

TANGLIQUAN QUANJI

唐力权 著

唐力权全集

第五卷



中国社会科学出版社

唐力权全集

第五卷

唐力权 著



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Context and Reality

Chapter I	The Philosophy of Organism As First Science: Introduction	(3)
Chapter II	Process and Reality: The Functional Conception of Existence	(27)
Chapter III	Power and Efficacy : The Dynamic Theory of Forms	(53)
Chapter IV	Individuality and Relativity: The Organic Doctrine of Perspective	(81)
Chapter V	Conclusion: The Idea of Metaphysical Necessity and the Question of Philosophical Method	(126)
Notes	(156)

Relativity and Relatedness: Essays

1.	Confucian Jen and Platonic Eros: A Comparative Study (1973)	(167)
2.	Care, Wonder, and the Polarization of Being: An Essay on Human Destiny (1974)	(174)
3.	The Concept of Time in Whitehead and the I Ching (1974)	(199)
4.	The Meaning of Philosophical Silence: Some Reflections on the Use of Language in Chinese Thought (1976)	(218)
5.	Knowledge, Power, and the Good: Some Comparative Reflections (1977)	(230)
6.	Whitehead and Chinese Philosophy: From the Vantage Point of the I Ching (1979)	(236)
7.	Nature and Feeling: The Meaning of Mentality in the Philosophy of Chu Hsia (1982)	(257)
8.	The Broken and the Unbroken: the Concept of Rightness in Chinese Philosophy (1984)	(265)
9.	Moral Humanism in Confucius and Nietzsche: The Conscientious Stance in Philosophy (1989)	(288)

10. Moira and Ming: A Comparative Study (1989) (304)
11. The Way of Care: The Image of the Moral Guardian in Confucian Philosophy (1989) (317)
12. The Appropriation of Significance: Concept of Kan – T'ung in the I Ching (1990) (330)
13. Uprightness and Humanity: Metaphysics and the Primordial Language of Man (With Comparative Implications) (1992) (351)
14. Self – overcoming and Morality: Human Creativity in Nietzschean and Confucian Thought (1994) (359)
15. Act, Sign and Consciousness: Thinking along with Ricoeur (1995) (369)

Context and Reality

—A Critical Interpretation of
Whitehead's Philosophy
of Organism

Lik Kuen Tong

Chapter I The Philosophy of Organism As First Science: Introduction

Philosophy is the quest for rational justification. In so far as this fundamental aspect is concerned, there is no difference between philosophy and the special sciences—and indeed between any departments of rational thought. But while the special sciences concern themselves with specific domains of “validity” — that is, rational justifiability, philosophy aims at the exhibition or discovery of ultimate principles of validity which are applicable to all modes or types of existence. Philosophy, in other words, must issue in Metaphysics as the First Science of Rational Justification.

This is what, following Aristotle, has been traditionally called “First Philosophy” or the “study of Being as Being.” This too, I believe, is what Whitehead had in mind when he began his monumental *Process and Reality* with the statement “This course of lectures is designed as an essay in Speculative Philosophy.”¹ The “Philosophy of Organism” —as he so characterized his own version of Speculative Philosophy—is undoubtedly metaphysics. This metaphysics as set forth in *Process and Reality* and Whitehead’s other philosophical works contains, first, an ontology founded upon what I would describe as the “functional conception of existence” and, in the second place, a theory of the universe interpretable in terms of his “functional ontology” —hence the subtitle to the monumental work, “An essay on Cosmology.”

“Speculative Philosophy,” Whitehead states, “is the endeavour to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted.”² For both Aristotle and Whitehead, wisdom is knowledge of first principles which constitute the source of all intelligibility and thus the rational ground of all existence. “The most intelligible matters,” Aristotle remarked, “are first principles and basic reasons, since it is by and through them that any given subject becomes intelligible, not vice versa.”³ Whitehead undoubtedly had a similar idea when he noted that “rationalism is the belief that clarity can only be reached by pushing explanation to its utmost limits.”⁴ Thus for him “metaphysical categories” are “formulations of the ultimate generalities,”⁵ just as for Aristotle metaphysics or the chief science is basically a “theory of first principles.”⁶ For both men these “first principles” or “ultimate generalities” are the most basic explanatory factors. Together they constitute what I have already termed the “rational ground” of all existence.

Now explanation is describable as the general instrument of rational justifica-

tion issuing in human knowledge. For to “explain” is to “make clear or intelligible” the rational (or reasonable) character of things in a rational (or reasonable) manner. There is therefore this important distinction between the two senses of “rationality” as pertaining, respectively, to the two sides or aspects of an explanation—namely, the “formal” or “subjective” and the “material” or “objective.” Rationality in the material or objective meaning is a property of the subject-matter or the “object” of explanation (that which is to be explained), whereas rationality in the formal or subjective sense is an attribute of the agent of explanation or the “subject” —which is defined solely in terms of its explanatory functions and the method or procedure involved in performing such functions (the subject thus conceived may be a single investigator or a group or community of investigators). These two senses of rationality have in common this generic meaning: it expresses the “rule-abiding,” “lawful,” or “orderly.” But their specific difference must be made clear. Thus, for instance, the “uniformity (or regularity) of nature” is an expression of the rational character of natural objects or occurrences, whereas “A thing cannot be both A and not A” is a statement expressing a logical principle which constitutes a necessary requirement of rational method. These two senses of rationality are involved in every explanation or rational justification. But it is important to draw the distinction between a principle which constitutes an explanatory factor in respect of the object and a principle which contributes to the determination of the rational subject and its method. The same statement can be expressed more exactly by saying that while a “material principle” is “constitutive” of subject-matter or object, a “formal principle” is “constitutive” only of the subject, and not of the object; it is, however, a “regulative principle” in respect of the object. Thus, for example, the laws of motion are constitutive of a subject-matter consisting of moving bodies, but the laws or principles of Formal Logic are only regulative in respect of the subject-matter, though constitutive of the logical character of the method of inquiry in question.

The object which constitutes the subject-matter of an explanation could be anything whatsoever: simple or complex, animate or inanimate, natural or artificial, real or fancied, actual or non-actual. With any such object we may associate the idea of a “logical ground” or “logical subject” conceived as a “repository” of explanatory principles or reasons. More precisely, the logical ground of an object is a conceptual representation of the rational ground of its existence. Thus conceived there is a logical ground or logical subject for everything rational. To explain a thing is to “construct” a logical ground for it; and every logical ground is “constituted” by both formal and material principles. The pursuit of knowledge is basically nothing but the “rationalization” —that is, “systematic fulfillment” —of the logical ground of things. Depending upon the nature of this process of rationalization, we may distinguish three general levels or stages of knowledge or rational justification: Common Sense, Science, and Philosophy, the last being highest in status. The advance of knowledge

through these three levels is ultimately directed towards the construction in metaphysics of the Logical Ground of the Universe—a conceptual determination, that is, of the rational ground of all existence.

This naturally raises the question as to how this Logical Ground of metaphysics is to be constructed. In his statement concerning the basic function of speculative philosophy as quoted earlier, Whitehead has given us a general answer to this question, namely, by framing a “coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted.”⁷ The key notions here are “interpretation” and “experience” —or, more adequately, “interpretation” and “experience as the source and medium of interpretation.” The two ideas are obviously inseparable, and they may be combined in this central notion, the “interpretation of experience.” This is the central idea in Whitehead’s methodology. For him the metaphysical construction of the Logical Ground of all things is basically an interpretation of experience. Interpretation, indeed, is the essence of all explanation or conceptual representation. The meaning of this most fundamental concept, which underlies all rational quest for knowledge, must be given a thorough examination.

Generally speaking, “interpretation” is founded upon what may perhaps be recognized as the most fundamental relationship in metaphysics—namely, “instantiation.” More precisely, “interpretation” is definable as a contrast in thought between a “form” which specifies a condition or criterion and an object which may or may not satisfy that condition or criterion. If the object thus contrasted with the form satisfies or fulfills the given condition or criterion, it is an “instance” of the form (hence “instantiation”); otherwise, the object may be said to constitute a “negative instance.” For example, if the expression “x is red” denotes a form which specifies the condition of being red, then any particular red thing would be an instance, whereas a yellow thing would constitute a negative instance. A negative instance may be “significant” or “insignificant.” In respect to the condition “x is red” a yellow thing is negatively a significant instance because it could be or could have been a red thing. A number, on the other hand, would be an insignificant instance, for it could not be predicated as being red. Hence all insignificant instances are negative, though not all negative instances are insignificant.

A form is ontologically describable as a “texture of existence” as designated by such expression as “X is red,” where x may be termed an “ontic variable,” which stands for objects which are possible instances of the form. The instantiation of a texture of existence by an object—an “ontic value” of the given variable—is a “text of existence,” such as “This rose is red.” A texture of existence is, logically speaking, a “propositional function” (as commonly called in modern mathematical logic); while a text of existence a “proposition.” The ontological and the logical represent then but two aspects of the same thing—namely, the metaphysical Polarity of Form and Object.

Before we proceed any further let us furnish here a sample of forms (textures of existence or propositional functions) which may enable us to acquire a general idea of their nature: "x is five-foot tall," "x is an electron," "x is a real number," "x is a female engineer," "x is a U. S. citizen in 1969," "x is the first President of the United States," "x loves y," "x borrows from y to pay z," "Socrates is P," "This rose is P," "Plato is P, but not Q," and the like. The letters x, y, z, p, and Q in these expressions are all ontic variables which stand for objects which are possible instances of the form in question. It is to be noted at once that a form is not identifiable with its conceptual determination, not to mention its linguistic representation. The fact that we have a concept does not necessarily mean that we have the concept of a valid form. The concept "x is the greatest number," for example, cannot be the thought of a possible form, for the concept is self-contradictory. It may, however, be taken as the form of an impossibility—that is, a form which has no instance.

Now both the object and the form of an instantiation may be simple or complex. The object which satisfies the form "x loves y" is complex because it can only be satisfied by couples one of which loves the other. "x is a U. S. citizen in 1969," on the other hand, is to be instantiated by a simple object or object taken as one thing.

A form is complex if it can be analyzed into a relationship of component forms; otherwise it is simple or taken as simple. The propositional function "x is a female engineer" expresses a complex form, for it can be analyzed into a relationship between two components, "x is a female" and "x is an engineer." Similarly, "x is a real number" also denotes a complex form because, as the mathematicians tell us, the real numbers are defined in terms of a complex set of primitive ideas and axioms each of which constitute a component condition. However, the expression "x is, red of a definite shade" may be taken as denoting a simple form. The controversy as to whether or not there are absolutely simple forms need not detain us here. Our view is that the distinction between simple and complex forms or objects can only be decided by context.

We have just introduced a Doctrine of Forms which is not at all identifiable with Plato's Theory of Ideas, nor with the medieval theory of universals. The full meaning and significance of this new theory (as contrasted with the traditional one inherited from Plato) remains to be explored in the course of this study. It will constitute the basic theoretical framework of our interpretation of Whitehead's philosophy. For it is this doctrine of forms which lies at the heart of Whitehead's metaphysical system that I see his most valuable contribution to philosophy. This new doctrine, however, was not fully developed in his writings; nor had it been rigorously formulated. But there is no doubt that all the necessary ingredients for a full-fledged development of this theory were there in his works. In what follows we shall attempt to present a crude outline of this doctrine together with a critique of the traditional points of view. Such discussion

will well serve our main purpose here in this introductory chapter, which is to determine the most salient features of Whitehead's metaphysics. First of all, let us return to the idea of interpretation, and try to see what connection there is between Being and Rationality.

To explain, Let us recall, is to make clear or intelligible the rational character of things in a rational manner. The essence of explanation, as we have also noted, is interpretation. This must mean that through interpretation the rationality of the object will be revealed in and through the rationality of the subject. Now interpretation has been defined in terms of the relationship of instantiation. We have employed the term "polarity" to describe this relationship between the form and the instance (or negative instance) as constituting two poles of an instantiation. The two poles—and herein lies the most distinctive feature of the new theory—are related as and solely as "condition" (the form) and the "conditioned" (the instance). They are not related as "pattern" and "copies" as in the Platonic theory. A red thing "satisfies" (fulfills or realizes) the condition of being red, but it does not "imitate" the condition, nor "participate" in its being. Furthermore, the form as specifying a condition is not more "perfect" than any of its instances; it makes no sense to say that the condition of being mortal is more perfect than a mortal being. Nor is a form necessarily "eternal" (or more properly, non-spatial and non-temporal); there are conditions which can only be satisfied a limited number of times (e. g., "x is a U. S. citizen in 1969"), and there are conditions which can only be satisfied once (e. g., "x is the first President of the United States"). Finally, a form is not more "real" than its instances; forms are mediums of reality. In the new theory a form may be itself "informed" —that is, in the sense that a condition may be itself conditioned. In most traditional analysis the emphasis tends to be one-sided with respect to the dichotomy between the so-called "universals" and "particulars." According to one side of the historical controversy, universals are absolute and self-sustaining; they are solely conditioning, but not conditioned by the particulars. According to the other side, particulars alone exist; universals are either abstractions or exist only in our mind. Both sides fail to see that universals and particulars require each other in their being; they are interdependent and mutually conditioned. Universals exist as "conditions of character," while particulars exist as "conditions of exclusive limitation"; and their relationship is functionally mediated by "conditions of relative status." We shall arrive at this three-fold distinction between forms or conditions in the proper occasion.

Now according to the new theory, the "being" of a thing is its "conditionality" —that is, its character of existence as form (condition) or as instance (conditioned). In so far as it exists as form and conditioning, it exists as Function, and in so far as it exists as instance and conditioned, it exists as Substance. Since nothing exists absolutely or solely as function or as substance, everything must exist both as substance and as function. To function is to contrib-

ute—that is, to the determination of some other being (or beings), while to “subsist” or “abide” as substance is to “acquire” contributions from other beings. Thus we may say that while substance defines the reality of a thing with respect to “self-determination,” function does so with respect to “other-determination.” It is obvious that what is comprised in the substance of one thing must be the function of another, and vice versa. The teachings that a pupil received from his teacher constitute substance for the pupil, but function for the teacher. Here the teacher is conditioning, while the pupil is being conditioned. But the process of education actually involves the interaction between the teacher and the pupils. Viewed from the standpoint of the teacher, he is being conditioned by his pupils, whose reactions contribute substantially to his own determination.

Now “condition” is essentially a “normative” concept: it contains in itself a “rule” or “law” which commands or demands satisfaction or conformation. Herein lies the relationship between being and rationality. Briefly, the rationality of a thing is just its “rule-abidingness.” That which is rational or reasonable is rule-abiding—hence not-arbitrary; the opposite of rationality is the arbitrariness of determination. Metaphorically, rationality may be said to express the “game-character” of the universe. The essence of a game is no more than its rules which are coordinated to form a conditional complex. It is this game-character of things that constitute their intelligibility. Hence the purpose of explanation must be directed to the discovery of game-character. This is the reason why interpretation constitutes the essence of explanation. For to interpret is to discover the rule-abidingness of things. Moreover, since the game-character of an object consists basically in a conditional complex upon which its being as substance and function depends, to discover the rationality of an object is to discover its being, and vice versa. And this means that rational analysis must basically take the form of conditional analysis, which centers round the relation of instantiation. The question now arises, what is capable of conditional analysis?

The answer is, Everything whatsoever. This is the case because everything must have some game-character: it must satisfy some rule or condition. A thing which absolutely satisfies no rules or conditions would have no “being.” And that which has no being cannot be conceived or talked about.

The “being” of a thing or object is definable as its “manner of existence” in terms of (a) “character,” (b) “position,” and (c) “exclusive limitation.” The character of a thing is its definite “whatness”—for example, the shape, the size, the color, and other qualities that jointly characterize a particular statue. Its position is its relative status in a context—the “here-and-now” of the statue from the standpoint of a given observer. And the fact that the thing has this—but not that—particular character and this—but not that—particular position is its exclusive limitation. Thus the being of an object is an instantiation of three major types of forms or conditions, as we have cited earlier: namely, (a) conditions of character, (or definiteness), (b) conditions

of position (or relative status), and (c) conditions of exclusive limitation. If a thing has no being because it satisfies absolutely no rules or conditions, it would have neither character, nor position, and, as it must follow, no exclusive limitation. Such a thing is, indeed, inconceivable.

This, I believe, is the correct interpretation of what has been traditionally identified as the Identification of Being and Thought. To "be" is to be "interpretable" —that is, as instance of some form or as satisfying certain rule or condition. Since all objects of thought are interpretable—at least as fulfilling the condition of being thought of, any conceivable object has being—and a mode or degree of rationality. "Absolute non-being" —which would also mean "absolute irrationality" —cannot be conceived and talked about.

Now if "absolute non-being" is impossible, so is "absolute unreality." "Reality" is justifiable existence. The reality of a thing, in other words, is its validity or justifiability. Everything is in a sense real because it must be in some way valid or justifiable. For rational thought justifiability depends solely upon the game-character of things—that is, their rule-abidingness. The being of a thing is justified solely by the forms or conditions which it realizes or fulfills. Thus the being of a physical event (e. g., a thunder) is justified by the physical laws governing its occurrence (e. g., the laws of electricity). And Nature as a whole is justified by the totality of laws which define the Natural Order. Logically speaking, all game-characters are of equal status. The game-character of one's waking life enjoys no privilege over the game-character of a dream. Hence we cannot, strictly speaking, speak of something as unreal, or as more real than another. "Everything is something," says Whitehead, "which in its own way is real. When you refer to something as unreal, you are merely conceiving a type of reality to which that 'something' does not belong."⁸

But in what sense, for example, is the centaur real, and also unreal? The centaur is real when it is conceived solely as an object (an animal) created by human imagination. It is unreal when compared with such objects as dogs, tiger, human beings, and so forth, which are actually presented in our sensuous experience. Hence when we refer to the centaur as unreal, what we really mean is that it does not belong to the type of reality to which dogs, tigers, human beings, and so forth, belong. "Unreality," in other words, expresses a special case of reality; it refers to an "incompatibility" between any two or more objects from the standpoint of a given form or conditional complex. Logically, we express this by saying that they do not belong to the same class, which Whitehead calls, as an ontological concept, a "type of reality."

The notion of "absolute unreality" is therefore groundless. This does not mean that the term "unreality" cannot be used to designate a relative concept—relative, that is, to what is prejudged as real. Thus according to Plato, for instance, things in the corporeal world are considered as unreal relative to the Ideas which are real and "truly are" because they are eternal, immutable, perfect, and intelligible. But even granted that the Ideas indeed possess these charac-

teristics, to describe them as real adds nothing to their essential being. And if we should employ these characteristics as criteria of reality which we impose upon all things, they are indicative not of the nature of things, but rather of what we are or what we want them to be.

But just as there can be no such thing as "absolute non-being" considered as that which satisfies utterly no forms or conditions, so there can be no such thing as "absolute being" if by that we mean something which is an instance of all forms or conditions. The absolutely unconditioned is as much an impossibility as the absolutely conditioned, let alone their combination as in Spinoza's God or Hegel's Absolute. The former is impossible because it cannot be conceived, the latter is impossible because there are conditions which are opposites of contraries. If John is taller than Paul, for instance, then he cannot also be shorter than the latter. And a red thing cannot be green at the same time under the same circumstances. This means, in short, that any object which is capable of conditional (and therefore rational) analysis is necessarily limited or "exclusively" determined; it can realize some conditions, but never all conditions. It follows that being (or existence) is necessarily finite, reality (the validity of being) an essential expression of limitation. "All forms of realization," Whitehead observed, "Express some aspect of finitude. Such a form expresses its nature as being this, and not that. In other words, it expresses exclusion; and exclusion means finitude."⁹

This idea of "limitation" (Whitehead sometimes called it "exclusive limitation") may be said to constitute the focal point of Whitehead's metaphysics. For Whitehead reality is necessarily limited, and its limitation presupposes process as the medium of limitation. Limitation, in other words, is the very factor whereby reality and process are inseparable. More exactly, process is the medium in and through which every real thing expresses a "fusion of the finite and the infinite."¹⁰ Conditions are infinite. But every realization is finite in the sense that it represents a selective fulfillment of the infinitely diverse conditions which, prior to their realization, are mere possibilities or potentialities. And this selective fulfillment of infinite conditions is basically what Whitehead meant by "actuality." The notion of an actuality is that of an "agency" whose "decision" and "activity" are required for any finite limitation of infinitude.

"Actuality," says Whitehead, "is the decision amid potentiality."¹¹ An actuality then is a "decision-maker," for whom the available potentiality constitutes the "element of givenness." But for Whitehead the essence of actuality lies not merely in "decision-making," but more fundamentally in the active fulfillment of what is intended in the "decision." The phrase "decision amid potentiality" means, in other words, not just an act of choice, but most emphatically an "activity procuring limitation." The following passage which contains the basis of our interpretation of Whitehead's philosophy must, in spite of its length, be quoted in its entirety:

For rationalistic thought, the notion of "givenness" carries with it a refer-

ence beyond the mere data in question. It refers to a "decision" whereby what is "given" is separated off from what for that occasion is "not given." This element of "givenness" in things implies some activity procuring limitation. The word "decision" does not here imply conscious judgment, though in some "decisions" consciousness will be a factor. The word is used in its root sense of a "cutting off." The ontological principle declares that every decision is referable to one or more actual entities, because in separation from actual entities there is nothing, merely nonentity—"The rest is silence."

The ontological principle asserts the relativity of decision; whereby every decision expresses the relation of the actual thing, for which a decision is made, to an actual thing by which that decision is made. But "decision" cannot be construed as a causal adjunct of an actual entity. It constitutes the very meaning of actuality. An actual entity arises from decisions for it, and by its very existence provides decisions for other actual entities which supersede it. Thus the ontological principle is the first stage in constituting a theory embracing the notions of "actual entity," "givenness," and "process." Just as "potentiality for process" is the meaning of the more general term "entity," or "thing"; so "decision" is the additional meaning imported by the word "actual" into the phrase "actual entity." "Actuality" is the decision amid "potentiality." It represents stubborn fact which cannot be evaded. The real internal constitution of an actual entity progressively constitutes a decision conditioning the creativity which transcends that actuality. The Castle Rock at Edinburgh exists from moment to moment, and from century to century, by reason of the decision effected by its own historic route of antecedent occasions.¹²

In this passage are contained not only the germinal ideas of Whitehead's metaphysical system, but also the basic schema which runs through the entire framework of the organic philosophy. The essence of Whitehead's speculative thought can indeed be summed up in the so-called "ontological principle" which defines actuality in terms of agency, and being in terms of the "relativity of decision." Whitehead's metaphysics is basically then a Theory of Agency, of which all the details of the organic philosophy are extensions or applications. This dissertation is an attempt to demonstrate the metaphysical validity of this theory, and to trace its essential development and application in Whitehead's philosophy. And we hope to accomplish this purpose in a manner which is at once more rigorous and more concretely understandable than the one Whitehead himself had adopted. What is in order here in this introductory chapter is a preliminary account and elucidation of the germinal ideas in Whitehead's metaphysics, as so succinctly formulated in the passage above cited.

To begin with, let us look closely into the idea of actuality in terms of some concrete illustration. The Castle Rock at Edinburgh, to use Whitehead's own example, is an "actual thing." At a particular moment of its history, the Castle Rock exists as a concrete fact, characterized by a definite manner of existence; it is definite in its particular character as well as in its position in space and

time. The fact that it has this—and not that—particular character, this—and not that—particular position, is its limitation. The Castle Rock as concretely given is limited in the sense that its being expresses an exclusive realization of the infinitely diverse potentialities. Every settled concrete fact is limited or implies exclusion; it is furthermore marked by an inherent “negativity.” Its negativity arises from the fact that it might have been otherwise; it is what constitutes the meaning of “givenness.” “The meaning of ‘givenness’, ” says Whitehead, “is that what is ‘given’ might not have been ‘given’; and that what is not ‘given’ might have been ‘given’ .”¹³ The Castle Rock as given here and now might not have been what it is and where it is; it might have been destroyed, for instance. But the very fact that it is what it is and where it is implies the pre-existence of a factor which was responsible for its factual givenness by overcoming the negativity in question. This is the origin of the idea of an “actual entity” —which was also termed by Whitehead “actual occasion” or “occasion of experience” —conceived as an active agent which is at once a “decision-maker” and an “operator” carrying out its own decision. For Whitehead as for Aristotle, agency belongs only to concrete individual things which may perform their functions individually or collectively. How actual entities may carry out their functions of agency both individually and collectively is precisely what constitutes the central problem in the organismic philosophy. It is a problem concisely defined by the phrase “the relativity of decision.” We shall arrive at its basic meaning in the following exposition.

Now an agent is what it does; its being as agent is exhausted by its agency, which is conceivable as a unity of activities, acts, actions, or operations (these terms are for us synonymous) . The agent as agent is no more than such operational unity. This is what Whitehead had in mind when he described an actual entity as an “individual unity of experience” —that is, of “acts of experience.”¹⁴ The term “experience” is here used metaphorically —or literally (depending upon whether conscious judgment is involved) —to suggest or convey the idea of “decision-making” which is normally regarded as a mental activity or, in Whitehead’s terminology, “act of experience.” The term is also meant to connote the general notion of activity as some sort of power or energy which pervades our awareness or experience of ourselves as living beings. All these meanings or connotations are subsumed by Whitehead under the general term “prehension” —or, in some parts of his writings, “feeling.” This idea of prehension may best be conceived as expressing a relationship or mode of connection between agency and its givenness. Thus “conceptual prehensions” are expressive (metaphorically or otherwise) of the deliberations of the agent issuing in a “decision amid potentiality, ” while “physical prehensions” refer to acts of appropriation or transformation involved in the actual carrying out of the decision. And whereas “positive prehensions” involve data or elements of givenness which are actually accepted or being made use of by the agent, “negative prehensions” are those in which the data are considered but rejected. In brief, the

character of the agent or actual entity is completely describable in terms of its prehensions. For "the essence of an actual entity," says Whitehead, "consists solely in the fact that it is a prehending thing."¹⁵

An actively "prehending thing" is a living center of activity and process of becoming: as such, it constitutes itself as "subject." And anything which is the "concern" or datum of a subject is an "object." In Whitehead's metaphysics the subject-object relationship acquires a much broader meaning than is attributed to it in the subjectivistic tradition of modern philosophy. For Whitehead the essence of subjectivity is activity, of which thought or conscious mental acts constitute only a special case. Subject and object, in other words, are not necessarily (as a matter of fact, rarely) related as thinker and thought (that which is thought), but rather as, generally, operator (which is no more than its operations) and operandum (or that which is operated upon by an operator). That "prehen-sion" is essentially an operational concept was made quite unmistakably clear by Whitehead himself in these words:

An occasion of experience is an activity, analyzable into modes of functioning which jointly constitute its process of becoming. Each mode is analysable into the total experience as active subject, and into the thing or object with which the special activity is concerned. This thing is a datum, the is to say, is describable without reference to its entertainment in that occasion. An object is anything performing this function of a datum provoking some special activity of the occasion in question. Thus subject and object are relative terms. An occasion is a subject in respect to its special activity concerning an object; and anything is an object in respect to its provocation of some special activity within a subject. Such a mode of activity is termed a "pre-hension."¹⁶

Thus, according to Whitehead, there are three factors involved in every prehension: (a) the prehending "subject" or the actual occasion within which the prehension is a detail of activity or specialized operation; (b) the "datum" which is the object prehended; (c) the "subjective form" which is how that subject prehends that datum.¹⁷ The subjective form of a prehension is what distinguishes or separates it from other prehensions or modes of activity within the same actual occasion. And every actual occasion is distinct from every other by virtue of its peculiar complex of subjective forms. In fact, a prehending subject depends for its internal constitution upon its complex of subjective forms.¹⁸ It is necessary to point out at once that the idea of an active subject is not that of a permanent substratum. "It is fundamental to the metaphysical doctrine of the philosophy of organism," Whitehead remarked, "that the notion of an actual entity as the unchanging subject of change is completely abandoned."¹⁹ Every actual entity constitutes itself in and through a process of "concrescence" — that is, a "growing together" of diverse activities or functions directed to the realization of a common objective which constitutes what is called its "subjective aim" (the aim of a prehending subject). The unity of an actual entity is therefore a operational or functional unity, defined in terms of an identity of purpose,