

Whitehead's God in Theology

There are two reasons to consider Whitehead's conception of God the most important philosophical idea for contemporary theology. First, it is an intimate part of a general philosophical system that, better than any other, restores cosmology to its rightful place in our intellectual concerns. The revolution in the conception of nature and of nature's unity with human affairs that has been wrought by Whitehead's theory of causation should be accepted, I believe. If his conception of God is mistaken, as I also believe, we are obliged to remove it from his philosophy with great care.¹

Second, and more important, Whitehead's conception of God forces us to reconsider our religious experience, assaying again which elements are basic and which merely appear basic because of the commitments of some interpretive scheme. In a world society where one tradition's experience must contest with the experience of alien cultures, nothing could be more important for theology.

I

Whitehead did not create his conception of God solely as an implication of his cosmology. Rather, it arose from many sides of his systematic thinking, most of which focused on reflections about nature, experience and history. In his brilliant *Religion in the Making*, Whitehead provided an interpretation of religion as a civilizing of the universal dimensions of experience through the cultivation of exquisite intensities of emotion. The role of the metaphysical conception of God, in this context, is to rationalize

and thereby to articulate and preserve those emotional intensities which are experienced as the greatest value. As he concluded in *Religion in the Making*:

God is that function in the world by reason of which our purposes are directed to ends which in our own consciousness are impartial as to our own interests. . . . He is that element in virtue of which the attainment of such a value for others transforms itself into a value for ourselves. . . . The consciousness which is individual in us, is universal in him: the love which is partial in us is all-embracing in him. Apart from him there could be no world, because there could be no adjustment of individuality. . . . He is not the world, but the valuation of the world. In abstraction from the course of events, this valuation is a necessary metaphysical function. Apart from it, there could be no definite determination of limitation required for attainment. . . . The present type of order in the world has arisen from an unimaginable past, and it will find its grave in an unimaginable future. There remains the inexhaustible realm of abstract forms, and creativity, with its shifting character ever determined afresh by its own creatures, and God, upon whose wisdom all forms of order depend.²

In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead's definitive systematic statement, he characterized God in the following terms:

In the first place, God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification. Viewed as primordial, he is the unlimited conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of potentiality. In this aspect, he is not *before* all creation, but *with* all creation. But, as primordial, so far is he from "eminent reality," that in this abstraction he is "deficiently actual"—and this in two ways. His feelings are only conceptual and so lack the fulness of actuality. Secondly, conceptual feelings, apart from complex integration with physical feelings, are devoid of consciousness in their subjective forms. . . . His conceptual actuality at once exemplifies and establishes the categorical conditions. The conceptual feelings, which compose his primordial nature, exemplify in their subjective forms their mutual sensitivity and their subjective unity of subjective aim. These subjective forms are valuations determining the relative relevance of

eternal objects for each occasion of actuality. He is the lure for feeling, the eternal urge of desire. . . . But God, as well as being primordial, is also consequent. He is the beginning and the end. He is not the beginning in the sense of being in the past of all members. He is the presupposed actuality of conceptional operation, in unison of becoming with every other creative act. Thus by reason of the relativity of all things there is a reaction of the world on God. The completion of God's nature into fulness of physical feeling is derived from the objectification of the world in God. . . . One side of God's nature is constituted by his conceptual experience. This experience is the primordial fact in the world, limited by no actuality which it presupposes. It is therefore infinite, devoid of all negative prehensions. This state of his nature is free, complete, primordial, eternal, actually deficient, and unconscious. The other side originates with physical experience derived from the temporal world, and then acquires integration with the primordial side. It is determined, incomplete, consequent, "everlasting," fully actual, and conscious. His necessary goodness expresses the determination of his consequent nature.³

Whitehead summed up his magnificent vision with these psalmic antistrophes:

It is as true to say that God is permanent and the World fluent, as that the World is permanent and God is fluent.

It is as true to say that God is one and the World many, as that the World is one and God many.

It is as true to say that, in comparison with the World, God is actual eminently, as that, in comparison with God, the World is actual eminently.

It is as true to say that the World is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the World.

It is as true to say that God transcends the World, as that the World transcends God.

It is as true to say that God creates the World, as that the World creates God.

God and the World are the contrasted opposites in terms of which Creativity achieves its supreme task of transforming disjoined multiplicity, with its diversities in opposition, into concrescent unity, with its diversities in contrast.⁴

I have quoted so extensively from Whitehead because these are among the most important texts in his corpus for the conception of God. Together with the surrounding metaphysics, they have stimulated the most vigorous, novel developments in philosophical theology since the era of genius in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The purpose of this volume is to examine several lines of interpretation, development and application of Whitehead's ideas. As indicated already, my thesis is that Whitehead's conception of God is largely mistaken and that an alternate conception is to be preferred. Yet Whitehead's broader cosmology is still the most plausible conception of nature to be developed. Therefore, the critical rejection of his conception of God must be undertaken from the inside through a careful analysis of its employment by major thinkers in the process tradition.

Lewis S. Ford is one of the most original and circumspect thinkers in that tradition. In an essay called "The Viability of Whitehead's God for Christian Theology," he claims that "from the standpoint of Christian concerns, Whitehead's metaphysics is most distinctive in being a philosophy of creation which does not identify creative power exclusively with God."⁵ Creativity lies underneath the contrasted antistrophes of God and World, as quoted above. Ford then claims that "the non-identification of God with creativity or being itself has many distinct advantages for Christian theism," and enumerates the following.

1. In creating itself, each creature is exercising a real freedom distinct from God's. Its freedom is not compromised by being also somehow God's action, or by being already known as determinate in God's foreknowledge. . . .

2. On this process view every actuality has ultimate significance as contributing to the experience of God. . . . If God's experience were complete and unchanging for all time, there seems no way in which our action could either add or detract from it and hence no way in which concrete meaning can be given to service for the sake of God's glory. . . .

3. A plurality of self-creative acts introduces a measure of potential conflict and incompatibility, which is the mark of evil. God is responsible for the ideals whereby the actions of the world might be co-ordinated, but the world is responsible for all physical actualiza-

tion, for its good and for its evil. . . . Above all, the non-identification of God with creativity exempts God from the responsibility for evil.

4. If both God and the world share in a common creativity, there is a mutual solidarity between them whereby God's agency can be discerned in the activity of the world. . . . The Biblical account of creation illuminates the process of evolution once it is understood as the gradual emergence of order out of chaos through divine guidance rather than as the ontological production of being out of non-being.

5. If God and finite actualities are all alike instances of creativity such that God is also a being and not being-itself, then our knowledge of God can be metaphysically intelligible without recourse to the more desperate strategies of indirect prediction. God becomes no longer an exception to the metaphysical principles but their chief exemplification. God's mystery is not thereby affronted, but discovered in its proper place, not so much at the limits of human intelligibility as in the depths of self-creative freedom.

6. If as a result of non-divine creativity God's experience is contingent upon worldly actualization, then this responsive action toward the world is also contingent. . . . Reason ascertains all it can about God, but in recognizing that there must be contingent aspects in God, it knows that it cannot determine what these are in concrete fact. Here we must appeal to the particularities of God's action in history, to the records of the evolutionary process for God's dealing with nature, and to the records of man's encounter with God for his dealings with man in sacred scripture.⁶

In this long quotation, Ford presents most of the major advantages theologians have seen in process theology. We shall have occasion to recur to them in various guises in the following chapters. But this chapter shall begin the direct discussion, starting with Ford's theme that Whitehead's uniqueness lies in separating God from creativity. Under this rubric shall be considered arguments concerning human freedom, the intrinsic significance of finite beings, evil, the creation of the metaphysical categories, divine finitude and whether a finite God is necessarily part of a larger, more worshipful whole. Next shall be considered Ford's arguments to prove that God can know incomplete phases of an actual occasion's concrescence, that is, that God can know a person in the subjective process of becoming. The final consideration shall be of persons' grasp of the presence of God.

II

The first consideration is a clarification of the contrast intended in claiming God is not to be identified with the ultimate principle of creativity. The alternative I shall defend is not that God *is* to be identified with creativity. Theravada Buddhists might defend this, arguing that the only ultimate reality is the ceaseless flux of forms having neither worshipfulness nor character apart from the train of evanescent patterns.

My own alternative is that God is creator of everything determinate, creator of things actual as well as of things possible. Apart from the relative nature the divinity gives itself as creator in creating the world, God is utterly transcendent. The why or wherefore of the original creative act is mysterious, as Ford notes. But, relative to the world as creator, God is present to each creature in the divine creative act giving determinate being; and the world itself is a normative expression of the creator, undetachable from the divine creative reality. The creator, the act and the expression form the rudiments of a philosophical trinitarianism. Contrasting with God's *ontological* creativity, we can distinguish the *cosmological* creativity exercised by creatures constituting the world. With Whitehead I agree (1) that the course of the world is characterized by events of harmonizing multiplicities into unities and (2) that the reality of the event for itself is the processive becoming of the unity; I accept Whitehead's categorial obligations for this process of cosmological creativity.⁷ What I call cosmological creativity, the only sort Whitehead acknowledges, is a descriptive generalization of the character of events; the reality of the events is accounted for with the ontological creativity of God the Creator.⁸ God is the immediate creator of the novel values or patterns by which an event is constituted as the harmonizing of a multiplicity. Since the real being of an occasion is the becoming of a harmonized integration of the multiplicity, its components stem either immediately from God or from what it prehends; since what it prehends are other occasions, themselves analyzable into novel and prehended features, it can be suggested that every feature at some time in the present or past is or was a spontaneous novel pattern or value immediately created by God. Thus God is the creator of every determinate thing, each in its

own occasion of spontaneous appearance. In contrast to God's ontological creativity, cosmological creativity is the descriptive fact that the spontaneity, in occasions brings unity out of multiplicity.⁹

The point of this lengthy sketch of an alternative to Whitehead is that many of the virtues advertised for his conception of God are also possessed, perhaps more satisfactorily, by the alternative, as will be illustrated in some of the topics discussed below.

1. Human independence or ontological freedom from God is the virtue most often appealed to in the Whiteheadian conception of God, standing first in Ford's list of virtues. The point is, because God is not identified with creativity as such, having only God's own specification of it (other finite individuals having their own specifications of it), people have their own independent being, underived from God, however interdependent God and the world are in other respects. And because being in this case means a specific act of creativity, harmonizing a given multiplicity into the individual's own concrete self, the independent being is independent self-determination, or freedom. Whitehead accounts for God's influence on other actual occasions with the doctrine that God contributes in the initial phase of concrescence a value orienting the subjective aim of the occasion: In later phases the occasion can modify the subjective aim according to self-determined emphasis.¹⁰ Allowing all this for the moment, I want to point out that this kind of freedom is a mixed blessing.

First, Whitehead and Ford must acknowledge God to be an external limit on human freedom in the same sense that other external things limit freedom. All objective things limit freedom in that they are given as initial data required to be harmonized in the prehending occasion's concrescence. God's datum is so important as to determine the initial state of the subjective aim. Whereas finite occasions determine themselves, God is rather like a smother-mother, structuring all possibilities and continually insisting on values of her own arbitrary choice. Considering creatures' immortality in God's life, in the long run there is a metaphysical guarantee that people cannot damn themselves, and the possibility of self-damnation seems to me a touchstone of freedom.

The Whiteheadian answer is that the limitations contributed to

an occasion by the world and by God are not negative, in any sense limiting freedom, but rather positive values; limitation is essential to value. But freedom for Whiteheadians is supposed to be an occasion's own creativity in determining its own final limitation within the range of possibilities inherent in the initial data. That is, an occasion chooses what limitation or value it will become, given the alternate possibilities for harmonizing the initial data. Insofar as God determines that value through the subjective aim in the initial data, the occasion's own choice is depleted. And, if God continues to determine modifications of the subjective aim through the process, it is hard to see any freedom of choice left. Even if there is always a residue of self-determined emphasis left to the occasion, the *function* of God is still to force feed a person's intentions even more powerfully than other things do.

The way to get around this objection is to say that God's contribution of possibilities and values is somehow *identical* with that occasion's process of self-determination. But this would require the denial of the ontological independence of God and finite occasions. If God's contribution of a spontaneous value defining an occasion's becoming is *identical* with that occasion's free adoption of the value, then for God to create the value at that point is for the occasion to be self-determining. We could claim a person's choice is determined by another in this case only if we said, in fact, that God's being as creator is other than the person's free process as creature. The conception of God as creator denies such an ontological difference, although Whitehead's theory must hold to it. The problem for the creation view, admittedly, is to articulate the right sense in which God is not ontologically distinct from creatures and yet is their creator, ontologically independent of them.¹¹

From the standpoint of religious and ethical experience, I submit, *both* human self-determination and divine determination of men are felt in the same act. Furthermore, as Job found out, it is misleading to interpret God's control of things with the model of a supercreature's control of things.

2. Concerning a creature's intrinsic significance, the second of the virtues Ford cites for Whitehead's view, an analogous objection holds: If the value which the creature attains is contributed forcibly by an ontologically independent God, its significance is

intrinsically *located* in actuality but extrinsically derived and determined. Ford's argument itself focuses rather on a creature's intrinsic contribution to value in the universe as preserved by God; without ontological independence, he says, our experience could neither add to nor detract from God's. But ontological independence is not the issue: a creator God who creates a person intrinsically possessing such and such a value has precisely that value in the divine creative experience; were God not to create that person, God would lack the value of being creator-in-that-person. The intrinsic significance of creatures is strictly correlative to the values in God's experience, on the creationist view, and this is so whether the value comes cosmologically to be actualized through the creature's own choice or through blind antecedent determination. Since God's creative act creates temporal determinations and is not temporally determined itself except in specific reference to temporal things, the issue of a creature's adding something to God's experience not possessed before is meaningful only from the creature's point of view. And from that point of view God is not specifically creator of such and such a valuable creature "until" it temporally comes to be.

3. Concerning evil, the Whiteheadian view indeed makes finite actual occasions responsible for the evil resulting from their own choices, moral or submoral. Of course, to the extent that people's choices are hedged in by divinely urged possibilities and values, as argued above, the choices can hardly be said to be the people's own; who can be responsible for resisting an Infinite Nudge?

But suppose evil is chosen only by people, and only in independence from God. Why should we want in the first place to exempt God from responsibility for evil? Because of an antecedent commitment to God's goodness. But to deny God responsibility by denying divine causal agency is not to lend *support* to the doctrine of divine goodness; it only strikes down a counter argument. And the price of this move is to make the actual course of events *irrelevant* to God's moral character; this goes counter to the religious feeling that God's moral character is *revealed* in events, for better or worse.

Furthermore, it makes the doctrine of God's goodness itself an ad hoc hypothesis of the metaphysical theory, not something with experiential warrant. If God's primordial decision regarding

values and limitation in general is at root arbitrary, as Whitehead says it is, then it is only coincidence if God is metaphysically good, this being an arbitrary decision God makes in determining the metaphysical principles to which divinity must conform. Although Ockham's razor is a dangerous weapon, I think the simpler doctrine would be that, if God is to be judged by moral categories (remember Job), the divine character is only as good as experience shows it to be as creator of just this world, and no more. God is a good creator insofar as the creation is good, and beyond that there is no reason to judge. This should be admitted whether or not one maintains that God creates the whole world or only the metaphysical principles (Whitehead's position).

4. Concerning that last point, I agree with Ford in singling out Whitehead's statement that God's "conceptual actuality at once exemplifies and establishes the categorical conditions."¹² This is what Whitehead meant to say, I believe, and Ford is acute in showing this renders a valid sense of actuality; God's primordial nature is the result as well as the reality of *decision*.

But I also fear the doctrine is untenable, and that Whitehead is mistaken. It is the character of a process of concrescence that, at any phase short of the final satisfaction, the unity of prehensions is partly indeterminate; before the satisfaction, then, the final satisfaction cannot be determinately exemplified. Especially, it cannot be said that the metaphysical categories are normatively binding on what is possible for God *before* they achieve their satisfactory determination.

It might be countered that the metaphysical principles are determined in their full extent in the next-to-initial stage of God's primordial envisagement, and that later stages are more determinate resolutions of possible relations within possibilities left open by the metaphysical principles. But in this case there either is or is not a reason why God decides on the metaphysical principles: If there is a reason, the principles are normative in the initial phase of God's decision and are therefore uncreated; if there is no reason, the principles being ultimately arbitrary as Whitehead says, then they do not determine the possibilities in the first move from the initial stage of envisagement to the next in which the principles appear and that first move does *not* exemplify them.

It is possible to say, as the doctrine that God is ontological

creator does, that God creates the determinate metaphysical principles or categorial conditions; indeed, Whitehead is right in saying that anything complex is the result of decision (in this case, divine decision). Furthermore, the principles describe God as the God who creates a world exhibiting these principles, including those articulating the divine created relation to the world. But it makes no sense to say the principles are norms for the concrescence of God's primordial decision before they are created. Whereas the metaphysical principles determine the difference between possibility and impossibility for a *finite* occasion's concrescence, and the categorial obligations in fact are rules for concrescing, God's primordial creation of the principles cannot be called a concrescence in any way determined by the principles created.

5. Let me repeat my appreciation of Ford's demonstration of God's conceptual infinity on Whitehead's view, and the peculiar actuality this entails.¹³ This takes most of the starch out of the usual attacks on the finitude of Whitehead's God in the divine consequent nature. It should be noted, however, that if one rejects Whitehead's account of freedom, of the intrinsic significance of finite occasions and of evil, much of the reason for saying God is finite in having a separate specification of creativity is taken away.

Furthermore, concerning the infinite side, there is a theoretical difficulty in saying whether the primordial decision is once accomplished and ever after objectively immortal or is rather everlastingly concrescing, never complete. Whitehead says both, and Ford cites both passages.¹⁴ I shall deal with this theoretical difficulty in treating the problem of our knowledge of God. Here I want to flag the point that the real onus of the charge that God should not be finite is the subordinate status a finite God would have relative to any whole including God plus the other ontologically independent beings, a point that will be developed at length below.

6. Ford is correct to point out that God is not finite with respect to creativity in Whitehead's scheme, since creativity is indeterminate apart from concrete specifications. He is also correct that God's conceptual nature excludes no possibility or achieved value; God feels the achieved value of every finite occasion with

the same subjective form with which the finite occasion in its own satisfaction feels itself. But God's finitude does contrast exclusively with the subjective process of concrescence in each temporal occasion; this is required for the mutual ontological independence of divine and temporal free decisions. Whereas in consequent nature God might contain the value of the whole world, in no way does God contain the creative activity of other creatures. The ontological whole includes God plus the world.

Whitehead's apt description for God plus the world, ontologically considered, is the "solidarity" of God and world in the creative advance. There are marked similarities to Hegel's Absolute Spirit. The crucial question is whether the solidarity of the advance is not more divine, more worshipful, than Whitehead's God. Hegel would say yes. By virtue of the very solidarity, God and the world are mutually dependent, and religious experience seems to prefer the relatively more independent. Whitehead could counter that his God, and not the world, is the creative source of the metaphysical principles, of all relevant possibilities and of all possible values, maintaining the achieved values against loss. But the answer to this is that the complete creative advance is creator not only of all God's contribution, but also of the concrete achievement of finite value in the temporal decisions. The very antistrophes of God and world quoted earlier mark a total holiness superior to the dependencies of the divine pole. There may be difficulties with the quasipantheism of the claim that the creative advance is most divine, or with Hegel's Absolute Spirit. But pantheism has a solid footing in religious experience, as nearly every religious tradition exemplifies. In essence, I think nothing short of the ground or principle of the whole of things is supreme enough to be worshiped.

This concludes the initial discussion of points raised by Ford's general thesis that there is an advantage in distinguishing God from creativity or being-itself. Dispute about these advantages of Whitehead's conception will be themes for variations in several of the chapters that follow with discussions of different authors. Two more critical themes may be stated, however, before moving on to the specific variations. The first is whether Whitehead's conception of God adequately addresses the question of God's

knowledge of human beings; the second is how people can know God.

III

One of the distinct advantages often cited for Whitehead's conception is that, since God is conceived as an individual actual entity (or a society of such entities according to Charles Hartshorne's view) with an intrinsically conceptual component, it makes sense to say God knows the world, particularly human beings. Doubtless there is initial plausibility in this suggestion compared with alternatives.

The conception of God as pure act, for instance, does not allow God to be thought of as sufficiently determined by what the divine knowledge contains in order to learn anything; in the classic formula (to be discussed in Chapter Five), the world is relative to God as pure act but the divine pure act is not relative to God.¹⁵

The conception of God as creator *ex nihilo*, in its turn, can call God "a knower" only by a thinly stretched analogy; being indeterminate as apart from the world, God cannot have knowledge that is about an external world interior to a divine nature; this theory must say that divine knowledge is the same as divine creating (Immanuel Kant's position).¹⁶

What about Whitehead's conception? The problem is that, in the Whiteheadian conception, God can know, feel or appreciate only people's deeds as done, finished; God cannotprehend them in their hearts, in their processes of becoming. The reason is that God is related to people *only* by prehending them and being prehended by them, and one canprehend only an objective reality, a satisfaction at the end of becoming. Whitehead was clear about there being no prehension of contemporaries in the sense of prehending the becoming of another entity not yet objectively come to be.

Recognizing this difficulty, one might supplement Whitehead with the doctrine that God canprehend the *incomplete* phases of a temporal occasion's concrescence. The rationale would be that God canprehend anything determinate and, although the multiplicity in those incomplete phases are not determinately together,

they are determinately individual and can be known as such. The reason that nondivine occasions are unable to prehend incomplete phases (according to this argument) is that they must wait upon the extensive perspective of the concreting occasion to be completed for the occasion to be distinguished from the actual world from which the prehending entities arose. Since God is not extensive, being unable in fact to make the negative prehensions necessary to stake out a perspective, God need not wait upon the concreting occasion to stake out a location of its own. This is an ingenious argument.¹⁷

Whitehead did not make this move himself. For him the incomplete phases of an occasion are not actual, and only actual things can be prehend. The reason they are not actual is that they are not completely determinate and therefore cannot be objective. Whitehead wrote, "An entity is actual when it has significance for itself. By this is meant that an actual entity functions in respect to its own determination. Thus an actual entity combines self-identity with self-diversity."¹⁸ I take this to mean that an entity is actual only with respect to its self-identity achieved in the completed satisfaction. Whitehead further wrote:

The actual entity is the enjoyment of a certain quantum of physical time. But the genetic process is not the temporal succession: such a view is exactly what is denied by the epochal theory of time. Each phase in the genetic process presupposes the entire quantum, and so does each feeling in each phase. The subjective unity dominating the process forbids the division of that extensive quantum which originates with the primary phase of the subjective aim. The problem dominating the concrecence is the actualization of the quantum *in solido*. The quantum is that standpoint in the extensive continuum which is consonant with the subjective aim in its original derivation from God.¹⁹

I take this to mean that there is no possibility of *existentially* separating the incomplete phases from each other or from the whole. There is no existential time in which an occasion's incomplete parts exist without the whole. The division of an occasion into phases is an abstraction made from the whole, and only the whole is a *res vera*. If God were to prehend an incomplete phase, it would only be the *idea* of an incomplete phase, not the part of

an individual different from God. In actuality, there is an event moving from a multiplicity, in which the new individual is completely future, to a new unity in which the new individual is completely determinate, and there is no actuality to be prehended in between. It might be argued that the incomplete phases are indeed not temporal, but eternal, and that God does notprehend them in the temporal consequent nature, but in the eternal primordial nature; but this is to give up the thesis that God prehends temporal people in their hearts.

Perhaps a more perspicuous way of putting this objection is that, if the incomplete phases of an occasion can be abstracted out to be prehended, the occasion itself is not being prehended; the occasion *is not itself* until its satisfaction is achieved. Although the satisfaction is contained in the subjective aim as a *potentiality* for actualization in the incomplete phases, the subjective aim with potentiality is precisely not objective for prehension, although a propositional statement of it is. To claim that the subjective aim in incomplete phases is prehensible as such is to deny process, the essence of Whitehead's insight, reducing an occasion to a succession of objectifiable patterns. The genetic *analysis* of an actual entity can abstract the process into such a succession of patterns, but this is an abstraction explicitly prescinding from the reality of the creative process of the concrete event.

This ingenious argument succeeds only at the expense of giving up the epochal theory of time, the doctrine of events and the vibratory interpretation of existence, crucial elements in Whitehead's metaphysics. My own preference is to maintain those doctrines of nature and to jettison the Whiteheadian conception of God in favor of a different view of the world's presence to God. To turn this preference into an argument, however, the coherence of Whitehead's own conception of God as related to the world must be examined—the topic of Chapter Two. But it must be admitted here that in Whitehead's conception, God can not know people in the subjective immediacy of their heart.

IV

The obverse side of the problem of God's knowledge of the world and the human heart is the problem of our knowledge of

God. For reasons that will be discussed in Chapter Six, Whitehead and his followers are right in interpreting God's knowledge of us and our knowledge of God in causal terms, not transcendental ones. But the question is whether the relevant causation is between actual entities or between actual entities on the one hand and the creator of all determinate things on the other.

Concerning human knowledge of God, most religions exhibit something of the feeling that God is experienced at the center of one's own heart, that Atman is Brahman, that God is closer to us than we are to ourselves. As Paul Tillich pointed out in his classic paper, "Two Types of Philosophy of Religion," the approach to God as an Other is always complemented by the approach to God at the depths of one's own being.²⁰ Whitehead's view, precisely because of the emphasis on separate acts of creativity for God and finite occasions, allows God only to be felt as other. In Whitehead's terms, God is prehended as an item among the initial data of an occasion, just the way the rest of the world is prehended, in the form of a hybrid physical prehension providing the orientation of the occasion's subjective aim. But Whitehead also emphasized that the occasion can modify its subjective aim in subsequent phases.

One can meet this difficulty head on by claiming that God not only is prehended among the initial data, but is prehended in subsequent phases as presenting the best possibility, taking into account each modification and decision of the occasion. Thus God is at the heart of the whole of the subjective process of actualization, not just at the beginning when the rest of the world is presented.

Against this suggestion, however, there are two objections. The first is allied with the argument concerning God's knowledge of finite occasions. Just as there are no existent incomplete phases in finite occasions for God toprehend, so there are none toprehend God; rather, the occasion as an actual whole prehends God and the world, and this is to be analyzed into prehensions unharmonized, which we call the initial stage, and the prehensions harmonized, which we call the satisfaction, with analytical components of logical progression toward harmony, which we call intermediate incomplete phases.

The second objection is that there are grave difficulties with

the concept of God required for this suggestion. As remarked before, Whitehead equivocated on whether God's concrescence is something forever in process and never complete or something that has at least some completed and completely determinate decisions. It is clear that for occasions toprehend God, God would have to have some completed and objective presentations. Perhaps these divine valuations, allegedly relevant for each phase in the concrescence of an occasion, are themselves incomplete phases of the one everlasting divine concrescence, determinate disjunctively in relation to the different temporal occasions and phases of occasions, but indeterminate in their ultimate conjunction in the overall experience of God. An intriguing thought!

But how can they be prehendend? Even allowing, as has been argued we should not, that an incomplete phase of a temporal occasion is the sort of thing that can prehend, its prehension of God would have to be a hybrid physical prehension. "A hybrid physical prehension has as its datum an antecedent occasion objectified in respect to a conceptual prehension."²¹ Whitehead pointed out that this means the mental element prehendend—in our case God's valuation—does not itself have a coordinate divisibility; in other words, God need not be prehendend as being in space and time, something with which Ford would agree.²² But it does mean that the divine conception prehendend must be *antecedent to the time of the temporal occasion*.

Yet this is impossible for two reasons. First, the temporal occasion itself *has* no time in its incomplete phases, only in its final satisfaction; an incomplete phase is only logically subsequent to the initial phase, not later than it. Second, God's prehendend valuation must have *a* time, a date, in order to be antecedent to the occasion's time; in fact, supposing there to be a temporal distinction between the occasion's phases, God's *remedial* valuation would have to be later than God's valuation initially prehendend, and earlier than the later phase. So, whereas God does not have to be prehendend *as* temporally located, God must be temporally located to be prehendend. One might respond that, in the consequent nature, God is in fact temporally located, and that the remedial valuation to be prehendend is a contrast schematizing the divine primordial valuation with God's temporal physical prehension of the incomplete phase of the finite occasion. But the

incomplete phase is not physical and cannot be temporally prehended. Not only are people incapable of experiencing God in incomplete phases of their becoming, God cannot respond from the divine side in a relevant way to those incomplete phases.

The upshot of this rather technical discussion is that, in Whitehead's conception, God is no more at the heart of human subjectivity than any other thing which enters among the initial data of experience. We considered the suggestion that would have God be prehended not only at the initial stage, but also at each incomplete stage within the concrescence, remedially luring each modification of the initial subjective aim. But this suggestion seems incompatible with the main lines of Whitehead's cosmology. And so the Whiteheadian conception of God appears to leave the knowledge of God by human beings at best a somewhat external affair, contrary to the widespread experience of God as that most real part of ourselves.

V

This chapter has surveyed some of the major advantages claimed for Whitehead's conception of God in philosophical theology and has rehearsed a line of objections to be developed in the following chapters with regard to the emphases of various Whiteheadians. The next step in the argument is to turn from the ways by which the Whiteheadian conception serves the interests of what theologians would like antecedently to say about God, to the coherence of the conception itself. Does Whitehead's conception make the divine life comprehensible? Perhaps at some deeper level the conception surmounts the difficulties introduced so far.