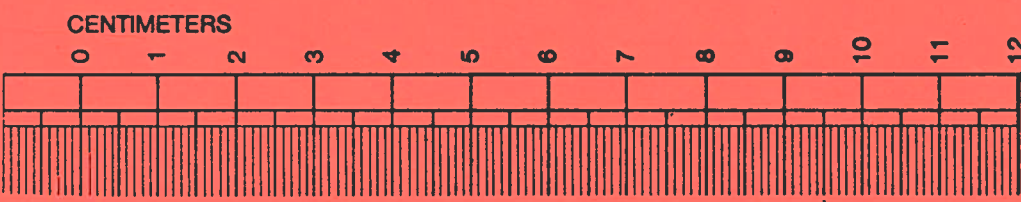
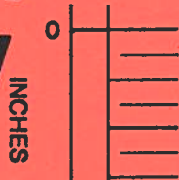


Bernard Loomer

**Professor Emeritus, Philosophical
Theology, will deliver the 1977
Graduate Theological
Union Lecture,
THE SIZE
OF GOD**



**Wednesday, November 16, 8 PM
Pacific School of Religion Chapel
1798 Scenic Avenue, Berkeley
The Public Is Invited**





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Oct. 11, 1977

Dear Claude: —

I do accept your invitation
to give the second GTU lecture.

The date of Nov. 16 is satisfactory
to me. I'll need to know the time of the
lecture, although I assume that it will be
an evening affair.

I'll travel up from Claremont,
probably by car.

The title of the lecture: The Size
of God.

✓ Elia

Andy
Neil

Cordially,
Bernie

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PREFACE

Bernard Loomer's "The Size of God" is a distinct option in process theology and in empirical theology. Further, it advances neglected theories not only about religious identity, but about the American character.

Loomer here proposes that empirical religious thought must never in any way be detached from natural and social history; it must reach all the way to the limits of natural and social history. Religious thought must be historical thought, but it must also identify God with the whole of the natural and social world. The effort to identify God with a part, rather than the whole, of the natural world is empirically unwarranted, even if it protects the divine virtue by associating God with only the goodness of the world. To relate God to only a part is to identify God with abstractions—abstractions away from concrete natural experience, abstractions exercised by virtually all American religious naturalists.

At the same time Loomer sharpens that distinct image of the American introduced by William James, John Dewey, and William Carlos Williams. In contrast to both the innocent American rustic and the other-worldly American pilgrim, Loomer's "earth-creature" has a sense of the tragic and a commitment to the concrete. For this character, whose "spirit had its origin in the flames of the stars and the dust of the planet," there is ambiguity in all areas of the world, even in God.

"The Size of God" has had three major public hearings: in 1977 at the Graduate Theological Union, in 1978 at a special session of the national meeting of the American Academy of Religion, and in 1979 at a second special session of the national meeting of the American Academy of Religion. Both American Academy of Religion sessions were initiated and organized by Bernard Lee. In the 1978 session the formal respondents were Lewis Ford and Nancy Frankenberry; in the 1979 session the formal respondents were John Cobb, Jr., Delwin Brown, and William Dean. These public meetings were controversial, a condition stimulated not only by the distinctiveness of Loomer's argument but by the way his prose leans into the wind.

John Cobb's and Delwin Brown's responses are reprinted here in virtually the same form they were originally written. Bernard Lee and Larry Axel offer new responses. William Dean and Nancy Frankenberry have relinquished their original responses in order to frame this discussion—Dean initially to summarize and amplify a few developments in Loomer's life and thought that appear to anticipate his last major writing, and Frankenberry finally to bring Loomer's orientation into conversation with the four responses.

Bernard Loomer died on 15 August 1985, as some of us still worked toward the completion of these pages.

THE SIZE OF GOD

The Theology
of Bernard Loomer in Context

edited by

William Dean and Larry E. Axel



Mercer
University Press



THE SIZE OF GOD

Bernard M. Loomer

Abstract

This is an essay on certain aspects of God's stature. The philosophic mode of thought is process-relational and the method is rational-empirical. The emphasis is naturalistic. The essay proceeds in terms of the general contention that if the one world, the experienceable world with its possibilities, is all the reality accessible to us, then one conclusion seems inevitable: God is to be identified either with a part or with the totality of the concrete, actual world. The thesis of my essay is that God should be identified with the totality of the word, with whatever unity the totality possesses.

The fundamental propositions of the essay are the following:

1. The self-sufficiency of the world enshrouds the inexhaustible mystery inherent with the actual world.
2. Order is an abstraction from the interconnectedness of events.
3. Love is grounded upon interconnectedness, rather than the other way around.
4. The widest generalization of the principle of interconnectedness results in the conception of the world as a web of interconnected events.
5. The unity of the world is the unity of this societal web of interrelatedness.
6. The perfection of a God derived from a priori considerations is the perfection of high abstractions. As concretely actual, God (or the world) is ambiguous.
7. The unity of the world conceived as a universal order (or God defined as a principle of order) leads to a theology or philosophy of abstractionism.
8. Christian doctrines of God and Christology have been shaped by their passion for perfection or the unambiguous, but the unambiguous has the status of an abstraction. The concretely real is ambiguous. An ambiguous God is of greater stature than an unambiguous deity.

9. Process-relational thought has been notable in its efforts to overcome the various bifurcations of modern philosophy, but the major exponents of this mode of thought exemplify the ultimate bifurcation—that between good and evil.
10. Whitehead does this by ontologically separating God and creativity.
11. Wieman does this by defining God as one process among others, a God of creative transformation. Both views result in making God an abstraction.
12. The basic theological and philosophical tradition of the West has maintained that the answer to the ambiguities of life is some form of unambiguity. In terms of this essay this translates into the notion that the answer to life is death.
13. The creative advance of the world is not to be understood as an adventure toward perfection. Rather, this advance is a struggle toward greater stature.
14. Ambiguity should perhaps be understood as a metaphysical principle.

The context of the present topic consists in the transition from a theology that maintains that resources for salvation ultimately derive from a transcendent God to an outlook that suggests that the graces for the living of a creative life emerge within the depths and immediacies of concrete experience. It is a transition from the wisdom of the sojourner, who was made in the image of his' creator and who travels lightly through his terrestrial pilgrimage because his destiny is a transcendent home, to the wisdom of the evolved earth-creature, whose spirit had its origin in the flames of the stars and the dust of the planet, whose home is the earth, whose destiny, or that of his descendents, may be extinction or life among the stars, and whose fulfillment as an individual and as a species requires a deep attachment to the humanizing processes of this life.

These transitions are aspects of a more basic shift in perspective from the two worlds of traditional thought to the one evolved and relativized world of contemporary imagery. This movement entails a revolution in our conception of the life of God and of our participation in it.

The God of our fathers was an infinite God; His qualities were defined in terms of the uttermost forms of perfection. Sometimes these superlatives were character-

¹This essay was published with Bernard Loomer's approval and cooperation, but its final editing occurred after his death. While it is the policy of Mercer University Press and of the *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* to ask their authors to substitute gender-inclusive language for gender-specific language, this was impossible here. Under the circumstances the editors did not feel entitled on their own to introduce gender-inclusive language and the required concomitant word changes in the many instances where that would have been appropriate.

ized by means of the negation of the limits of human attributes. He transcended us in all respects. Whatever limitations He possessed or operated with were self-imposed. He was the primordial source of all good, and the incommensurate standard by which all our thoughts, actions, and virtues were to be judged and found wanting. He knew about evil, and He sometimes made use of it in the process of achieving His purpose. But His character and actions, while many-faceted, were wholly unambiguous.

This God was personal, loving, merciful, and gracious. He was also free and creative. He made a world that was wholly dependent on His power and sufferance for its continued existence, but he was not identified with this world. He transcended the world in somewhat the same manner in which an artist transcends his creation. The object (as an artistic creation) is derived from the artist's creativity, and something of the spirit of the artist is exemplified in his creation; but the being of the artist is quite independent of the existence of the work of art that he created.² So God transcended the world, although both His creative activity and His redemptive work in and through Jesus Christ somehow manifested His infinite wisdom, His incomparable goodness, and His adequate power. (The ways in which all this and more have been revealed and vouchsafed in the person, work, and life of Jesus have never been adequately explained in the annals of Christian theology.)

For the purposes of this discussion, it must be emphasized that God in His being was totally independent of the being of the world and its creatures. This basic distinction between God and the world has been fundamental throughout the history of Christian theology. I suggest that this is a pivotal point in looking at the traditional picture of God. His status as God, and His worthiness of our worship and commitment, were not grounded on religious and ethical factors alone, abstracted from all metaphysical considerations. God was not only the author of our salvation, the forgiver of our sins, and the one who established the new as well as the old covenant; He was also the lord of history and the maker of heaven and earth. The concept of lordship includes the notion that the fundamental conditions of our natural and historical existence—such as sexuality, mortality, and the feeding of species on other species—were derived from the wisdom and power of God. Without these qualities of lordship and transcendent creativity, God would not have had the status of being the one universal God by whose power all things were made and continue to exist. God was love, and love was of God as a fundamental quality of His being, but love was not the being of God. The being of God was the being of independent, transcendent self-existence; the being of God was His aseity.

I hazard the judgment that God's freedom, His unambiguous goodness, and even His holiness derived in large part from the independence of His being.

With the elimination of the transcendental world of metaphysical independence, first causes, perfection, aseity, and preestablished unity, a radical shift occurs. If the one world, the experienceable world with its possibilities, is all the reality accessible

²The artist, as artist, may not be completely independent of his artistic creativity, although he transcends any one expression of it; but the artist as a whole person transcends both his artistic creativity and the results of his work.

to us, as naturalists claim, then one conclusion seems inevitable. If God is to be spoken of as something more than an ideal or a principle (that is, as something more than a final or formal cause), then it follows that the being of God must be identified in some sense with the being of the world and its creatures. To express the point in naturalistic categories: If God has a reality beyond that of an abstraction, then God is in some sense concretely actual. As an actuality or a group of actualities God is then to be identified either with a part or with the totality of the concrete, actual world, including its possibilities.

The following discussion is devoted to a partial exploration of one option within this general thesis: the alternative that God is to be identified with the totality of the world. More particularly, the focus is on the character and stature of God in relation to His concrete actuality. It represents another effort to characterize the reality and limits of a finite and concrete God. The inquiry moves within the orbit of a type of thought that began with the work of Henri Bergson and William James and includes the thought of A. N. Whitehead as its major metaphysical embodiment. I describe it as a process-relational mode of thinking. The present discussion continues the empirical tradition within this general understanding of the nature of things. It was James who suggested in 1907 that "some kind of an immanent or pantheistic working *in* things rather than above them is, if any, the kind recommended to our contemporary imagination."³

I take note that there are many who will contend that naturalism, especially the type I will attempt to outline briefly, is incompatible with Christian faith. If the Christian faith is understood as a tradition that permits no radical transformation of itself, I would agree with the contention. This is not the occasion to suggest a possible justification in Christian terms of the general orientation with which I stand. Suffice it to say that I am attempting to do theologically what Whitehead suggested should be done philosophically, namely, to take a set of ideas, the best that one has, and unflinchingly to explore experience with the aid of those ideas. To do so "unflinchingly" suggests the quality of courage that is required in this venture, especially when the inquiry takes place in unfamiliar and traditionally forbidden territory, and when the tentative conclusions may appear to be so at odds with what has been accepted as true and adequate and helpful for so long. (Tillich, for example, has called the position that I find myself driven to "absurd.") I assume that courage and tentativeness, along with humility, are inherent qualities of faith. At least this inquiry is undertaken in this spirit.

The Naturalistic Outlook

The naturalistic outlook that is operative within this inquiry can be expressed in terms of basic empirical, methodological principles, or at least those that are most pertinent to the discussion. These principles do not have an independent justification; they are of a piece with the accompanying ontological stance. They are in fact the methodological expression of this ontology, since the ontology is embodied in their

³William James, *Pragmatism* (London, New York, Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1940) 70.

content. The spirit of these principles exemplifies the methodological and ontological humility characteristic of much of modern thought since the time of Hume and Kant.

1. There is the general empirical principle that knowledge is derived from and confirmed by physical experience. This entails the notion that ideas are primarily reflective of physical or bodily experience, although they may also be elicited secondarily from other ideas that in turn are ultimately rooted in physical experience.

Physical experience is a generative and formative encounter with concrete actualities existing in the context of the immediate past of an emerging subject (including the subject's past self). This experience involves a causal feeling of derivation from influences issuing from the past. As data, these influences do not include past actualities in their concrete fullness. The formed energies of past actualities are objectified in the mode of perspectives of themselves.⁴ These perspectives are projected as vectors into the present and become the causal data from which present actualities are created. Physical experience is at once an act of perception and a process of creation whereby the present actuality emerges as a synthesis of its constitutive past world.

Physical feelings are the fundamental avenues through which we meet and absorb the elemental forces of our existence. They are the primary mode in which we experience the processive and relational as well as the qualitative (especially the affectional and evaluative) dimensions of life. The heights and depths of life, the unmanageable and efficacious undertows of existence, and the transformative energies of creative interchange are known first through our bodily feelings.

Sense perception, by contrast, is an abstract version of physical experience. It is a perception of contemporaneous sensorial forms and qualities, together with their mathematical relations, in abstraction from the presupposed causal matrix of concrete actualities of which they are ostensible components. It is a more specialized type of prehension that enables us to have relatively clear and distinct impressions of the more manageable features of our experience.

Conceptual experience is a complex phenomenon. On the one hand, it is an envisagement of structures, forms, and qualities (including novel instances of these entities) in their capacity for being determinative elements in the creation of concrete actualities. The scope of this envisagement may range from relevant solutions to immediate practical problems, and even to the farthest reaches of imagination and speculative thought. A conceptual sensitivity to relationships and interconnectedness is the basis for theoretical generalization.

On the other hand, all physical experience involves some degree of conceptual response. These responses are interpretations and evaluations of physical experience. They heighten or diminish the intensity of physical feelings. They enhance or distort the reality of these primal forces. In these and other ways conceptual operations advance or weaken the organismic freedom of actual realities.

⁴We are accustomed to think that a standpoint determines a perspective, but in this interpretation of physical experience perspectives objectified from the past determine a standpoint in the present. The past perspectivizes itself. These perspectives are abstractions from the past, but they are physical rather than conceptual in nature.

An intuition in the perceptual sense is a physical experience with a modicum of conceptual interplay. The far-ranging insights of religious intuitions are derived from the fusion of physical and conceptual sensitivity to life-directive and life-transformative qualities and relationships.

2. The extensiveness and dimensions of our knowledge are determined by the range and depth of our experience. The limits of the knowable are defined in terms of what is experienceable (including the possibility of parapsychological phenomena). The limits of what is experienceable are constituted by the boundaries of our relationships with other realities, both actual and possible. These relationships are the media through which other realities affect or communicate with us.

3. The disavowal of transcendental causes, principles, and explanations is the negative side of the assertion of the self-sufficiency of the world and of our descriptive analysis of it. Whitehead's version of this point states that "there is an essence to the universe which forbids relationships beyond itself, as a violation of its reality."⁵ This statement is sometimes, I think, mistakenly interpreted in rationalistic terms.

4. This naturalistic orientation can be restated in terms of a principle that is both methodological and ontological in scope: the reasons why things are the way they are and behave as they do are to be found within the things themselves and their relationships (including the factor of chance) to each other.⁶ The "reasons" are conceptual abstractions from the functionings of concrete actualities. In this sense ultimate explanations are descriptions expressed in their most generalized form. In Whitehead's words, "explanation is the analysis of coordination."⁷

5. Actual entities are not created by combining formal abstractions. A concrete individual is never "possible." "Philosophy is explanatory of abstractions and not of concreteness. . . . Creativity is the ultimate behind all forms, inexplicable by forms" (Whitehead).⁸

6. The self-sufficiency of the world of our experience enshrouds the unfathomable or inexhaustible mystery inherent within the factuality of the world.

The irreducibility of the fundamental premises of our description of the nature of things defines the limits of human inquiry. The reasonableness of these hard-won premises (whether from revelation or reason or empirical analysis) is an apparent assurance of the measure of our grasp of ultimate meaning. We may be impelled to believe that our deepest and dearest convictions concerning value and the "way of things" penetrate to the very heart and mind of the "why of things," or that the innermost secret of the world is decisively disclosed in the very structure of the world that we have described in our categories, or that our necessary and primordial truths reverberate with confirmation throughout the abyss of meaning.

⁵Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978) 4.

⁶Whitehead's "ontological principle," which states that to look for reasons is to look for actual entities, is another rendering of the general empirical principle.

⁷*Ibid.*, 153.

⁸*Ibid.*, 20.

It may be so; and we must live with the aid of the wisdom we have. But awe and wonder, which constitute the rich soil in which wisdom flourishes, are not exhausted by revelations, necessary truths, and self-evident premises upon which intellectual worlds are erected. They are the primal exemplifications of self-transcendence.

The unremovable, intellectual arbitrariness of the premises of meaning that undergird our systems of explanation symbolizes the immanence of the mystery of existence that absorbs not only our questions but also our deep-rooted criteria of value and intelligibility. This absorption is reflected back to us both as an affirmation and as a beckoning beyond ourselves. Our deepest wisdom is productive of a peace consonant with our understanding. It is also generative of a restiveness that impels us toward a fullness or an emergent "more" that lies beyond our comprehension.

Faith seeks an understanding of itself, and trust requires some sense of vindication. Yet the depth of trust that tries to assimilate the tortuous turnings and baffling agonies of experience outruns the assurance of either self-evident understanding or the vindication of prior fulfillment.

The basic ontological categories are relatively few in number. There is, in the first place, the fact of becoming; but becomingness is not a substantive entity in itself. Like all categories, it exists only in terms of its exemplifications. There are only specific instances of becoming, or particular units of process; there is no creativity apart from the creativity of individual units of actuality. Furthermore, there are no instances of bare or contentless becoming. Process is the becoming of experience, and these instances of becoming are occasions of experience. They are somewhat analogous to James's "drops" of experience.

These occasions of experience are the fundamental actualities of the world, the concrete individuals that constitute the successive moments in the historic lives of all forms and levels of existence. These occasions are the subjects of their experience. Their subjective experience is a synthetic process of unifying the several forms of vectorial energy derived from past occasions.⁹ Their subjective individuality, their self-creativity, and their freedom consist in the manner of their response to what they have received. This is their "howness" of becoming, or the style and spirit of their life: How they become determines what they become.

Viewed from another standpoint, these occasions of experience are what and where they become. Their subjective experience occurs when and where it does, and once having become something definite within a particular spatial and temporal context they do not move or change. They cannot move or change. They can only be

⁹Whitehead holds that his irreducible quanta of energy are the "final" subjects, the elemental individuals, and that all other, more complex organizations of energy are either nexuses or societies. Whitehead may be metaphysically correct, even though the empirical truth-status of his position may be moot, or must await future means of verification. But this issue aside, the precise application of his distinction and concepts to all situations and kinds of problems makes discussion needlessly awkward and cumbersome. In terms of this essay, we can make the kinds of distinctions within the world of reality that are most relevant to the kind of problem and type of inquiry under consideration. For our purposes these occasions or drops of experience vary in their extensiveness. The fundamental definition of an individual unit of concrete actuality is that it is a process of unification, whether or not it includes other and smaller processes of becoming.

superseded. They inherit only from the past and, having etched their individual stamp on their inheritance, for richer or poorer, they project their decision into the future.

The instances of the becoming of individuals are transient and episodic in their duration. They are superseded by other instances so as to form a historic and causal route of occasions. (Change occurs only within this route.) This route of successive individuals or occasions of experience will be termed an event. The concept of events is useful because it enables us to deal with organizations of energy of greater complexity and extensiveness than actual occasions of experience exemplify. In everyday usage, when we refer to an individual, we normally have in mind an enduring person, and not a self as a momentary occasion. Most of the basic affairs of our common life are carried on in terms of relatively permanent and complex personages. The decisive sections of this essay will be concerned with individuals in their more extended reality—that is, as events. An event is an "enduring individual."

An individual instance of becoming is shaped (in large part) by past occasions upon which it is dependent and from which it emerges. Because of this dependence its relation to its past is internal. But it is independent of its contemporaries. It neither influences nor is directly influenced by them. Because of this independence it is externally related to its present. Because of its perspectival projections of itself it can help to shape the future. However, it is independent of the future, since as a past occasion it cannot be altered. Thus its relation to future occasions is also external. With respect to individual occasions of experience the line of dependence is asymmetrical or unilateral. As transient moments of subjectivity they do not participate in relationships of interdependence. This lack of mutual dependence provides a context within which they can exercise whatever degree of freedom they possess.

The relationship of interdependence obtains only between several routes of occasions, or events, that perdure over an indefinite, yet sizeable, temporal span. These routes are, for the most part, roughly contemporaneous with each other. In this essay where I speak of interdependence and interconnectedness, the reference will be to individuals or persons as events, and not to individuals as momentary occasions.¹⁰ In this fashion the freedom of individuals as occasions, and the externality of many of their relationships, are maintained within the context of the interdependence of events.

Finally, concrete occasions and events should be distinguished from material objects that we see, such as bridges, trees, and people. Occasions are particular processes of the becoming of individuals as subjects, as selves. Events are durational, historic routes of successive occasions. Material objects are the enduring or recurring structures within events. The distinction between an event and a material object corresponds to the difference between an extended process (or an extended succession

¹⁰The use of "individual" to indicate both a momentary self and an enduring person may be confusing, but the text and the context should make it clear which connotation is intended. This possible confusion could be avoided by always using the term *event* when speaking of interdependence and reserving the term *individual* when speaking of the momentary self. In addition to the consideration that this does not conform to ordinary usage, there are significant dimensions of meaning carried by the phrase "interdependent individuals" that cannot be conveyed by the expression "interconnected events," although this latter phrase will also be employed at times, especially when a more general reference is intended.

of processes) and an enduring structure. The fundamental concrete reality is the process or the occurrence and the structure is an abstract component of the occurrence.

In the language of this essay, a person may be defined as an enduring object (actually, an incredibly complex society of countless enduring objects) when we have reference primarily to his formal or structural characteristics which are maintained over a considerable stretch of time. A person may also be defined as an extended event (again, of baffling complexity) when we intend to suggest the dynamic basis of his sustained existence.

All organizations of energy into groups that exemplify some causal connections are, strictly speaking, organizations of events and not simply of transient occasions. Contemporaneous occasions are mutually independent. Causal connections involve the temporal relationship of "earlier" and "later." This means that any structural grouping must include several sequences (events or enduring objects) wherein the earlier phase in any one sequence influences the later phases in other sequences.¹¹

So, secondly, events create (and are created by) two kinds of enduring groups, a nexus and a society. A nexus is a relatively unorganized relational matrix of interconnected events whose members manifest a spatial togetherness. A society is a nexus whose members illustrate a common mode or behavior or feeling. This commonality of behavior (which may be quite simple or complex in its structure) is the "defining characteristic" of the group. This distinguishing feature is inherited by each member through its causal or determining relations with other members of the web.

Whether we move toward the larger or the smaller, obviously there are societies within societies. The more inclusive the society the more abstract and vague its defining characteristic. Communities constitute a species of society with a more deeply etched commonality of spirit.

Thirdly, occasions of experience and events exemplify the physical, sensual, emotional, and purposive dimensions of life. These are the various qualities with which we encounter the energy in its unadorned factuality. As Henry Nelson Wieman put it: Energy always comes to us clothed in qualities such as softness, yellow, or joy.

Fourthly, occasions are largely constituted by their relationships with other occasions. Relationships are the realities through which we encounter each other and become members one of another. They constitute the situational contexts or fields in which we live, move, and have our being.

Finally, the fact of order indicates the structures of organization that are exemplified within occasions and events, and the patterns of relationship between events.

We have, then, a perspective on the nature of things that emphasizes the ultimacy of becoming and the primacy of relationships. I will return to this topic shortly, but

¹¹Whitehead's discussion of the concepts of nexus and society is puzzling. He is heavily insistent on the causal independence of contemporaries. Yet he characterizes both of these groups in terms of prehensions among their members, which are actual entities or occasions. But physical prehensions occur in physical time for Whitehead. They are in fact the very temporality of physical time. Thus there can be no nexuses or societies simply of occasions. These two groups presuppose successions of occasions, if they are to exemplify prehensive connections. Nexuses and societies are temporal or enduring groupings. In this sense an "enduring society" is redundant.

I conclude this preliminary discussion by underlining certain basic features of this point of view.

Because of our long substantialist tradition in philosophy and theology it is difficult to avoid thinking that there is another substratum of reality that undergirds the world of events. This notion seems to add a dimension of meaning and a depth of value that a purely naturalistic outlook appears to lack. Possibly so. Yet, in terms of this essay, there is nothing beyond processive actualities. The occasion itself (and its constitutive relations) is the fundamental reality. Events do not occur to something that is not itself an event, an occasion of experience is not an incident in the life of a self who is not an occasion. The self is its occasion, and the enduring person is a historic route of such occasions.

In this view there is no ground of being that is the source of all becoming but, in itself, is not becoming. The only ground for the becoming of an actuality consists of other, temporally prior actualities from which the energy of its becoming is derived.

Similarly, the referents of such terms as power, freedom, and creativity should not be reified. There is no independent or self-existing power beyond that of individuals and societies existing in a relational matrix. Freedom is not a preformed, spiritual reality from which we can draw our resources. Creativity is not an entity, either actual or possible. These concepts refer to qualities of concrete particulars. Grammatically these terms are nouns, but, with the possible exception of creativity, they function as adverbs. They are not "whats" but "hows." They are indicative of modes of behaviors of actual occasions.

Even these concrete actualities, while they have the grammatical status of nouns, should be classified more accurately as verbs. When we refer to them as nouns, I suggest that we have reference to the relative permanence of an enduring historic route of occasions, or to some structure of formed identity that we derive by abstraction from the ebb and flow of transient occasions of experience.

The point of these concluding introductory remarks concerns the viability of this outlook as a living option. Within the fundamental pluralism of this position there is the inherent claim that the heights and depths of existence, including the qualities of profound religious encounters and the resources for living an abundantly meaningful life, are to be experienced within the concrete realities of this world. This contention conjoins the sense of ultimacy in meaning and the immediacy of experienceable actualities (to borrow Bernard Meland's language).

The translation of this mode of thought into a style of life is premised upon what may be called an "attachment to life." I have described this stance elsewhere¹² as a persistent and spirit-testing commitment to the specific processes of life, as a "discerning immersion in what is most deeply present at hand and concretely at work in our midst."¹³ The cultivation of this commitment is the elemental reason for an empirical emphasis in theology and philosophy.

¹²Bernard Loomer, "The Future of Process Philosophy," in *Process Philosophy: Basic Writings*, ed. Jack R. Sibley and Pete A. Y. Gunter (Washington: University Press of America, 1978) 537-38.

¹³*Ibid.*, 537. This immersion is to be informed by various forms of understanding, including Marxist, existential, and psychoanalytic perspectives.

The importance of empirical method depends on the value that is assigned to our existential assimilation of those life-determining processes and relations that are (or ought to be) the focus of empirical inquiry in theology and philosophy. Charles Hartshorne contends that metaphysical truth is a priori truth, and that the practice of empirical method in metaphysics results in our being unable to make any significant distinctions between metaphysics and science. With some important qualifications, this contention may be granted. But truth exists for the sake of value. The value that is at stake in a commitment of attachment is the value of the relational life in its deepest meaning. This meaning (for us) is symbolized by the cross. The discipline of this way of life involves the most mature sensitivity to the workings of concrete processes in the context of internal relations. (This discipline is surely one of the greatest challenges for the human spirit.) This essay contends that an empirical stance is more helpful in promoting and deepening an attachment to the concrete processes of life. All articulated truth is abstract. Therefore, a priori truth is doubly abstract. The grandeur of abstractions is their capacity to extend the intellectual horizons of our lives; but this grandeur is ambiguous, for the pursuit of these abstractions also lures us away from the sensitive immersion in concrete processes that an attachment to life requires.

An attachment to life does not preclude a gladsome and ample appreciation of the wide-ranging functions of reason. The exemplification of a generality of thought is an indispensable feature of any high civilization. It is an agent in the purifying and humanizing of our physical feelings. Most important, an openness to conceptual novelty is a vital element in one kind and level of transformation.

But for all its impressive importance conceptual openness is an abstract way of being accessible to change. This is a receptivity to form. A deeper type of openness is a receptivity to the concrete processes involving causal relationships, especially those that are mutually internal. This kind of openness issues in a more organic type of transformation.

There are alternative modern conceptions of the nature and source of the directive that should guide modern man's efforts to help shape the course of human history. For some this directive is indigenous to the dynamic and controlling thrust of scientific knowledge and technological advances. For others it is derived from an existential self-consciousness as it confronts the structure of alienation and the threats of nothingness inherent within our various societies. For still others it is to be found within the insights and ideals of our rational understanding (in both its idealistic and humanistic modes) in its efforts at creative ecological reconstruction, and for some others it is exemplified in the various methods for heightening the psychic and spiritual level of human consciousness as preparation for the next stage in the evolution of the human spirit.

From the standpoint of this essay neither self-consciousness nor knowledge can provide an adequate directive for the reformation of society or the evolution of the human spirit. They can provide conditions that can facilitate or frustrate the working of the directive, but the directive is to be found within those processes involved in sustained, mutually internal relations. The "wisdom" that can be trusted, and the kind of power consistent with this wisdom, are contained within, or emerge from, these relationships.

Given the outline of the resources available to our inquiry, the thesis will be developed in terms of four topics: the web of life, the unity of the web, the concept of ambiguity, and the creative advance.

The Web of Life

The basic perspective that I have outlined in the introduction has been identified as "process philosophy," and theologians working within this mode of thought have identified themselves as "process theologians." Apart from the point that the religious base of these theologians does not derive in the first instance from this philosophic stance (although I do contend that it has made fundamental contributions to our religious understanding), I want to stress the importance of relationships. If the role of relationships is underplayed in this perspective, an ontology of becoming will have been substituted for an ontology of being, which could be compared to the difference between Einstein and Newton. The cutting edge of this mode of thought results from the synthesis of becoming and relationality.

If we speak of the ultimacy of becoming, then we must speak of the primacy of relatedness. Becoming may be the more inclusive category, but without the presence of dynamic relationships from which actualities emerge, the notion of becoming would be empty of content. Neither becoming nor relatedness is an emergent. They are equiprimordial.¹⁴

Furthermore, even though becoming is the most inclusive category, relatedness has a priority in value. Process exists for the sake of relationships. The final justification for taking the notion of process as the basic category is teleological. It is a way of stating and grounding the conviction that at the heart of things there is a passion or a restlessness to move toward the increase in value, to achieve the "more," to transform what is into a "better." This means there is a drive to create those kinds of relationships from which more complex individuals and societies of greater stature may emerge.

In this perspective, actualities are largely constituted by their relations. Relations are the carriers of energy projected from past occasions, from which present occasions are produced. They are the means by which one actuality enters into the life of another actuality; and they are the bonds of vectorial connectedness between actualities. The concept of the social individual in its most radical meaning is grounded on the notion of constitutive relationships. We live in society, but our society also literally lives within us.

We feed upon each other in all the dimensions of our lives—physically, emotionally, intellectually, spiritually. We create each other. We live within relationships. We live within interlaced fields of energy or relational webs of

¹⁴The fact of becoming is not an emergent. To put it abstractly, becomingness does not itself become. Actual entities become, and there is no becoming apart from the becoming of specific actualities. But there is no reality, actual or otherwise, apart from the fact of becoming. Becoming is coterminous with actuality itself. To be, in the concrete sense, is to become actual. In analogous fashion, relatedness is not an emergent. Various forms of relatedness are historical emergents, but any actuality presupposes the factor of constitutive relatedness.

interconnectedness. Individuals are created within these fields and their possibilities emerge within these interrelationships. This is the reason why I have suggested (on other occasions) that we should commit ourselves to relationships and not to each other, and especially not to the good of the other. In summary, as interrelated individuals we create the web, and the web creates us. Within this relational web we are also self-creative and thereby transform the web—for better or worse.

These considerations add up to the simple yet profound point that as individuals we are interdependent. We do not become interdependent, but rather are such from our inception. This is a primordial fact of our existence. Interdependence or interrelatedness is not an emergent fact. It is indigenous to reality as such, including the realm of possibility as well as the world of actuality.

This point can be extended. We are not interrelated because there is an order in the world. That would be to explain the concrete by the abstract. Rather there is an order because we are interrelated, and this order is an abstraction from the interrelationships. Without interconnectedness there could be no order, unless it were somehow arbitrarily imposed and enforced by an all-powerful and transcendent deity.

Order is a necessary condition in the creation of actualities. It is a condition of limitation, which is a way of saying that it is a principle of actualization. All actualities are finite in that they exclude as well as include. Both inclusion and exclusion occur on the basis of compatibility, whose perimeter includes incompatibility. Since actuality is definable as a process of synthesis, order involves the compatible copresence of contrasting elements whereby a synthesis of them is possible.

The notion of order as compatibility presupposes a reference to specific actualities. Without this reference there would be no basis for incompatibility or exclusion. In the hypothetical situation where everything is equally possible because of the absence of exclusions, the notion of compatibility (and actuality) loses all concrete meaning. Consequently order as abstract harmony is concretized only in the relativities of actual situations.

With respect to specific processes of synthesis, "the compatible copresence of contrasting elements" means that possibilities present themselves as arranged in varying degrees of appropriateness and importance to the emerging purposes of the occasions. (These degrees include those of irrelevance and exclusion.) Order as harmony becomes order as graded relevance (Whitehead).¹⁵

¹⁵Many interpreters of Whitehead's concept of order as graded relevance understand this to mean that a definite final aim is provided (by God) for each occasion. I think they are mistaken; but if their reading of Whitehead is correct, then I think that Whitehead is in error. The gradation of possibilities is an arrangement of possibilities permissive of the realization of various levels of value or degrees of complexity. It does not furnish us with specific aims. (The aim at the greatest possible value or, more accurately, the greatest value possible, is not a specific aim.) The notion that the order of relevance is quite precisely arranged does not enable us to know concretely which specific elements are most relevant to any specific occasion of experience. Sometimes we cannot know which elements are compatible until they have been synthesized or until the synthesis has been attempted. There are some general limitations. Logical contradiction may constitute one instance. Yet there are emotional, psychic, and spiritual contradictions that can be present (and eventually transformed into compatible contrasts) within a person.

The import of this discussion is that order as graded relevance is a condition that is inherent within the diversity of interconnected elements (in their relations to specific actualities). Order is not an independent or ontologically separable factor that is added to the basic condition of our interconnectedness. Order as a distinguishable factor is analytic in its derivation. Furthermore, the order of relevance of possibilities with respect to any occasion is not arranged by any external agent (God). The shift in relevance of a group of possibilities to different occasions is a function of the complex interplay among all the constituent realities. To think otherwise would seem to deny the principle that the reasons for things are to be found within the things themselves and their relationships to each other.

Still further, we are not interdependent because there is a principle or law of love. This, again, would be to explain the concrete in terms of the abstract. We love because we are interdependent, because we enter into each other's lives.

Love does not create our essential interrelatedness. Love is an acknowledgment of it. We love because we are bound to each other, because we live and are fulfilled in, with, and through each other. We love because a failure to love is a denial of the other, ourselves, and our relatedness. It results in a diminution of all of us, including God. We respond to the suffering of another because he is another and because he is suffering, but this does not tell the whole story. When we reach out toward the other in sympathy or compassion or love, we acknowledge our oneness with the other. His suffering becomes in part our suffering; his impoverishment diminishes us. Our response becomes his resource. In responding appropriately to the other we are both fulfilled through that act, and life within the web of relationships is advanced. All the religious virtues are virtues of relationships.

Love (which some refer to as a law of life) is obligatory because we are members one of another and because we are all members of the web of interconnectedness within which we all live. Without our interdependence within this web, love would not be obligatory. The notion that we are to love God and each other because God loves us has force only because our lives are bound up with each other and with God, and because His life is bound up with ours. The parable of the Last Judgment is the text for this point.

In short, love does not create the world; it recreates and redeems it. Love (except as a principle of harmony or compatibility) does not cause the world to cohere in one unity; it adds a richness and tragic beauty to the given unity. The unity is inherent within the matrix of interrelated entities, both those that are possible and those that are actual. The unity and the interrelatedness of things are exemplified as much in the mutual destructiveness of evil as they are in the mutual enrichment of a loving relationship. Love does not create the societal character of the web; it transforms the society of the web into a concerned community.

Love is not a substance. It is a quality of energy whereby external relations, or relations of indifference and bare toleration, may be transformed into internal relationships, and internal relationships may be deepened and enhanced.

The notion of our interrelatedness or interdependence is surely one of the basic insights of the biblical understanding of life. This understanding was expressed in terms of covenantal relationships and the concept of the kingdom of God. Covenants in the biblical sense involved relationships between God and a people. The interre-

latedness of the members of the community did not clearly entail an interdependence between God and the people, although there was a unilateral dependence of the people on God. Within biblical understanding there seems to be a limitation to the range of the notion of interdependence, a limitation that is not present in my own theologizing. Yet within these limits there is some similarity between the biblical understanding of covenantal relationships and what I call the relational web of life.

The Bible has different meanings for various people. One of its most important functions consists in its being a record of the tortuous evolution in a people's understanding of the nature and the meaning of the basic divine-human covenantal relationship. This evolution and this tradition culminated in the person of Jesus, whose life, work, and teaching (according to the early church) were of such stature that the heights and depths of the meaning of the covenant had been made known; the heart of God and the spirit of man had been revealed; and both man and God were defined in terms of their involvement in the web of the covenantal kingdom. The relational life, or the interdependent life of the kingdom, was envisioned and embodied. The cross and resurrection set forth both the price and the recreative power of this kind of life—for God and man alike. Most of us reject the relational life within the interdependent web much of the time. In the midst of our several inequalities we are all equally dependent upon the life within the web.

The Bible is also an extraordinary record of the many ways that we resist, deny, and reject the existence and meaning of this web, this interdependence, this relational life of the cross and resurrection. The themes of this resistance have resounded through centuries of church history. Most of them involve a failure to acknowledge and accept the fulfillment of life that comes through grace, which is a gift of the relational life. In this respect the evolutionary struggle recorded within the Bible is recapitulated in each of us.

It should be added that the Bible is one record of the evolution in the creation of specific webs of interrelationship, creations that more fully exemplified the fulfillment that is possible within the interdependence that lies at the foundations of our existence.

We all live in various webs of interrelatedness, some smaller, some larger. As a consequence of Jesus and the revelatory founders of other religions, we have come to see that the stature of our humanity is in large part a function of the inclusiveness of the communal web in which we feel at home—an insight that G. H. Mead has spelled out in terms of his behavioral psychology. We have come to understand that at the human level the web of life includes all humankind. This all-inclusive human web is the primordial covenant—primordial in the sense of being coterminous with human life—to which all are called and all are chosen, and in whose service all covenants of lesser generality, both religious and secular, receive their justification.

We are slowly, perhaps too slowly, coming to understand that the human community belongs to a larger web that includes all forms of terrestrial life. In certain respects we transcend the world of nature, although these differences may be distinctions of degree and not of kind. Nevertheless, our transcendence establishes neither our independence of nature nor our imperial status in the scheme of things. Our freedom as individuals emerges from our relationships. We are related in order to be free—that is, we are related in order to fulfill ourselves as individuals. It is also (and

more profoundly) the case that we are free in order to establish deeper and more far-reaching relationships. We achieve our greatest fulfillment not in, by, and for ourselves, but in terms of those finer relationships we help to create and by which we are sustained. When we use our freedom to deny our interdependence with others, including the world of nature, we also assume the prerogative to try to control nature and use it for our own autonomous purposes. When we act as though man is the measure, then we not only befoul our own nest; we shred the web and impoverish all life. The web is not only the context of our lives; it is the measure of all life.

Our identities as individual persons may derive in part from our transcendence of nature and of other people. But, the basic organismic orientation upon which our personal identity is dependent is a function of the complex interplay of the motions of the celestial bodies that make up our solar system. Unless our bodies are attuned to the motions of these spheres, we would have no directional center. We would not know where or who we are. We are not only distant relatives of the nonhuman members of the spaceship earth; we are quite literally creations of the transcendent firmament. The evolution of our planetary life is not only a fantastic tale of the incredible and cunning creativity of life's powers exhibited over vast stretches of time; it is equally an awesome and humbling story of the "enormous interlinked complexity of life" as Loren Eiseley made the point by citing the poet Francis Thompson: "One could not pluck a flower without troubling a star."

These human and planetary webs of interconnectedness are functions of creative and dynamic relationships. If the foundational elements and conditions of our world were not given as interlaced and interdependent, there would be no way to create this basic interdependence. When, in our openness and by our efforts, we establish webs of relationships, we are not uniting fundamental factors that previously were radically disjointed. We are rather exemplifying and extending the interrelatedness that is a given condition of our lives and of all life.

This interconnectedness is not simply one fact among many other equally significant facts. It is a preeminent fact. It is a condition that is presupposed in every experience of personal wholeness and socialized existence. When interconnectedness is conjoined with the process of becoming, we have arrived at the elemental matrix of life and existence in any form. This matrix is the elemental shape of social life and the creative context within which individual life is actualized.

We are led ineluctably to extend the range of application of the concept of the web. The widest generalization of the notion of interdependence results in the proposition that the world, in the most inclusive sense, is an indefinitely extended field of interconnected events. The term *indefinitely* indicates that the limits of this extended web cannot be established. One can say that the concept of this extended web is a generalization of field theory, or the utmost expansion of our sense of community. Or, I suggest that it can be interpreted as an imaginative extension of the sentence: "Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these, you have done it unto me."

The Unity of the Web

The idea of the world as in some sense one world, one unified whole, does involve an imaginative leap of some magnitude. It is a far-flung generalization and admittedly this idea is a vague notion. The attempt to give it definite empirical content

would take us beyond the limits of scientific evidence. Yet the basis upon which the generalization is grounded does have some support in scientific theory. Some empirical evidence may also be derived from more concrete forms of experience than those employed in strictly scientific enterprises. The vision of the unity of human life, and of all life, is an ancient concept growing out of prolonged inquiry. This theme has rootage in poetic insight, parapsychological phenomena, and in deep intuitions emanating from several religious traditions, including those of the American Indians.

The introduction of the notion of religious intuitions into the empirical tradition of process-relational modes of thought raises a host of problems. Most of these center on the question of evidence and the limits of evidence. Evidence is a function of perception (and accessible data), and perception is a matter of sensitive discernment. Discernment is a variable, reflecting the inequality of sensitivity among observers. In order to obtain a discerning and penetrating "seeing," physical perception must be informed and prepared by appropriate and suggestive theory that guides our seeing, prefigures possible connections, and enlarges our receptivity concerning what may be presented to us. (It should be noted that it is also the case that physical experience guides, corrects, and enlarges our conceptual receptivity.) Because of this interplay between the physical and conceptual dimensions of our experience, perception is not a bare and wholly innocent seeing. It is an interpreted seeing, an understanding. This understanding has its meaning and truth-status only within a more inclusive background of interconnected meaning, even if this larger framework is only presupposed.

The final aim, as Whitehead suggests, may be the achievement of self-evidence. But with respect to the issues that concern us most profoundly, decisive and persuasive evidence (not to mention self-evidence) is not easily or quickly obtainable.

The testimony of fundamental religious intuitions derives from a sensitivity to qualities and relationships of more than usual depth and range. These intuitions seem to be constituted by a very close integration of physical and conceptual feelings exemplifying wide generality of import. The generality of interconnectedness is experienced physically and conceptually.

It would seem to be the case that religious intuitions, however profound and penetrating, do not take us beyond the fundamental conditions of our known world. Within this cosmological limitation, the descriptive range and power of these intuitions, and the status of descriptive generalizations based upon them, are at least unclear.

These methodological questions (which are merely outlined here) arise because of the thesis of this essay, which identifies God and the world. This thesis grows out of a devotion to the concrete nature of God, which, in turn, is grounded in a conviction concerning the inadequacy of an abstract God. These methodological problems may prove to be insurmountable, and this version of an empirical stance within this (or any other) mode of thought may be felt by many to be inadequate, theologically and religiously. However, the alternative approaches within the process-relational outlook also have their problematic aspects. These alternatives can be briefly noted.

First, at least some of the methodological problems associated with an empirical approach to the notion of the unity of the world (and to the concreteness of God) can be transcended by an *a priori* method. Charles Hartshorne, for example, contends that a contingent God arrived at by an empirical method is not worthy of our worship;

only a God who exists necessarily merits devotion. By means of a reconstructed ontological argument that is premised on a conception of perfection which is illustrated in Whitehead's concrete/abstract God, Hartshorne concludes that this God exists in the mode of necessity. Since this God is concrete, with an unchanging abstract character, it follows that some concrete state of God (or some concrete world) must exist or be actualized. This actualized state is the actual world in which we live. It is God's body, and as such it is a concrete unity. It is contingent in its mode of existence since it could have been otherwise. God is therefore actual as an incredibly complex and living subject (or personal society) with an unambiguous character.

Hartshorne concedes that the ontological argument is valid only on the basis of a conception of God akin to Whitehead's. On any other premise the argument is invalid; that is, it results in self-contradiction. Furthermore, the world makes sense only in terms of the kind of God who exemplifies the qualities and performs the functions entailed in the notion of perfection that is the premise of the argument (such as the perfect preservation of all actualized values). Apart from this kind of God life is meaningless. So both ontological necessity and the meaningfulness of life are grounded on an idea, a meaning. This idea has empirical rootage, but its *a priori* character and validity derive from the claims of abstract logic.

The premodern philosophers of substance (or being) who devised the ontological argument apparently believed that their value premises established the validity of the argument. Philosophers of process (and others) believe they have shown that the argument, based on the premises of substance thought, is invalid. Hartshorne believes that the inadequacies of substance premises have been overcome by the premise of process-relational modes of thought and that the validity of the argument has been thereby assured.

But are these premises beyond criticism? Even if we assume that there is some philosophical and theological advance in the history of these inquiries in the West, this advance has occurred within the evolution of Western thought and experience. Are we to assume that this evolution has reached its zenith? The logic of ontological necessity appears to be, at least in some respects, a device to assert the unsurpassability of our historically achieved value insights.

In terms of Western experience, in what sense is the encounter of ancient Israel with the figure of Jesus paradigmatic? The Jews had their understanding of God's covenant with them. They awaited the coming of a messiah who would confirm and actualize their deepest meanings and expectations. For them, any alternative conception was a spiritual self-contradiction and a denial of life's meaningfulness. For them, the coming of a messiah shaped in the image of their expectations and value judgments was their "ontological necessity." But, from a Christian perspective, the messiah who came was not the messiah who was expected.

On what self-evident grounds are we philosophically and theologically invulnerable to an encounter with an unexpected messiah? In terms of what irrefutable considerations are we privileged to believe that the self-transcending restiveness inherent within revelatory events and figures has been once and for all overcome by one particular revelation, or by the emergence of a philosophic perspective such as process philosophy?

Beyond this caveat concerning the historical relativity of the value premises upon which the ontological argument is grounded, there is another consideration. The stipulated perfection and unambiguousness of God's unchanging character is, in fact, a conception of God's character. But God's actual character does not correspond to this conception. The next section of this essay will contend that there are no unambiguous, concrete actualities in the world of our experience. God as concretely actual is involved in ambiguity. In Hartshorne's system God's character can be analytically abstracted from His actuality; but the character of God that is abstracted is not unambiguous. An unambiguous structure or character can be derived only by a complex abstractive process, the end result of which has no counterpart in reality. In short, the conception of the character of God that constitutes the premise of the ontological argument, which ostensibly establishes the necessary existence of God, is not the character of the God who is concretely actual.

The philosophy of a priori necessity is or tends to be a philosophy of abstractions. The religious stance of a theology of God's necessary existence harbors the impulse to become the worship of an idea of God. It acknowledges the reality of mystery, but it subsumes its sense of mystery under the structures of its metaphysics. The empirical philosophy of attachment attempts to think and live in terms of holding its ascertained structures of experience subject to the dynamic presence of mystery.

There is a second alternative that defines the unity of the world abstractly in terms of a universal order. God is then identified as the abstract source or principle of this order. This option is illustrated in Whitehead's conception of the primordial or abstract nature of God—a conception that is adopted by many of Whitehead's disciples. As we saw previously, in Whitehead's system order is a gradation of relevance among diverse possibilities in relation to any concrete occasion of experience. This gradation is required if the process of actualization is to result in the creation of definite or limited actuality. These possibilities include novel forms. These possibilities and their relevance change in accordance with different personal, social, and historical contexts, but the pattern of graded relevance remains fixed. As the principle of order, God is the principle of concretion.

Within this interpretation some Whiteheadians associate God primarily with the future. In this respect God functions as the abstract ground for hope.

A principle of order may have a wider and deeper status in the scheme of things than an ideal.¹⁶ God conceived as a principle of order does all that an abstraction can do. But the net effect of this alternative is to reduce God to a final cause whose aim is not basically distinguishable from the best of historically relative, human ideals. Human ideals also function as lures to their actualization in due season. They may also embody the principle of self-transcendence with respect to creative novelty. They can be an adequate basis for "the adventure of ideas." Beyond this, the commitment to a transcending principle of order, even with its persuasive appeal for an openness to forms of creative novelty conceptually envisaged as relevant ideal aims, can be as idolatrous and destructive as the commitment to projected humanistic ideals. The in-

adequacies of a religious life oriented to abstractions—be they ideas, forms, ideals, possibilities, or an order—are not overcome by calling these abstractions divine.

An emphasis on the ultimacy of process has or could have a significant religious consequence. It should enable us to be more alert to the distinction between the actuality of God and our ideas about God. The actuality of God is dynamic process. Our ideas are forms of symbols. Ideas are indispensable to our living as humans, but they are not the proper objects of an adequate religious commitment. We do not need to be philosophic instrumentalists with respect to the status of ideas or symbols in order to maintain that they exist for the sake of the enhancement of actuality and our relation to it. Symbols may guide our commitment, but even this guidance is subservient to the working of the process of actuality.

There is the fact of process and there is process as a concept. There is a process of creative transformation and there is transformation as an idea to be realized. The two are by no means the same. Our commitment to this *process* of transformation is not to be equated with a commitment to transformation as such, or to transformation as an idea if this gets translated into being an openness to some relevant conceptual novelty. Conceptual openness has its high importance, but as a form of commitment it is a devotion to abstractions. As a type of religious commitment it exemplifies the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness."

It is, of course, the case that within the Whiteheadian system God is also concrete. This means that God is actual as an incredibly complex process wherein the activities of the actual world are internalized and synthesized into the unity of an experiential subject of experience. As a consequence of this process the actual world becomes an organismic unity within the concrete actuality of God (panentheism).

There would seem to be two alternative routes by which to attempt to establish the concrete actuality of Whitehead's God. (Whitehead himself is less than precise about the method he employs.) One route is rationalistic, and the other is empirical. The rationalistic alternative would involve some such method as Hartshorne's ontological argument, a point of view we have discussed above.

Empirically, there is the primacy of the principle that the concreteness of actuality is neither derivable from, nor explainable by, the abstract. This means that the presumed fact of the abstract unity of the world does not in itself entail the concrete unity of the world. Stated alternatively, it means that the abstract reality of God (viewed as a principle of order) does not in itself establish His concrete reality. We can "move" from the abstract reality of God as order to the actuality of God as the concrete unity of the world only if we understand order to be an abstraction from the presupposed interconnectedness of events.

The evidence that is relevant to Whitehead's conception of God would seem to be derived from the interconnectedness of events and the qualities experienced in profound religious intuitions. It is quite problematic whether this evidence is sufficient to establish the concrete actuality of God as an experiencing subject.

On the assumption that Whitehead's method is that of speculative empiricism rather than that of the rational a priori, it may be the case that with regard to their adoption of the concrete nature of God many Whiteheadians are, at least implicitly, Hartshornians.

¹⁶The reader is referred to the previous discussion of order, 32-33.

Third, there is another empirical theological alternative to the one I am proposing. Although its focus is on the conception of God as a concrete and creative actuality, it is not concerned with the problem of the concrete unity of the world. Since the actual world manifests a diversity of forces, many of which are either noncreative or destructive in nature, God is identified with one aspect of the world or one kind of process. This is the process of creative transformation. This creative process exhibits an unchanging character whereby this kind of process is distinguishable from all other processes. This character is understood to be unambiguous.

In the following section it will be suggested that a God that is identified with an aspect of the world (e.g., Wieman's fourfold creative process) is an abstract and not a concrete God.¹⁷

To return to the question of the nature of the unity of the indefinitely extended web of interconnected events, three conceptions seem to be most relevant to our inquiry. First, there is the unity of an occasion of experience. This organic unity is that of an experiencing subject in the immediacy of its becoming. The unity, like the occasion itself, is momentary in its duration.

Second, there is the unity of an event. This can be defined both concretely and abstractly. Concretely, the unity of an event constitutes a historic route of successive occasions, but the route itself is not an occasion. The abstract unity can be understood as a recurring structure that characterizes the enduring object in its persistence throughout the duration of the inclusive event.

Third, there is the unity of a nexus and a society. The concrete unity of both consists in the genetic interrelatedness of the members of the enduring group. The difference between them is that the unity of a society may also be defined abstractly in terms of a shared manner of feeling and action, a common character or ethos.

The nature of the unity of the web would seem to lie between two extremes. On the one extreme the world as a whole does not appear empirically to have the unity of an experiencing subject, conceived as an unimaginably complex process of subjective synthesis. Certain religious intuitions may modify the stark simplicity of this conclusion, although intuitions of the unity of the actual world may not provide evi-

¹⁷Another and quite different suggestion could be mentioned. There is the conception of a plenum, or a fullness, which has the unity of a continuum. This is an ancient theory going back at least as far as Plato's receptacle. Whitehead has revitalized this notion in terms of his concept of the extensive continuum. It is clear that for Whitehead extensive connectedness, as a factor in the construction of the world, is not first introduced by the process of actualization. It is also found at the level of possibility in his system. But extensiveness, or extensive connection, as a continuum is a characteristic of potentiality and not of actuality. Actuality, as Whitehead insists, is incurably atomic. Thus the extensive connectedness of actuality cannot take the form of a continuum. The connectedness within actuality can be exemplified within a web of relationships involving particular actualities that are in some sense discontinuous, even though they are related through their causal connection. The web of relationships constitutes the extensive field. In Whitehead's system this extensive field of concrete actualities exists within the larger and more inclusive extensive continuum of abstract potentiality. Furthermore, this extensive field is not a web of material objects. It is a field of interconnected events. Concrete interconnectedness, like relativity, is found only between events and not between material objects. The point was made previously that material objects—such as chairs, trees, and people—exist as recurring or persistent structures only within the relativistic contexts of interconnected events or enduring societies of events.

dence of this particular kind of subjective unity. (If the world does not have the unity of an occasion, then it cannot have the unity of an event.)

On the other extreme, the world seems to be something more than an aggregated totality. To be sure, in certain respects the unity of the world may appear to be rather loose and indeterminate. But, the general order of things would seem to attest to a unity that has more structure and cohesiveness than are involved in a vast conglomerate whose components basically exemplify external relationships.

The tentative conclusion of this oversimplified analysis is that this universal web of interconnected events has the kind of unity the term "web" suggests, namely, that of a generalized enduring society. The fundamental characteristics of this society (which make it a society rather than a nexus or a totality of nexus) are definable only in terms of the utmost universality because it "includes" all other societies of lesser generality as well as all occasions and events. These characteristics would probably consist of certain elemental properties of extensive connection.

It should be emphasized that this societal web is not a "society with a personal order" or a "person" in the Whiteheadian sense. It is much more akin to Whitehead's description of the world of nature as an "organic extensive community . . . that is always passing beyond itself."¹⁸

In terms of this analysis, God as a wholeness is to be identified with the concrete, interconnected totality of this struggling, imperfect, unfinished, and evolving societal web. As this universal society God includes all modes of temporality; God also operates through all the Aristotelian causes. God's action is not wholly or even primarily identified with the persuasive and permissive lure of a final cause or a relevant and novel ideal, as is the case in Whiteheadian thought. An exclusive or even a primary emphasis on final causation is abstractionism. God is also physical, efficient cause that may be either creative or inertial in its effects.

Stated otherwise, God is not only, or perhaps even primarily, the divine eros, understood as a conceptual appetite toward the good. This, again, is an abstract mode of operation that has its important role; but more concretely, God is expressed as the organic restlessness of the whole body of creation, as this drive is unequally exemplified in the several parts of this societal web. This discontent, which is an expression of the essential "spirit" of any creature, may exemplify itself as an expansive urge toward greater good. It may also become a passion for greater evil that, however disguised or rationalized as a greater good, also has its attractiveness.

Furthermore, God is not only the ultimate end for which all things exist; God is also the shape and stuff of existence.

These points of emphasis are to be understood in the context of the self-creativity and relative independence of individual creatures who yet have their being only in community.

All of this having been said, the question naturally arises: Why deify this interconnected web of existence by calling it "God"? Why not simply refer to the world and to the processes of life? Since, in terms of this perspective, the being of God is not other than the being of the world; since to speak of God is to refer to the world

¹⁸Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 289.

in some sense; and more decisively, since God is not an enduring concrete individual with a sustained subjective life, what is gained by this perhaps confusing, semantic identification?

The justification for the identification is both ontological and pragmatic in the deepest Jamesian sense. In our traditions the term "God" is the symbol of ultimate values and meanings in all of their dimensions. It connotes an absolute claim on our loyalty. It bespeaks a primacy of trust, and a priority within the ordering of our commitments. It points the direction of a greatness of fulfillment. It signifies a richness of resources for the living of life at its depths. It suggests the enshrinement of our common and ecological life. It proclaims an adequate object of worship. It symbolizes a transcendent and inexhaustible meaning that forever eludes our grasp.

The world is God because it is the source and preserver of meaning; because the creative advance of the world in its adventure is the supreme cause to be served; because even in our desecration of our space and time within it, the world is holy ground; and because it contains and yet enshrouds the ultimate mystery inherent within existence itself. "God" symbolizes this incredible mystery. The existent world embodies it. The world in all the dimensions of its being is the basis for all our wonder, awe, and inquiry.

Yet the question persists. The world, conceived as this universal web, includes all the evil, wastes, destructiveness, regressions, ugliness, horror, disorder, complacency, dullness, and meaninglessness, as well as their opposites. Why then choose the relational life of the cross, or the discipline of the artist, or any other form of life that requires sensitivity, suffering, fidelity, trust, openness, and creative labor? Since all is in God, why not opt for a life engrossed in the several levels and dimensions of self-gratification, or the subtler and more demonic forms of destructiveness—in short, a life dedicated to the actualization of nothingness? Since the interdependence of life is as well illustrated in mutual destruction as in the relational life of the cross, why choose the cross? Why not choose hell?

The answer lies in comparing the level of stature that is available under each choice. It is a matter of evidence. With respect to the deepest questions, the search for evidence becomes the quest for self-evidence. The ultimate manifestation of self-evidence occurs at the level of embodied valuations. And stature, wherever found, is the most impregnable and incontrovertible form of self-evidence. Beyond it there is no court of appeal. On this hangs all the law and the prophets—and all the revelations.

In this web of interrelatedness there are aims and purposes almost beyond measure. Some are compatible, some are cooperative, and others are mutually enhancing. Others are contraries, and still others are mutually contradictory and destructive. In and through, because of, and in spite of this diversity and these contradictions and this disorder, there persists a restlessness or a tropism not only to live, but to live well and to live better (Whitehead).¹⁹ This passion carries its own appeal, its own authority and warrant, and its own limited strength to fulfill itself in due season.

But this passion for greater life and stature does not exist apart from all other passions that aim at or result in the actualization of smaller stature. It participates in them and they in it. Thus we are led to our third topic.

The Ambiguity Within God

Years ago Reinhold Niebuhr contended that Christian faith could not be expressed adequately in terms of a naturalistic philosophy because every natural and historical process is ambiguous in character. Niebuhr's implicit premise is that Christian faith is rooted in the idea of perfection. The thesis of this section accepts Niebuhr's observation concerning the ineradicable presence of ambiguity, but denies the actuality of (and the need for) the unambiguous. On the contrary, the thesis asserts that the unambiguous has at best the status of an abstraction, and that consequently an ambiguous God is of greater stature than an unambiguous deity.

The point involved may be misunderstood. The aim in the first instance is not to seek and cherish ambiguity for its own sake. The aim is qualitative richness. The quest in the first instance is not for an ambiguous God. The quest is for a living, dynamic, and active God—in short, a concrete God. An ambiguous God is not of greater stature simply because He is ambiguous. His greater size derives from the concreteness of His actuality in contrast to the reality of a nonliving, undynamic, and inactive abstraction. The concretely actual is ambiguous; only the highly abstract can be unambiguous. Thus, the conclusion, and the thesis, that an ambiguous God is of greater stature than an unambiguous deity.

In its conception of God, Christian theology has been obsessed with God as embodied perfection. From its beginning down to the present, theology has taken it as axiomatic that God is unambiguous in character. (In this tradition only the unambiguous can be perfect. Or, conversely, only the perfect is unambiguous.) God's goodness has been conceived as pure and unmixed, the personification of unambiguous love.

The Christologies of the church, by and large, reflect this same passion for perfection. Jesus Christ, as the unexcelled representative and the unsurpassable historical embodiment of God's perfect love for the world, has also been conceived as unambiguous in His being, sinless and completely at one with the divine purity. The unambiguity of God could be symbolized adequately only by another unambiguous figure.²⁰

There seems to be some internal relationship between the traditional view of the unambiguous character of God and the notion that the being of God is independent of the being of the world. The precise nature of this relationship is not decisive for our purposes, but surely without the latter notion the former is difficult, if not impossible, to maintain. In any case, the ontological transcendence of the God of tradition means that God is not of the world. Yet this God acts in the world. He makes Himself known through his activity, or at least through the results of His activity,

¹⁹Alfred North Whitehead, *The Function of Reason* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959) 8.

²⁰It is interesting to note that the crucifixion of Jesus was the basic (or perhaps the only) example of unambiguous love that Niebuhr found in the world.

such as the creation and sustained existence of the world, and the redemption of lost souls. As the unity of perfect wisdom and sovereign power, God is responsible for having established the basic structure of the world, the fundamental conditions of natural and historical existence. The traditional doctrine of the goodness of creation (which is often employed in discussions concerning the nature of sin and evil) seems to imply that the basic structure of the world is unambiguously good. If this is the case, then not only the evil but also the ambiguity in the world derive from the misuse of these conditions by the creatures, especially the human species. On the other hand, if ambiguity were shown to be an inherent characteristic of the created world, then the God of tradition could be defined as ambiguous, at least as judged by the foundational conditions resulting from His creative activity.

Theologians as well as other Western thinkers have noticed, of course, that the world of our experience is at odds with itself. With differing degrees of decisiveness they have recognized that our world, especially at the human level, is filled with evil and ambiguous elements that thwart and bedevil the noblest purposes of God and man. Now whether these factors are inherent within the structure of the world, or are due to creaturely sin and evil or to the presence of demonic powers, they have been interpreted in the tradition as being finally phenomenal in nature. That is, they are not characteristics of ultimate reality. For these thinkers the very meaning of *meaning* is wholly dependent on the eventual or ultimate overcoming of these problematic conditions. Unless this general resolution occurs (in one way or another) life has no basic or intrinsic meaning.

Consequently these thinkers have concluded that the final answer to the ambiguity and evil in the world lies either in an unambiguous and perfected God, or in a transcendental realm that is the domain of a perfected and indivisible whole. The answer is variously phrased, but the responses are analogous. They are in fact variations on a theme. In one mode of thought after another it has been maintained that ultimately the partial and fragmentary meanings we achieve will be completed; phenomenal appearances in all dimensions of life will give way to God-perceived reality; the obscure will be clarified; the ambiguous will be purified; the contradictions of life will be resolved; and sin and evil will be vanquished by a triumphant goodness.

This general principle can be briefly illustrated. For Reinhold Niebuhr the unambiguous and sacrificial love of Jesus Christ (on the cross) must be vindicated if life is to be affirmed as meaningful. It must "pay off" in terms of historical consequences. However, the actual course of human history is a refutation of the power of sacrificial love. The sacrifice has not paid off and the vindication has not occurred. Thus, viewed in terms of history, the world in itself has no intrinsic meaning. Therefore in Niebuhr's thought there must be a "point beyond history" where this justification takes place.

For Kant the fulfillment of the moral imperative should be conjoined with the realization of human happiness if life is to make sense. In actual life this union, the *summum bonum*, does not occur. Therefore there must be an immortality wherein this unambiguous and complete union is realized. (Immortality is also the condition wherein the limitations of phenomenal understanding are transcended.)

The dominant tradition of Western thought has proceeded on the value premise that the resolution of the ambiguous, in terms of the perfect and unambiguous, is a

development from the less to the more. The thesis of this section asserts that the converse is the case, that this movement is a transition from the more to the less. In terms of the language and outlook of this essay, it is a movement from the concrete to the abstract. From this perspective, the traditional resolution of the ambiguity of life is an abstract justification of a theoretical vindication. This is to say that it is not a resolution. The tragic richness of the concretely actual can never be redeemed by the poverty of abstractions, however purified they may be.

In process-relational modes of thought the being of God is not independent of the being of the world. Thus whatever unambiguity may be ascribed to God in this way of looking at things, this quality cannot derive from God's ontological transcendence. Yet some representatives of this philosophy seek an unambiguous God. They are concerned with transcending the ambiguity of the world. They, too, believe that the answer to ambiguity is to be found within the unambiguous. They attempt to do this by one or another type of abstraction. An evaluation of these efforts can be facilitated by a discussion of the nature of ambiguity.

Ambiguities derive from the basic characteristics of individuals and societies. They emerge out of the dynamic and relational features of experience.

Ambiguities arise in the first place because of the composite nature of individuals as occasions of experience. (The composite character of occasions is due to the immanence of several causal influences in the becoming of an individual.) The several components within an individual are interrelated. In becoming something definite an individual makes a decision, or emerges as a decision. The decision is single, but it need not be single-minded. The unity of individuality often includes the presence of tension or incompatibility between the internalized causal influences. Each influence makes its claim and has its own appeal. In his composite unity an individual may be pulled in several directions. His motives may be mixed, causing him to be at odds with himself. His "decision" may embrace various indecisions and irresolutions. Possibilities may be ordered in their relevance for an individual (as Whitehead believes), but this hierarchical presentation may not be matched by a corresponding order of priorities within the subjective life of that individual.

In the second place, this point may be extended in terms of the interconnected character of enduring individuals. As we have seen previously, individuals participate in each other. This mutual participation defines the way that enviroing society lives within the individual. This entails the consequence that an individual cannot fully determine the quality of his life by himself, by a resolution of his will, however enlightened and decently motivated he may be. The confusions, prejudices, contradictions, and brokenness of his society are present as shaping forces within him. He may mitigate their power, but he cannot be completely free from their influence until they are eliminated from his world. From this point of view, the notion of a sinless and unambiguous savior existing within a sinful society is an impossibility.

Third, the dynamics of life are such that ambiguity seems to be almost a built-in quality of the elemental processes of creation. The relationships and institutions that bring us into being and shape us are the same forces that tend to restrict us to conformal patterns of thought and behavior and thereby to minimize our freedom. Society is one of the sources of our freedom. The health of a society requires the relative

autonomy of its members. Yet there is something in the very nature of a society that is antithetical to the exercise of freedom by its citizens.

The strength that is poured into the formation of our virtues is the same strength that overplays itself and tempts us to think and act as though our virtues were more inclusive and adequate than they are: In this fashion our virtues become vices and our strengths, weaknesses. This consequence is a function of the expansive and self-centered character of spirit. The individual does not come equipped with a self-regulator by which his appropriate limitations are determined and maintained.

The passion that compels us to search for truth is the same drive that leads to our neuroses and defensiveness when the truth (especially about ourselves) is more than we feel we can or want to bear. The repressions that function as "normal self-protection and creative self-restriction" (Becker)²¹ can easily lead to destructive neuroses and result in a refusal to enter a wider life.

The energy that is shaped by the disciplines of our intellectual and vocational specializations whereby we acquire greater knowledge and competence is the same energy that develops inertial qualities that blunt our sensitivities to other dimensions and perspectives of experience. The structures that are essential to the realization of specific and definite actualities also tend to staticize the very forms of life they made possible.

Fourth, the dialectic of life breeds its own ambiguities. The spirit moves toward creative freedom, but it becomes institutionalized because spirit must assume specific forms. Institutions are the means whereby the spirit becomes socialized. However, in this very process institutions tend to domesticate and stultify the spirit.

The individual is dependent upon his relationships for his very being; he is an emergent from them. Yet the very achievement of his individuality tempts him to deny his essential dependence and to make himself the center of his own existence.

The moment of success in any advance seems to create two contrasting impulses. On the one hand there is a restlessness to continue the advance to a more complex stage, even though this effort requires a finer and more demanding discipline. On the other hand there is an impulse to rest and to be content with the good that has been achieved. This leads to fixation and defensiveness. The strength and devotion that caused us to labor and sacrifice to achieve a goal is the same energy that leads us to cling to the plateau of our achievement. The energy of success may become entropic in that it moves in the direction of creating a closed system. In this manner success may become the enemy of further creative advance, and the good becomes the foe of the better. The adage is confirmed that "to travel hopefully is better than to arrive."

Reinhold Niebuhr's reiterated insight, that every advance in goodness brings with it the possibility of greater evil, entails the caveat that there is no progressive conquest of evil. On the contrary, the forms of destruction or diminution take on a character and a strength that are proportional to the character and strength of the advance. In this fashion every creative advance may give rise to its contrary or to some condition that either negates or qualifies the advance.

Within the movement of this dialectic not only do various gains entail some loss, but in many instances the higher levels of achievement become increasingly fragile in their constitution. They become more vulnerable to destructive and disintegrating forces. Greater vigilance, finer sensitivity, and more energy are required for their survival. In democratic societies, an insistent openness to contrasting points of view, a sensitive regard for the rights of all, a knowing commitment to the common good in the face of countless pressure groups, and a firm resolve to maintain a judicious and viable structure of checks and balances—these great, fragile, and hard-won values are easily forgotten, ignored, or trampled on by the callous and the unknowing. In the arena of sports, it is much more difficult to remain a champion than to become one.

It is true that some good may emerge from the ashes of destructive evil, although too often it requires a catastrophic event to bestir us sufficiently to take any constructive action. It is of course also true that qualities of goodness may be transformed into demonic attributes; but it is easier to transform goodness into evil than to transmute evil into goodness. It is easier to arrest the advance of goodness than to block the inertia of evil. To repeat an earlier characterization concerning the energy of success, evil, in contrast to creative goodness, moves in the direction of creating a closed system. Evil thereby tends to become entropic.

Fifth, the ambivalence of life, at least at the human level, is found at the core of the human spirit. On the other hand we are fearful of failure, anxious to realize our potentialities. We want the most of what life has to offer. We say that we yearn for the fullness of experience. But on the other hand we are also fearful of success. We draw back not only from the cost of success, the courage and discipline required to achieve our highest potential. We retreat also from the obligations, the challenges, and the risks that follow high achievement. The fullness of life is too much. We are afraid to die, and we are afraid to live deeply and with great openness. We would avoid the seeming nothingness of death, and yet the fullness of life seems to be too big and unmanageable. Its price is too great. We desire to be our own unique selves, and yet we want the comfort and safety of anonymity.

It may be the case, as Becker claims, that we cannot face the full truth of life in an open and unprotected manner and live. It may be that the truth is such that life in its rawness is unmanageable, and that we must live in terms of various defense mechanisms (or what Becker calls "lies") whereby life is reduced to manageable proportions. If this is so, then our psychic and spiritual ambiguities may function as forms of protection that make life possible for many or most of us.

Lastly, the pervasiveness of ambiguity may be seen in contemplating the goodness and evil of a person. We cannot divide the seamless cloth of actuality, especially the concrete actuality of the self. There are no separable or autonomous divisions within the self. There is no part of the self that is the fountainhead of goodness and another part that is the ground of evil. Virtues and vices, while distinguishable in their natures, are inseparable with respect to their source. The good and evil of a person derive from the same origin. They are in fact two sides of one coin. This common source is the basic spirit of the individual. The spirit, which is the unity of the self in its self-creative freedom, includes all the forms of ambiguity we have discussed above.

²¹Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: The Free Press, 1973) 178.

The specific qualities and dimensions of an individual's goodness reflect the qualities and dimensions of his spirit. These features embrace all the interdependent facets of his personality and character, including his capacity for evil. The qualities of goodness are inseparable from these diverse elements. This ambiguous and composite goodness, which arises out of the ambiguity and the dimensions of his spirit, is the only concrete goodness he possesses. He has no other goodness.

This seamless actuality of the self houses the composite unity of the spirit of an individual. Within this unity of the spirit the inseparability of the capacities for good and evil is rooted. This means that the evil of a person cannot be exorcised without decimating his capacity for achieving goodness. The evil proclivities of a person can be transmuted only by transforming his essential spirit. This entails the proposition that the tradition's conception of love, which has the quality of "in spite of," must be transcended. A love that is truly adequate has no qualifications of acceptance, rare as this kind of love is. If, as some psychologists insist, there is no light and good "side" of the self without the presence of a dark shadow, then the whole person must be accepted if the creative advance of life is to be enhanced.

With this discussion of ambiguity as background, we now return to the topic of the propensity of process-relational thinkers to search for the unambiguous. This will be carried out in terms of an evaluation of the work of Whitehead and Wieman.

Henry Nelson Wieman's underlying concern was to discover within experience some reality to which all people should be religiously committed. This reality should be concretely actual, causally efficacious, creative, and religiously absolute. In a confused and highly ambiguous world Wieman searched for an unambiguous process that is worthy of our worship and, when given the primacy of devotion, can lead to our salvation. Wieman's inquiry found its answer in the creative event or the process of creative transformation (which is alternatively called "creative interchange"). This process merits the appellation "God."

In the long odyssey involved in coming to this conclusion Wieman made two fundamental decisions. In his understanding of the Christian tradition, God is interpreted as being the unity of power and goodness, where power is defined as omnipotence and goodness is understood as consummate love. Wieman agreed with those critics of the tradition who believe this union entails the judgment that God is responsible for evil as well as being the source of good. This ambiguous God is not worthy of our worship. In order to discover a God who is free of this ambiguity, Wieman believed that one must choose between a God of goodness and a God of power. Wieman chose a God of goodness. The issue of whether this God can prevail against the powerful and demonic forces of evil is, of course, an important but not a decisive consideration.

His second decision is closely related to the first. Since there is a great diversity of kinds of processes or forces in the world, God is to be identified with that process that is truly creative of all human good (and possibly the source of the good at all levels of existence, although Wieman did not complete this metaphysical aspect of his theology). In Wieman's thought events are distinguishable basically in terms of their constituent structures. Thus the creative event has its own distinctive structure differentiating it from all other events.

In summary, Wieman's God is a God who acts in a causally efficacious manner. (Wieman's religious heritage was Calvinistic.) However, since all events are causally efficacious in one way or another, God's efficacy is distinguishable in being creatively transformative. Thus God is identified with an aspect of the world. He is one kind of process among many kinds, limited in effectiveness, but unambiguous in character and religiously trustworthy.

My contention is that Wieman's God, as defined and described, is not concretely actual. Both as a concrete process and as a process with a distinguishable and unambiguous structure, Wieman's God does not concretely exist. It is rather a high abstraction from the world of events. Wieman has described something that actually occurs, namely, the fact of transformation. He has also identified some of the phases and dimensions of this transformation. But the actuality of the process of transformation does not conform to Wieman's description of it.

The first phase of abstraction occurs with Wieman's decisions to opt for a God of goodness in contrast to a God of power and to identify this goodness with one kind of process. These decisions are translatable into a choice between kinds of causal efficacy. Wieman's God apparently does not create the world. At least He does not sustain the world as created. He is engaged solely in transforming the world as it is into something better. His activity is a particular form of creativity. These other non-transformative and inertial processes are responsible for the general creation and sustained existence of the world of concrete events.

If this is the case, then the processes of creative transformation are highly dependent upon these other forces. Without the latter, the former could not exist, although the reverse is not true. Furthermore, given the interconnectedness of events, transformative and nontransformative processes interpenetrate and participate in each other. They constitute and shape each other. The unambiguous character of Wieman's creative event is derived by abstractive separation from the convoluted web of events that in its totality may exemplify a spectrum of kinds and levels of ambiguous dynamics and structures.

Yet even this account does not get to the heart of the matter. The deeper fact is that the several phases of the experience of transformation do not in themselves constitute a concrete process or a set of processes with a distinguishable structure. The elements of a transformative experience emerge as factors within the almost infinite number of all kinds of interconnected events, of all sizes and degrees of complexity, that constitute the complex and concrete life of an enduring individual existing over an extended span of time. The variety and levels of processes, experiences, and relationships involved make demarcation literally impossible. We may isolate certain moments and results of this total phenomenon of transformation, and in our mind's eye we may connect these moments as though they constitute an actual concrete process. But this is abstraction indeed. Concretely, there is no actual and specifiable process of creative transformation. There is no creative event as such. There is, rather, a total, complex, individual life that, among other things, occasionally exemplifies transformative growth. With the recognition of degrees of relevance, it can be said that a whole complex chunk of the web of life is the source of creative transformation within the life of an individual. Wieman's God constitutes an instance of misplaced concreteness.

The criticisms of Wieman's position can also be applied to some forms of liberal theology that identified God with the "personality-producing forces of the universe" or with "a power that makes for righteousness." In all such cases the effort to live by abstracting God or the good from the concrete, living, and ambiguous realities of existence results in a loss of the sense of available resources for achieving the better.

From his study of the history of theology Whitehead concluded that the church "gave unto God the attributes which belonged exclusively to Caesar."²² Whitehead, like Wieman, wanted to disassociate God from evil. He wanted to absolve God from any responsibility for the destructive and inertial forces at work in the world. Whitehead opted for an unambiguous deity, a God who is single-minded, unsullied, and clean.

To work out the metaphysics of this decision, Whitehead first made an ontological separation between God and creativity. God is not the creator of the world. As the principle of order God is a necessary factor in the creation of the world because without a primordial order there would be no world. But the efficacious creation of the world of actuality is not part of God's action or responsibility.

Second, God's work in the world is basically that of being a persuasive lure toward the achievement of qualitatively richer and more intense forms of experience. As a principle of order God operates primarily with forms. His work is mainly conceptual in nature. He arranges the order of the relevance of possibilities with respect to any occasion of experience. His conceptual functioning is to be contrasted with the physically efficacious and coercive ways of the world. To experience God is to experience a universal mind and its conceptual valuations.

To be sure, like all actual entities God has a physical as well as a conceptual side. As physical (or "consequent") God acts to preserve the values that have been realized in the actual world. This is accomplished through the agency of his physical feelings. He evaluates what He receives from the world in terms of His conceptual vision. He saves what can be saved.

But even with respect to His physical or concrete actuality we don't experience God in terms of His physical feelings. If we were to do so we would experience God as causally efficacious or as coercive. God would then be involved in evil. So we experience Him through His conceptual feelings. We experience Him as final cause, as aim, as conceptual appetition, as persuasive beckoning.

Whitehead's God receives from the world. He saves or preserves what he receives; but except for His function as a principle of order or as a conceptual lure, Whitehead's God is not involved in the world. Basically we know Him as a conceptual reality, as an abstract vision, as an appetition toward conceptual novelty, as an aesthetic form of persuasiveness that is pitted against the coercive and inertial powers of the world. We know Him as a conceptual urge to live well and to live better. His character is unambiguous because His reality as experienced is that of a primordial abstraction that is unaffected by the concrete world. This is the inevitable price to be paid if one's quest is for the unambiguous.

The Creative Advance

In terms of the essential understanding of the world as expressed in this essay, the creative advance of the web of life is not to be understood as an adventure toward perfection. Given the nature of the world as we experience it, the adventure toward perfection is a movement toward the vacuity of abstraction. The passion for perfection is a protest against the unmanageable vitalities of concrete life. It is a yearning for the bloodless existence of clean-cut, orderly abstractions. It is, in short, a yearning for death.

The creative advance is to be seen as a movement toward greater stature in which the zest for novel ideas of larger generality plays its needed role. This advance involves the transformation of incompatibilities and contradictions into compatible contrasts within the unity of the web and within the lives of its members.

This movement toward greater stature does not involve either the gradual or the immediate elimination of ambiguity. On the contrary, the dialectic of relationships, the dynamics of the process of becoming, and the quality of insatiable zest within the freedom of spirit move in a different direction. Even with the realization of greater stature, it would still be the case that this larger achievement will be accompanied by the possibility of greater inertial resistance of further advances. The notion of ambiguity becomes a metaphysical principle.

This view of the possible future entertains the notion that order at all levels is an emergent, that there may be no fixed and primordial order or structure, and that this may be the case whether the most general structure is viewed as ambiguous or unambiguous. This view is entertained even when the structure is defined in terms of love. This entails the suggestion that all exemplifications (as well as all understandings) of love are relativized. (The fact that most process-relational thinkers, especially theologians, hold that God has an eternal, unchanging character suggests that—in this respect at least—process-relational thought is a variation of classical thought.)

Whitehead's speculative suggestion expresses something of the spirit of this segment of the essay: "The most general formulation of the religious problem is the question whether the process of the temporal world passes into the formation of other actualities, bound together in an order in which novelty does not mean loss."²³

The conception of the stature of God that is presupposed in this essay may be indicated by the speculative suggestion that the world is an interconnected web endeavoring to become a vast socialized unit of experience with its own processive subjectivity.

²²Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 342.

²³Ibid., 340.