

Whitehead, Process, and Concern

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ICW12 interrogates process as creativity and process as concern. This keynote will seek to clarify the three concepts. Since a mixed audience is expected, it seems wise to raise basic questions, to provide systematic answers, and to highlight a few technicalities, such as “concrecence” and “conceptual reversion.”

First, why, and how, should one read Whitehead, and especially *Process and Reality* (1929)? Whitehead is the post-modern Plato: like the fourth century philosopher, he has studied, taught and contributed to all the major sciences of his time and consequently devised a unified, coherent, worldview; unlike Plato, however, Whitehead has sought to give a positive ontological status to the accident (the “sumbebekos” aka becoming, process, event, ...) and to the body.

Second, two forms of process should be contrasted: process *qua* meta-morphosis or flux, and process *qua* creativity or bud. Continuous flux is described in Whitehead’s philosophy of nature, that allows to interpret all (mesocosmic) events according to common sense. Intuitively, it is the heir of Michael Faraday’s (1791–1867) concept of electromagnetic field, as it was axiomatized by James Clerk Maxwell’s (1831–1879) in his *Treatise on Electricity and Magnetism* (1873). Creativity constitutes Whitehead’s ontological core. Intuitively, he relies upon William James’s (1842–1910) *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (1904/1912), and especially upon his reading of Zeno. Conceptually, he obtains a twofold analysis. On the one hand, a mereo-topology of sorts built upon the binary relation of extensive connection (irreflexive, symmetrical, non transitive) whose *relata* are regions. On the other hand, a genetic analysis of the process of concrecence. Actuality *per se* is now discontinuous. In sum, while he carefully articulates transition and concrecence, the reader should regroup these concepts and envision the necessity of a process that is *both* continuous and discontinuous —reason why I have argued for a contiGuum.

Third, Whitehead understands concern as a modality of duty and reverence. Each event, or moment of existence, re-enacts, in its own way, some past events, and fosters some future events. Hence, the, however limited and relative, control it can have on the world’s history and its adventurous future (not to mention god’s) needs to be taken seriously. This is precisely what common sense teaches us; this is also the ethos that can be found among the first people. Unfortunately, our current global systemic crisis is so deep that the possibility of a near-extinction of the human race has to be considered seriously, leaving, with a bit of luck, the first people as the last people.

In conclusion, if time allows, we will revisit the concept of pre- and post-modernism with the help of Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) and *Island* (1962). Immediate answers to Whiteheadian puzzles are indeed easy to find with these works in the background.