

Modern Ideas of GOD:
Divinity Reflected Through
Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel
and
Alfred North Whitehead

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HEGEL - ABSOLUTE SPIRIT

Reason is spirit. The category enters the mind as the self existence of the ego. Category knows itself as objective reality and as self. It is this self which is spirit which stands over against itself, that is over against its objective understanding of reality. This self is ethical actuality. Spirit in this form is the being and the abstraction. Spirit in this form is absolute self-identity. It breaks up the all and masters its personal part.

Spirit steps at each self-examination and each stopping is existence. Each self-examination only exists within spirit for where else could it? What else is there but given reality and consciousness of it? Spirit is sense experience but then in that spirit abstracts from that experience it splits away from the existent reality and is self-consciousness. It is reason to have immediate consciousness both of that which makes it up and its self-consciousness. When the reason that spirit has is seen by spirit to be the reason that is; it is Spirit.

The present has its beyond in its being thought. Spirit is both indwelling within all reality and beyond reality in its being thought but still within spirit but in a more differentiated way.

Self-consciousness only is something definite as it alienates itself from itself. It is conscious of

being self only as transcending. The whole alienates itself; that is the composite of individual self-conscious impressions becomes a consciousness and then is alienated from itself in abstraction. Spirit is both self-containedness and self-completeness; it is the enduring and also that which again goes back into the stuff of reality to later come to the surface again.

State power and wealth (which calls forth universal labor) are the good and the bad. It is the state which subdues the natural power of wealth to create.

Spirit operates as the intermediate term between reality and the self-consciousness spirit has of the reality. Consciousness that knows itself to be possessing validity becomes the intermediate term; it becomes spirit in its spiritual form. It knows between reality and consciousness and in this knowing it mediates the two but more so in being a unity it is the spiritual whole breaking out between them, going back in and ordering all by its unity. Spirit must then return out of the mixture of reality, consciousness and the ordering unity and their interaction producing newness back into itself.

The pure consciousness of spirit over against itself by nature is estranged for it is separated from objective reality. It is the nature of the pure consciousness to flee from reality for reality causes this abstract consciousness to know of its falseness and death. Pure consciousness is therefore of its very nature self-alienated. The nature of consciousness then is to be absolutely restless process which at every moment must be ready to be cancelled in its opposite. Spirit is the unity of its self-consciousness and the actuality of existing being. But in the alienation of the two they split into a twofold consciousness. The one side of this split is pure insight which has no content as it exists in negating everything in itself. The other half is belief which has the content but no insight. Insight holds the power of knowing its limitation; belief holds the memory of where it has been. Thought is the primary factor of belief. Thought is content but it is the awareness of the relation of thought that insight brings. A part of this knowing something in its relativity is feeling and emotion. Under-

standing of reality comes from belief's consciousness which is obedience to experienced reality. Belief holds a naive unsophisticated attitude toward its absolute object. It is insight which brings about an end to this unsophistication. Insight relates the moments lying apart in belief. Insight declares things for belief that lay way off from it and of which it is unconcerned. Consciousness is divided between the beyond remote from reality and the immediate awareness of the beyond belief. Insight is spirit in action.

The world is an organized reality which is mostly metaphysic, pure notion or knowledge. Self-existence stands over against the world though. Self-existence has the form of absolute freedom. As freedom personality is concretely embodied universal will. Personal existence as absolute freedom is autonomous. All social ranks and classes are annulled in this absolute freedom which is person. Universal will comes into the personal and becomes individual will, thus the universal spirit becomes the person.

The world is divided between objective nature and will. Between these two is concrete action. It operates as the mediating ground between objective nature and will. Objective nature and will are harmonies which have not

become definite in their abstract distinctiveness from one another. Distinctiveness takes place in concrete actuality. Both appear to each other as the other to the other in actuality. In actuality objective nature is seen to be consciousness. Objectivity sees itself as duty - as obedience - existence is seen as spirit in actuality. In actuality something more is asked of objectivity than it has. Objectivity is asked to be specific and definite. Objectivity is called to will and a will that is more than just its counterpart for will must be both the will of the general duty of objective reality and also of specific objective reality. The will that is called for is the Absolute will = the Absolute spirit - the consciousness of spirit.

WHITEHEAD - GOD

As all reality is an embodiment of permanence and flux so also is the reality of God. God is with all creation and also beyond all creation. God is eternal and God is temporal.

God considered as primordial actuality is before all being. He is the unconditioned actuality at the base of all things. He is untrammelled freedom, unrelated to the course of particular things. The world presupposes the primordial freedom but it does not presuppose the world. Forms flow out of this primordial nature that orders the world. This supplies the subjective aim of reality. Prehensions are ordered by this flow. The source of feeling for the acceptance and use of these forms comes from this source which is outside.

God on the other hand is consequent. God is the actuality of the conceptual operation and in this is involved with the coming to be of all reality. This consequent nature of God receives the multiple freedom of actuality into its own actuality. The conceptual object in God is the unification of the various objective realizations in reality.

The many objectifications reach individual unity in the eternal objects and beyond this the whole reaches a unity.

God operates both in the world as the force of movement towards coherence of the prehensions and yet God is the memory of where the eternal objects have been. God is therefore unchanging and changing.

God is involved in the coming to be of everything. He is the memory of that which goes before which then becomes part of that which comes after. All that goes before becomes foundational for all that comes after. It need not necessarily be taken up in that which comes after but it is available. There is more involved than just memory, for instance the probability of a certain aspect as being taken into the new reality but that which has gone before is used in determining this probability. The future depends on the difference of the past and the possible future not on absolutely what the past was. It is what is added to the past which is determinate. God holds the past in memory.

God is not just subsisting in himself alone. All reality and God are intermixed in that they interact. God is the

superject but he is also part of the basic process which all reality under goes. How can that which has no relation to that which is effect the other?

How are the occasion or event related to personality? The occasion is part of the complex of personality. It has no reality outside the context of a "society" that being the self. All events are a part of the society called God. There is a unity of time in which each event contributes to the value of the next and it is the divine which unites them.

Without self-contrast there is no personality but only a state-an object. It is contrast and self transcendence that is personality and self.

God persuades reality to be thus as it would be by the weight and breadth of his experience. As that which is involved with all that is the experience of all that leads up to and of all that surrounds and interacts with that which immediately surrounds God has an influence on that which comes to be.

God literally feels our feelings. Our desires become his. What we do, what all reality does effects God's

personality and he acts in ways consistent and yet free from the activity of the world which he has experienced. God suffers the consequences of all our acts in a way we often do not. On the other hand God does not step arbitrarily into reality to change the outcome of our actions for the whole must be considered and the effect of arbitrariness on the whole.

God prehends our feelings on an overall level just as each event of reality feels or prehends all reality with which it is contact. Events cannotprehend beyond their experience and neither is God able to know consciously all that He experiences on a subconscious level. God prehends the larger workings and directions of the whole of reality just as each occasion on a smaller level prehends what its course of action is to be by feeling around it into the reality of surrounding reality. This larger prehension of God is no more absolute in understanding than is the prehension of the composite part of reality.

Analysis

Hegel's Absolute Spirit and Whitehead's God can I think easily be seen to be the same. Both are both all reality and somehow consciousness beyond the complex of reality as an organic whole. This is the general outline to which both agree but the personalities of Hegel's Absolute Spirit and Whitehead's God differ in specifics.

In a general sense Absolute Spirit does not have the memory or capacity for all encompassing thought that God has. God in Whitehead's conceptualization remembers all, nothing ever is which is not at some time later a component of that which is to follow. Absolute Spirit in Hegel's conceptualization has more loose ends to his thought. He is made of all that goes before as is God but Absolute Spirit is never so exactly

sure of what has gone before nor is he so exactly sure that what he thinks is the way reality is. Absolute Spirit knows but his knowing always contains part of that which immediately preceded it and is a fuzzy newness emerging from both. In contrast Whitehead's God always remembers what has gone before. God also has fine ability to experience and separate out his experiences. Finally God's knowledge is fuzzy also, as he prehends reality each component part feels out that reality which is in contact with it. God it seems has a more precise ability to experience reality where Absolute spirit works with bigger chunks of reality at a time.

We might now ask the question who is the better Absolute Spirit or God. I think that the answer is that they both have their strong points. The fact that Absolute Spirit does not need to remember everything allows He or She to be more human. Absolute Spirit generally makes decisions and that is how human beings work. What human being remembers all and with minute prevision examines data given still that the data must be felt, it seems that in the minuteness with in which the data is felt already much of the possibility and extent of that feeling is lost. Whitehead's God is knowing the particles of the universe's make up while Hegel's Absolute Spirit is exploring reality at the level of human decision making.

I would like to draw a few relationships between Hegel, Whitehead and Phenomenology-Existentialism. Existentialism is concerned with the bare lived fact and since Kant what other kind of fact is there? Phenomenology is the method of getting the fact to consciousness. Hegel has a belief in the relatedness of facts and relatedness related to the

nature of consciousness. Whitehead (especially because of his mathematical experience) has a sense that the flow of facts forms an organic whole.

We experience the fact; it is the existential fact. By replaying to the mind the facts in the form of art - dance, sculpture, painting, etc. and language - visual and spoken language - plays, movies, T.V., - written language - novels, history, ancient literature such as the Bible, etc. We see wholeness or if you will consciousness emerge if we look long and wide enough at the flow of acts. We do not need faith to see this evolution. It is inherent in the facts.

God and man are much related. God is the consciousness of all reality; we are the consciousness of our reality, that is reality that comes into our sphere of reach. God's reach is all reality, therefore, his being has aspects our being does not have, but reality is not made over to accommodate to God; the reality in which man moves and has his being is the same reality in which God moves and has his being. That does not mean that reality at God's level cannot look much different given greater comprehensiveness. Reality from subatomic particles, through stars and man, onto higher forms of being, onto God is different given its range but there is commonality.

Neither Hegel nor Whitehead have gotten to the place the Bible and existentialism have. Hegel and Whitehead see activity but they are just at the beginning of their phenomenological investigation. They need to get to where the Bible did on less data and where existentialism did in reference to man. Following Hegel we must move beyond culture, society, and man to see where creative innovation makes its entrance into history. We get the flow of history but miss the personality. With Whitehead we are overwhelmed as is modern man in general with the data which must be taken into consideration to know the personality of God, but we may ask has not the data yielded up some glimpses of personality? Can't we focus a little more on the synergistic systems that we do see emerging from the data as collected? For instance don't the various disciplines in the world which have evolved from an existential base tell us something of the consciousness of God? Art, science and economics broadly tell us some how that God thinks in an artistic representational, a minutely detailed, and a practical way. God organizes on a microscopic and a macroscopic level. Everything that has been explicitly written or thought of God has some tie in with the flow of reality - science relates to poetry, art relates to sports, and the family relates to the molecule; and all relates to God. If we are to take Whitehead and Hegel seriously and given reality how can we not then we can work both ways: from the flow of reality to God and from God to the flow of reality. God has relevance to art, science, and economics.

One could get the idea from reading Hegel and Whitehead that the personality of God is determined but this need not be the conclusion. Working from the ground up and having all relevant to all could lead to this impression. Where is the freedom of personality to come from if the outcome of consciousness is to flow directly from the flow of reality and be one with it?

Hegel leaves room for the creativity of God in that God has insight. God does not just reproduce reality. Absolute Spirit sees that what it holds in reason and what is are different, that reality changes and the mind must change. Absolute Spirit does not know absolutely- there are gaps in its knowledge. Besides these gaps on the side of the elements of reality there are gaps on the side of larger reality in general. Reality itself is not so clear so neither can Absolute Spirit be so clear in following exactly what its leads are. At the base of reality there are contradictions. At each level where reality comes together it comes together in a fuzzy manner, each transition of knowledge is not clearly demarcated, elements of the old continue to exist side by side with the new. It seems because the nature of reality is cloudy therefore God's thinking must be cloudy.

In Whitehead this problem of the determination of God becomes greater I think for Whitehead's God knows more exactly all reality or at least that is the impression given. Openness to freedom might be the that modern science has come in its study to see reality as not all that clear in the minutest and the largest elements of reality- in quantum physics and in astronomy. The very nature of reality is clouded. But beside from this there is the fact that a perfect memory such as Whitehead's God has does not say that what it remembers does not become more cloudy as we progress in complexity of reality. The whole

is not just the sum of the parts. As reality comes together in greater and greater complexity we see that the facts are not any longer so sure. What in the isolated instance can be separated clearly can no longer so clearly be separated. One still gets the sense that all along the way for Whitehead reality stays more discretely categorized than for Hegel but especially in the light of Kant I think it must be seen that no ordering of reality can be absolutely correspondent to the ordering of reality. Besides I think as the studies have ended in cloudiness in quantum physics and astronomy we might make the projection that reality is actually more cloudy than our scientific method might leave us to believe.

Along the line we have been traveling one might ask if we could not become completely skeptical in our attempts to see the reality of God. Here we are at the edge of what I think separates science from religion, that separates the spirit of Hegel and Whitehead from the spirit of the bible and existentialism. It is just at that edge of unknowability on a microscopic and macroscopic level that radical personality enters the picture. I think that the two have a tension that can never be resolved. The tension is between the knowable and the unknowable between the distinct and the indistinct, the formed and the formless. Reality is made of both- in Hegel's terms reality is composed both of reason and insight- sameness and change- that which is distinct and that which is indistinct. Fluidity and fuzziness permeates reality but so does the static and the knowable that is the discretely categorizable.

Hegel and Whitehead both start from different bases in exploring the divine being and in this can be seen their differences. Hegels starting point is history while Whiteheads is Empiricism. Whitehead has a matematical and scientific mind while Hegels mind centers on man and his culture. In the last analysis what is interesting is that from such diverse starting points they reach such similar conclusions. What both starting points have in common is a coherence a wholeness and what both also have in common is a differentiation of the whole from the parts. Karl Barth would attack their concepts of Divine Being just at this point and say is this too limited a perspective off which to view such an absolutely different being as God? Is not there more to God than the simple cming together of smaller elements? Can God be so simply figured out? I think that Barth on the face of it has a point but as we move into the complexity of the reality this seeming simpleness of Gods being dissolves into the air and we no longer can just say God is such. Every statement of reality is surpassed by the reality which it tries to deal with and beyond this is countered by many other elements in the reality. Understanding itself which Barth will not hold God to is involved deeply in the very unknowableness with which Barth is so concerned. Understanding and reality are one in ~~their~~ inscrutability- they meet in inscrutability. Answers that are given dissolve away on further exploration- this gives proof that we are involved in the very roots of being and that our insights have lasting worth.

Back to Hegels and Whiteheads starting points. If Hegel starts with man and Whitehead with matematics what does that say about them? I think we can infer that Hegel will never reach the precision of Whitehead, nor Whitehead the personality of Hegel. But we are not limited to being either Hegel or Whitehead we are existential humanity in search of the foundations of reality and we never stop at any given answer, so we have no problem. Just as Hegel and Whitehead can be seen to be greater and lesser in their differentiation so Hegel and Whitehead have their place in our increasing differentiation. It is no longer so simple as part to whole it is personality in the making it is universe in the making. Does not each probing of man who is one of the higher forms of existence have reverberating consequence to the rest of reality? Yes and no and in this yes and no the mystery of reality is again inferrred. We might also ask what of the mathematical reality of man and the personal aspects of mathematics? In a universe in which all is relative to all no answer is discrete. Every answer is open to being differentated from a new standpoint. Hegel from Whiteheads standpoint and Whitehead from Hegels standpoint. Humanity interms of probability seems deterministic untill seen from the point of view of a mathematics that is uncertain and limited in scope. Why fear the overtaking of God by man. Why not rather have a sense of the overtaking of man by God - that man in all his discernment even to the minutest detail still again and again comes to the point of transcending previous awareness.

With the exception of terminology Whitehead does not add all that much new over Absolute Spirit in Hegel. Hegel had a bipolar God before Whitehead- a God flowing out of reality yet beyond it. Whitehead in the overall must be termed a Hegelian. In Whitehead there are absolute ideas in the mind of God to which reality somewhat conforms so the tendency would be to label him a Platonist but these ideas do not absolutely fix reality

and it is just this absoluteness which is at issue. In Plato the mind of God is that to which reality conform while in Whitehead the eternal idea is secondary to the process. It is the process of the flowing up of ideas and the process of the makeup of reality beyond the eternal idea which is most important. The idea is an important part of the make up of reality but it roughly corresponds to reason in Hegels terminology and is important to his conception of God. Hegel is not very exact in how notions of reality in the mind of God change he ascribes this part of the process basically to insight and Whitehead meets insight with his concept of feeling. Whitehead has process but what is Hegels understanding of God if not process. Everything is in flux in Hegel and the whole moves forward out of the past and consciousness flows out of reality- how is this different in Whitehead? Whitehead is a Hegelian with a scientific bent but none the less an Hegelian. He never challenges the basic presuppositions of Hegel that all is related to all and that the existential reality of person must be seen in the flow of the all and from the flow of the all. It is Whiteheads terminology which makes him sound different but in adding a few things he does not take away from the major schema as established in Hegel.

If Whitehead is a Hegelian we might ask what is Hegel and we might I think answer a biblical thinker. In the bible God is intimately related to the coming to be of all things. In many places in the bible it is not all that clear where reality ends and God begins. Gods consciousness and conscious acts are stressed in many places in the bible but so are his subliminal acts -his relation to the seasons and the analogy to mans personality. God in the bible walk with man one moment and is in heaven the next. He lords it over man and then he bargains with man as with Abraham and in Job. Is God over and above all reality -unchanging or does reality have an effect on God. The bible does not so much go into an exploration of Gods consciousness and its foundation, when we approach a metaphysics of God as with Gods giving his name the issue does not become all that more uncloudy. God says he is who will be with you. How can someone be with me and relate to me if whatever I do -he does not change? It is in the nature of relationship to personality and to all reality that change occurs consciousness relates to reality. That which relates to reality and does not change is non-existent. That God is dead in Nietzsches terminology. The God of the bible obviously is involved caringly with all reality and in so being he is effected by it. God listens to us and from this we can expect him to act differently than if we where not there to listen to. Does god just sit unchanging somewhere because all that will or can be is known? How can the future be known? And if it is known can one still not be changed in the translation from known to existentially occurring. Can God know the future in the same way the future will play itself - that is is essence the same as existence?

If essence and existence are the same then all philosophy through the ages comes to nothing and we could posit that all philosophy is as nothing and can be counterdicted in the light of God but then what of a God involved in our coming to be in such a way that our coming to be can have nothing to do with nature of reality as it is. Does not existence have something to do with all reality even from the minute quantum maybe especially there then what of man a highly developed form of existence is he so far off that his existence does not relate to existence in general? That is a possibility but it is a possibility that the bible and theology through the ages have argued against. Even the hairs of our head are number and in being number the consciousness of all reality is effected.

It may be asked if Whitehead is influenced by mathematics and I think he was and makes statements that can be interpreted such in Process and Reality, what is the relation of mathematics to the bible or existential understanding of reality. I think we can say they are related and in a less nebulous way than might be thought

Can't we explore the existentiality of mathematics? What can we say of mathematics in an existential way? If Hegel and Whitehead are right we can I think say that mathematics has some existential aspects. Does not Kant lead us to a conclusion that all reality is filtered through consciousness and that therefore there is not any reality even mathematics that is not existentially effected. God's consciousness flows from reality and reality has both absolute and changing aspects as both Hegel and Whitehead analyze it. Put differently reality is a composite of the distinct and indistinct. The nature of God's consciousness is complex. It is a complexity of distinctly known and indistinctly known. Probability enters into the realm of mathematics no longer is there just

clear knowledge. Reality is in distinct in a Einstienian way. relative facts keep encroaching on the data. Probable facts are always getting in the way of absolute facts - that is the nature of reality. Newton gave way to Einstien and algebra gave way to calculus and new Newtons and algebras. lose kingship in an absolute world as a democracy of reality comes forth in which no reality can stand on absolute rule- for reality is too complex even to its own understanding.

We might ask what do Absolute Spirit in Hegel and Whiteheads God have to do with me-how am I related to them? I would think in a way more deeply that to any other God for you are one with them you share the same universe. In experiencing this universe you are experiencing something of God. The implications of the modern anthropocentric turn are in full flower in a universe that is open to existential experience from smallness to largeness- by way of science and art- God is knowable- we can therefore form a relationship with him. An unknowable God is from a biblical standpoint no God-for God is for us. The anthropocentric turn says no more than that the God we know has some relation to the God who is and that the universe that we experience is not totally false in the eyes of God. The anthropocentric turn says that we are important to God not an insignificant nothing so far less able to experience reality as it really is. The God of Hegel and Whitehead supports the anthropocentric turn for he or she is a God whose existial being has something in common with man. when we say that we are made in the image and likeness of God it has meaning for we are like Gods. Our reality has something

very basic in common with Gods reality . Words like trust, love, courage, and loyalty have a high place in the very way of the universe and our scientific and artistic understanding though imperfect in precision and in scope are non the less true in some way to the way the universe is. Is Teilhard de Chardin right in the eyes of Hegel and Whitehead? Yes. Spirit and matter go together even from the smallest to the highest. There are common denominators and these denominators in the sense of experience are eternally true. Man is the highest we see in our experience and man says something about the way the universe is. Man is central to the very nature of Hegels exposition. Higher consciousness also to Whitehead is the culminating reality. All modern theology and philosophy are saying is that man has a place in the universe and in saying that you cannot turn man off again in terms of what his reality means in the rush of the being of the all to the consciousness of the all.

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