers improved reflections on God, creativity, and the world.

It is no easy task to show what Whitehead was doing systematically in *AI* in terms of the notions of God, creativity, and the world and how this triad is linked to early Christian theology. Although Whitehead admired the creativity of these early Christian theologians, his admiration knew limits. Whitehead argued that the problem of God–world relations arose in Western religious thought, specifically in Plato and Aristotle, long before it became a highly charged theological problem for the early Christian theologians. The focal point for the Christian was how to resolve the unity and internal diversity of God's nature as expressed in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Historically, the solution of the problem demanded a doctrine of the person of Christ because of the Arian challenge to the orthodox Christian affirmation of the mysterious yet complete unity of God and Christ. Whitehead holds that these theologians were correct in that "They decided for the direct immanence of God in the one person of Christ. They also decided for some sort of direct immanence of God in the World generally" (*AI*, 216). This, according to Whitehead, is the basis for their advance on Plato. "It is in this respect that they made a metaphysical discovery" (*AI*, 216).

But once having made their metaphysical discovery, the theologians failed to advance toward what Whitehead calls general metaphysics. The reason for this was "another unfortunate presupposition. The nature of God was exempted from all the metaphysical categories which applied to the individual things in this temporal world" (*AI*, 216). In most respects, Whitehead's philosophic quest can be viewed as a return to this early patristic breakthrough without exempting God from the analysis. For whatever reason, the Christian

theologians, and most theologians ever since, suffered from what Whitehead calls a failure of nerve in metaphysical vision.

> They made no effort to conceive the World in terms of the metaphysical categories by means of which they interpreted God, and they made no effort to conceive God in terms of the metaphysical categories which they applied to the world. (*AI*, 217)

From a Whiteheadian perspective, this was unfortunate. But it does not mean that modern philosophers of religion and philosophic theologians cannot return to this initial breakthrough and try to create a more adequate notion of God–world relations. This is basically what Wilmot tries to do, however flawed the execution of the project may have been.

Whitehead in *AI* goes on to point out that the problem with this gulf between the metaphysics of divinity and the temporal world leads to an inability to figure out what is going on in terms of God's relationship to the world. He argues that unless we develop a more adequate doctrine of a divine world relationship, we must resort to silence on the issue or deploy the long bow of mysticism because we cannot know anything about the divine on the basis of the mundane (*AI*, 217). Even as an Englishman with a natural veneration for the long bow, Whitehead does not believe that this solution will work outside of purely Christian circles. Some kind of reasonable discourse on divine things is not only possible but necessary for religious and philosophic reconstruction.

To locate this revised notion of God within process thought, in chapter 2 we will explore briefly the development of Whitehead's notion of God. What distinguishes my commentary from other standard scholarly accounts is that it will focus attention on those aspects of the Whiteheadian corpus that allow for a revised process philosophic and theological position on the question of God–world relations, a position also to be enriched by recourse to an examination of Chu Hsi's Neo-Confucian process thought. In chapter 3 we will then address whether Neville's doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is a brilliant example of an arrow shot from the long bow of mysticism into the silence of the other side of what we call God. Is Neville's provocative rendition of Platonic or Neo-Platonic mysticism all that can be said of God, the world, or creativity? In chapters 4 and 5 we will introduce Chu Hsi as a dialogue partner on the issue of God, creativity, and the world.

We must now return briefly to Wilmot's reconstruction (1979). He looks at the theologians of Alexandria and Antioch to discover what Whitehead was exploring in terms of God–world relations if and when we take material from *AI* and *MT* in order to understand a possible revision in Whitehead's thought.

Wilmot then proceeds to frame his own argument in terms of what he takes to be a Whiteheadian response to the metaphysics of Plotinus, an important figure in the development of Platonic theology in late classical antiquity. Wilmot takes Whitehead at his word and looks very carefully at the writing of a representative theologian of the period, Athanasius, to see what this advance in metaphysics might be. And of course Wilmot concludes that this advance, by the necessity of the logic of the theological argument, takes us directly into the heart of the Christological controversies of the fourth century. In his enthusiasm for the argument, Wilmot makes the claim that the "problems facing Athanasius and Whitehead are identical" (1979, 143). It is just this kind of excessive rhetoric that causes many sober Whiteheadians to discount Wilmot's work.

Furthermore, Wilmot ends his book by trying to argue that Whitehead was an orthodox trinitarian Christian. This is simply too much for many scholars to credit because of what we know about Whitehead's negative opinion of the Church and his relationship to it. It may be the case that Whitehead was impressed with some of the early Christian theologians, but to try to bring Whitehead himself safely back into the embrace of the Church strains credulity, given Whitehead's caustic opinions about the Church of his day. All one has to do to make the point here is to re-read Lucien Price's 1954 *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead* to get the point. Whitehead may indeed have had a high opinion of the insights of Jesus of Nazareth and some early Christian thinkers, but this does not mean that we can infer something about his own faith stance vis-à-vis the existing Christian churches. Nonetheless, this does not mean that Wilmot is not on to something that can help resolve the problem of God–world relations in process philosophy and theology.

What Wilmot points toward is one possible response to internal critics such as Neville who have made a telling point about the lack of coherence caused by the diremption of God and creativity within *PR*. Some kind of speculation on trinitarian theory may indeed be helpful in resolving this dilemma in a manner different from Hartshorne's revision of Whitehead's categories or Neville's rejection of process cosmology as a metaphysics without ontology. At this point it is important to keep in mind that although Neville rejects Whitehead's metaphysics, he still relies on Whitehead's cosmology when he comes to frame his own creative cosmological exposition, as first expressed in *The Cosmology of Freedom*.

In Chu Hsi's case, it is more difficult to locate any particular famous passage on the role of principle and matter–energy that becomes the focus of debate in quite the same way Part V of *PR* does for Whitehead. However, the first six chapters or sections of Chu's recorded conversations or dialogues

with students and friends also provide ample material for exploring the Sung analog to the problem of the separation of God and creativity as first principles in Whitehead. The Neo-Confucian problem has to do with the analysis of the relationship of principle (*li*) and matter–energy (*ch'i*) in Chu's mature thought. The first six sections of the conversations (*yü-lei*) and the anthologies based on them, have set the standard for the pan-East Asian discussion of this quarrelsome issue right down to today.

However, even if the textual location of the debate is diffuse, the heat generated by Chu Hsi's discussion of the relationship of principle and matter–energy is intense.[25] Chu's analysis of principle-*ch'i* relations provided a great deal of material for conversation with his own students and friends. In fact, Ch'en Ch'un (1159–1223), as we shall see, devotes a great deal of his philosophic energies to trying to get straight just what the master taught about this topic. All later Neo-Confucian philosophers took a stand on the relationship of principle and matter–energy. While none of the schools wanted to be labeled dualists in terms of their analysis, there was a persistent suspicion that Chu's theory did seem to tend toward a quasi-dualist reading of reality. While this potential dualism was extremely different from the kind of dualisms familiar to the post–Enlightenment West, it was still a problem for the Neo-Confucian tradition. On the one hand, Chu himself denied that we can interpret principle and matter–energy as being cosmologically separable dualistic principles. But on the other hand, if this were the case, then what was the true relationship of principle and matter–energy if not some kind of dualism? Surely the mere fact that there are different and important distinctions to be made indicates that Chu was talking about at least two different things—or modes, manifestations, levels of analysis, and so on.

Is there something in all process philosophies that abhors a fundamental, ontological dualism and yet always embraces a dualistic analysis of reality?[26] Does the admission of dualism somehow detract from the cogency of the argument? This often appears to be the common assumption when we review the Neo-Confucian debates. Chu Hsi's most trenchant critics sought to find a more unified position than they discovered in Chu's analysis. In some cases they were clearly monistic in intent. For instance, some of the very acute Ch'ing dynasty Evidential Research scholars, such as Tai Chen, affirmed that matter–energy was the prime and only basic category of analysis. They recognized principle but only as a pattern within matter–energy. To suggest, as they often took Chu to be doing, that principle and matter–energy have some kind of cosmological parity was a category mistake of the highest order for someone like Tai Chen. Chu's defenders countered that the critics had misunderstood the essential argument for parity that lies at the heart of Chu's mature thought. But in both cases, the critics and the supporters defended the

need for an essential unity of first principles—principle and matter–energy—even if they were not comfortable with Chu's philosophy of principle.

Many other favorite topics of Neo-Confucian discourse were spin-offs of the principle–matter–energy debate. Much of the direction of later East Asian Neo-Confucian speculation depended on whether the philosopher in question chose to defend or attack Chu. Until one could provide a coherent reading of the question of principle and matter–energy, it was, for instance, almost impossible from within the Neo-Confucian worldview to give meaning to the notion of the mind–heart, human nature, human feelings, the nature of morality, and all of the other issues so near and dear to the Confucian Way. And if Chu were wrong about his approach to such a fundamental question, what credence could be given to all of his other commentaries and insights into the Way of the Sages? In a link to the Whiteheadian tradition, we note that Neville has written extensively on the Neo-Confucian tradition, often seeking the support and illumination of contrast from this East Asian tradition as he develops his own critical project.

A REVISED WHITEHEADIAN METASYSTEM

One clue about how to proceed is to review briefly some key passages from *AI* as they pertain to this issue. As it has been amply demonstrated by Lewis Ford in *The Emergence of Whitehead's Metaphysics: 1925–1929*, Whitehead was quite capable of changing his mind as he worked through a problem. Ford has done a masterful job of demonstrating how Whitehead arrived at his final conclusions in *PR* without sometimes even bothering to remove earlier drafts expressing different positions from the newer layers of the text. As it is well known, Whitehead wrote quickly and did not take much care in the final editorial preparation of his books. *PR* is a perfect example of this rather lax process (*PR*, v–x).

More germane to our problem, however, is that Whitehead does return to basic speculative issues in *AI* and *MT*. In terms of Sung Neo-Confucian discourse, Chu thought systematically but never wrote a study of physics like Aristotle, so it does not make a great deal of sense to instantly link his speculative reflections on the nature of things to a characteristic Western ordering of the sciences. Chu's more characteristic way of systematic reflection is similar to what Hall and Ames (1995) describe as analogical or correlative discourse or what Lakoff (1987) construes as reliance on metaphor or prototype. In both Whitehead's and Chu's case, there is an attempt to explain the world in ways that are not immediate copies of ontology or cosmology as pure theoretical or abstract disciplines. In Paul Feyerabend's radical formulation (1988), both Whitehead and Chu are more historical than abstract thinkers.