Whiteheadian Ethics
Whiteheadian Ethics: Abstracts and Papers from the Ethics Section of the Philosophy Group at the 6th International Whitehead Conference at the University of Salzburg, July 2006

Edited by

Theodore Walker Jr. and Mihály Tóth

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The 6th International Whitehead Conference in July 2006, organized by Franz Riffert and Hans-Joachim Sander, was in Salzburg, Austria at the University of Salzburg, Department of Theology, Universitätsplatz 1. During July 2006, the city of Salzburg was the center of international celebrations of the 250th anniversary of the birth of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (born in Salzburg, Austria on 27 January 1756, died in Vienna, Austria on 05 December 1791). While celebrating Mozart, Whitehead scholars in Salzburg also celebrated the 100th anniversary of the publication of Alfred North Whitehead's *On Mathematical Concepts of the Material World* (1906). In addition to celebrating Mozart and Whitehead, Salzburg scholars celebrated the return of John B. Cobb Jr. In 1992 Cobb’s invited lectures inspired Salzburg scholars to host a local Whitehead conference at Salzburg University in 1996. Ten years later, the University of Salzburg hosted the 6th International Whitehead Conference.

It was a truly international event. Though the vast majority of conference presentations were in Whitehead’s native languages—English and mathematics, there was a section for papers in the German language, and another section for papers in French. And there were papers and other presentations from various geographic, cultural, and religious contexts, including North American, European, Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and other contexts.

The conference was held in a section of old Salzburg with cobble stone streets, horse-drawn carriages, street vendors, sidewalk cafes, ancient churches (including Franziskanerkirche, Kollegienkirche, St. Peter’s, and the Salzburg Cathedral where Mozart was an organist), and memorable scenes from "The Sound of Music" movie. Conference goers were often surrounded by the sound of Mozart's music (from street musicians and evening concerts, including a conference concert), and also on some evenings by the sound of chanting crowds responding to giant screen telecasts of World Cup fussball (soccer). The conference dinner at the Stiegl-Keller and other meals exhibited an excellent Austrian cuisine enriched by contributions from various nations of the Habsburg Empire.

The title for the 6th International Whitehead Conference was “The Importance of Process—System and Adventure.” In accordance with Whitehead's *Science and the Modern World* (1925), *Process and Reality*
Whiteheadian Ethics

(1929), and Adventures of Ideas (1933), in the 2006 Whitehead Conference Program booklet, conference organizers Riffert and Sander explained that the conference title (“The Importance of Process—System and Adventure”) calls attention to the importance of process-relational philosophy for the creative-adventurous advance of various systematic research programs. Accordingly, the 6th International Whitehead Conference was intended to facilitate the exchange of scholarly research on Whiteheadian process-relational philosophy from various fields of inquiry, and to inspire new research projects in old and new fields, including interdisciplinary projects. This intention followed from the local Whitehead conference of 1996 entitled “The Process Paradigm—A Basis for Interdisciplinary Research” (see conference program booklet, p. 3; see conference website at <www.uni-salzburg.at/whiteheadconference/>).

The July 2006 6th International Whitehead Conference schedule included nine keynote presentations, four strategic sessions (including a session on the future of Process Studies), and more than 300 papers. The 300+ papers were in three main groups: (1) Philosophy, (2) Religion & Cultural Traditions, and (3) Science. The Philosophy Group included fifteen sections, including a section for ethics.

The idea that ethics, moral theory, social science and social thought should be instructed by Whiteheadian process philosophy is only recently becoming a subject of sustained systematic inquiry outside schools of theology and religion. During the 1979-1980 academic year, John B. Cobb Jr. and W. Widick Schroeder were editing Process Philosophy and Social Thought (Chicago: Center for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1981). This was “the first collection of essays exploring the implications of process philosophy for social thought” (x), and the first collection with work on developing “a process social ethics” (xii). The majority of the essays derived from papers on the theme “Process Philosophy and the Social Sciences” presented at national annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion from 1975 to 1979. The collected essays included deliberations on relations between “Process Thought and Social Theory” (Part One), “Process Thought and Social Ethics” (Part Two), and “Process Thought and Liberation Theology” (Part Three). The essay contributors were: James Luther Adams, Henry W. Clark, John B. Cobb Jr., Franklin I. Gamwell, David Ray Griffin, Bernard M. Loomer, Darrell Reeck, W. Widick Schroeder, John B. Spencer, Max L. Stackhouse, Douglas Sturm, James E. Will, and Clark M. Williamson. Cobb and Schroeder lamented that all of the contributors were theologians, professors of religion, or Christian ethicists. Unlike process theologians, and unlike liberation
theologians inspired to seek alternatives to classical theism by William R. Jones’s *Is God a White Racist?: A Preamble to Black Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973) and Eulalio R. Baltazar’s *The Dark Center: A Process Theology of Blackness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1973), very few social scientists, social ethicists, and moral philosophers had considered the social implications of process philosophy. Accordingly, in the concluding paragraph of their 1981 preface, Schroeder and Cobb wrote, “We hope that the essays included in this volume will encourage others to explore the relation between process philosophy and social thought” (xiii).


“Although Whitehead did not develop an ethical theory,” Belaief found that, “he has made it philosophically possible for a process ethics to be derived from the richness of his metaphysical categories, his ethically relevant concept of God, and the non-systematic ethical statements that appear throughout his work” (Belaief 1984, xi). For Belaief, metaphysical categories are essential to adequate systematic ethical theory. Accordingly, in the concluding paragraph of the prologue, Belaief wrote of “a special hope” to “encourage” ethicists to study Whitehead and “other superior metaphysicians who also did not develop a systematic ethical theory,” including especially Justus Buchler (Ibid., xiii).


As Cobb and Schroeder hoped in 1981, in addition to more process theologians, there are now many others (other than theologians) working on Whiteheadian social thought. And as Gray hoped in 1983, rather than being mostly “a sideline” for process theologians, Whiteheadian ethics is becoming a distinct field in philosophy. Furthermore, Belaief’s “special hope” (1984) for more work on the ethical implications of metaphysics, especially Whiteheadian metaphysics, has been increasingly realized.

Whiteheadian Ethics


Process theologians appreciate Whitehead’s status as a philosopher. Religious scholars doing philosophical theology were attracted to Whitehead’s philosophy because, in Hartshorne’s words, “Whitehead is, in the Western world at least, the first great philosophical theist who, as a philosopher, really believes in the God of religion” (Hartshorne 1950...
[WMW], 31). Similarly, Hartshorne affirmed the God of religion “as a philosopher.”

Though they wrote as generic philosophers, Whitehead and Hartshorne grew up in specifically Christian homes. Whitehead’s father was an Anglican clergyman. Hartshorne’s father was an Episcopal minister. Like the two famous Anglicans—John Wesley and Charles Wesley, the two famous philosophers with Anglican connections inspired many followers among Wesleyan theologians, including John B. Cobb Jr. and Schubert M. Ogden. In the introduction to *Thy Nature & Thy Name Is Love: Wesleyan and Process Theologies in Dialogue* (2001) editors Bryan P. Stone and Thomas Jay Oord attribute the contemporary Wesleyan embrace of process thought to the continuing influence of early Wesleyan thinking about grace and reason. Also, commitment to rigorous scholarly inquiry continues to be characteristic of the Methodist movements inspired by a few methodical-disciplined Anglican students at Oxford University. For Wesleyan and like-minded theologians, philosophy (including logic, math, science, and scientific accounts of creation and evolution) is no necessary affront to rightly Christian theology. According to Ogden’s *On Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), Christian theology presupposes philosophical theology and independent philosophical inquiry.

The existence of a Philosophy Group with an Ethics Section (with a subsection on metaphysics) at an international Whitehead Conference is consistent with the hopes of Cobb, Schroeder, Gray, Belaief, and others. In contrast to the year 1981 when all thirteen contributors to the Cobb-Schroeder collection were from schools of theology or departments of religion, in 2006 seven of twelve contributors to the Ethics Section came from philosophy departments. Also at the 2006 Whitehead Conference, there was a Science Group that included whole sections of papers on areas concerned with social ethics, including papers on education, social science, political science, and law (including human rights and rights of nature). Plus, there were strategic sessions on “Process Thought and the Sustainability Discourse” and “Process Thought and the Social Sciences.” Thus, the 2006 Whitehead Conference demonstrated that philosophers and scholars from many various sciences are now finding recourse to Whiteheadian ethics.

The Ethics Section included three subsections: (I) “Metaphysics of Morals and Moral Theory,” (II) “Evaluating Moral Practices,” and (III) “Ethics and Aesthetic Values.” Each subsection allowed time for four presentations—twenty-five minutes per presentation, followed by twenty-five minutes of panel discussion.
The Tuesday morning 04 July 2006 subsection on (I) “Metaphysics of Morals and Moral Theory” included these presentations: (1) “Does Morality Presuppose God?” by Franklin I. Gamwell, (2) "Process Philosophy and Ethical Theory” by John W. Lango, (3) "Ethics' Dipolar Necessities and Theistic Implications" by Duane Voskuil, and (4) "Neoclassical Cosmology and Matthew 22:36-40; Necessary Cosmological Distinctions Imply Theological Ethics" by Theodore Walker Jr.

The Tuesday afternoon 04 July 2006 subsection on (II) “Evaluating Moral Practices” included: (5) "Testing Technology with Whitehead" by Frederick Ferré, (6) "Hope for the Earth: A Process Eschatological Eco-ethics for South Korea" by Seung Gap Lee, (7) "Compassion, Creativity, and Form: the Ethics of Institutions" by Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, and (8) "Beyond Enlightened Self-Interest Revisited: Process Philosophy and the Biology of Altruism" by George W. Shields.

The Wednesday morning 05 July 2006 subsection on (III) “Ethics and Aesthetic Values” was scheduled to include: (9) "Creativity and the Depths of Ethical Seriousness" by Stephen T. Franklin, (10) "Is There an Ethics of Creativity?" by Brian G. Henning, (11) "Art of Life and the Ethics of Life Forming from a Process Perspective" by Mihály Tóth, and (12) “Being and Value” by Guorong Yang. Shortly after the conference program booklet was printed, the conference website indicated Yang’s scheduled presentation was changed from “Being and Value” to “Virtues and Norms.” Instead of “Being and Value” or "Virtues and Norms," on 05 July 2006 Yang presented "Problems and Perspectives in the Emerging of Global Society." Regrettably, Franklin was absent.

Part One—“Ethics Section Abstracts”—of this collection contains the original Ethics Section abstracts. Abstracts were submitted online as part of the pre-conference registration process, then printed in the conference program booklet, and posted on the conference web site at <www.unisalzburg.at/whiteheadconference/>. Many abstracts were submitted months before the registration deadline of 15 May 2006. Some of these pre-Salzburg abstracts differ from the July 2006 Salzburg papers. Obviously, after the abstracts were submitted, some of us continued working on our papers, and thereby created differences, including a few major differences. Also, one contributor—George W. Shields—added a new abstract because his contribution to this collection is a post-Salzburg reworking of his Salzburg paper, not the original Salzburg paper from which his pre-Salzburg abstract was abstracted. Another contributor—Guorong Yang—presented a wholly different paper, and added the abstract for that paper. Thus, Part One includes twelve pre-Salzburg abstracts, some with modest changes, plus two subsequent abstracts. These
fourteen Ethics Section abstracts are placed in subsections (I, II, and III) and numbered (1-12, plus 8b and 12b) according to the Salzburg schedule.

Part Two—“Ethics Section Papers”—includes eight papers originally presented to the Ethics Section in Salzburg, plus Shields's post-Salzburg paper. Shields's original paper and one other Ethics Section paper—Frederick Ferré’s paper—are printed in another collection of Salzburg papers compiled by conference organizers Franz Riffert and Hans-Joachim Sander. One of the Ethics Section presentations took the form of a directed discussion of themes indicated in the abstract. By design, that presentation by John W. Lango was not a paper. One scheduled presenter was absent, and submitted no paper. Hence, in the Ethics Section, twelve pre-Salzburg abstracts were followed by eleven Salzburg presentations, of which ten were papers, of which nine are printed here (eight as originally composed, plus one reworked and retitled). These nine papers are grouped (three papers in each of three subsections—I, II, III) and numbered (1-12, minus 2, 5, and 9) according to the Salzburg schedule.

Theodore Walker Jr.
"Hope for the Earth: A Process Eschatological Eco-ethics for South Korea" by Seung Gap Lee was presented to the Ethics Section in Salzburg in July 2006, then printed in *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth (Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquia)* (Bronx, New York: Fordham University Press, March 2007) edited by Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller. With permission, it is reprinted here.

"Is There an Ethics of Creativity?" by Brian G. Henning was presented to the Ethics Section in Salzburg in July 2006, then printed in *Chromatikon II: Yearbook of Philosophy in Process* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Presses universitaires de Louvain, 2006) edited by Michel Weber and Pierfrancesco Basile. With permission, it is reprinted here.
ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations (acronyms), drawn from *Process Studies* and used in some of the Ethics Section abstracts and papers, concern books by Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) and Charles Hartshorne (1897-2000).

### Alfred North Whitehead

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<th>Title</th>
<th>Edition Details</th>
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<tr>
<td>ESP</td>
<td><em>Essays in Science and Philosophy</em></td>
<td>New York: Philosophical Library, 1947</td>
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<td>OT</td>
<td><em>The Organization of Thought</em></td>
<td>London: Williams and Norgate, 1917</td>
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<tr>
<td>PM</td>
<td><em>Principia Mathematica</em></td>
<td>2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929</td>
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<tr>
<td>PNK</td>
<td><em>An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Natural Knowledge</em></td>
<td>Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1919</td>
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Charles Hartshorne


WAM  Wisdom as Moderation: A Philosophy of the Middle Way.


Subsection I - Metaphysics of Morals and Moral Theory

Abstracts
DOES MORALITY PRESUPPOSE GOD?

FRANKLIN I. GAMWELL

This paper argues that an affirmation of God’s existence as the universal and thus necessary being or individual is implied by any moral affirmation or denial. This thesis is defended through an engagement with its major contemporary challenge, namely, the view, occasioned by linguistic and hermeneutical successors to the subjective turn of Kant, that all understandings are mediated by a language or lifeworld and thus meaning and truth is in all respects circumscribed by some context within the human adventure. Having argued that this view is pragmatically self-contradictory, the paper seeks an alternative account of human understanding and, specifically, moral evaluation that gives due appreciation to the transparent importance of language or lifeworld and thus to learning and reflection on learning. This account turns on a distinction between explicit understandings mediated by language or learning, on the one hand, and, on the other, an implicit understanding of the moral law constitutive of human understanding as such. Understanding of the moral law, I continue, must be understanding of its ground, which may be called metaphysical in the broad sense. Further, the ground of morality must include metaphysical conditions in the strict sense because morality requires a comprehensive good. In turn, a comprehensive good requires a universal and thus necessary being or individual.
PROCESS PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICAL THEORY

JOHN W. LANGO

One of Whitehead's remarks suggests that he should be classified as an ethical particularist or an ethical relativist: "The notion of one ideal arises from the disastrous overmoralization of thought under the influence of fanaticism, or pedantry" (PR 84). However, I shall argue that his metaphysics is compatible with the metaethical thesis that ethical judgments are universalizable. On the other hand, because a conception of time is fundamental to his metaphysics, I shall defend the metaethical thesis that ethical judgments are temporalizable. A key task is to show how temporalizability is coherent with universalizability. A general goal is to illustrate how process philosophy might contribute to ethical theory.
ETHICS’ DIPOLAR NECESSITIES
AND THEISTIC IMPLICATIONS

DUANE VOSKUIL

Every value judgment must consider both the ‘is’ and the ‘ought.’ Each moment of reality is a dipolar whole, a creating subject-whole grasping its factual casual past as object-parts within itself while evaluating its possible outcomes against an abstract, conceptual standard, a necessary characteristic within itself. An argument is presented that the conceptual standard must be metaphysically grounded, that is, a characteristic necessarily found in every moment of existence. Five concepts of purported metaphysical generality are presented, without which ethical theory would fail to make sense: Two are necessities exhibited by the facts inherited by every moment of reality: Creative Freedom and Making a Difference; two others are necessities concerning the value of facts, namely, the Value Standard itself and the Principle of Co-Equal Values; and one expresses the global necessity of Dipolarity, that wholes can only evaluate their own actual and possible factual parts.

The principles necessary to make sense of value judgments imply theism, specifically neoclassical theism. Theism is either the only way reality is conceivable, or theism is meaningless since theism is not a contingent possibility. Frank Gamwell’s similar conclusion in The Divine Good, is generally supported except for his belief that Creativity is the ultimate principle of value (182/3). Creativity is the means to the ultimate end of Beauty or aesthetic richness. Creativity is neutral to the positive-negative value scale except in the most attenuated sense of ‘something is better than nothing,’ but since ‘nothing’ is meaningless, being or coming-to-be in some way or other is on the ‘is’ side of the ‘is-ought’ contrast.

One cannot argue from the necessity of some creative freedom, to one ‘ought’ to have more freedom or creativity since, apart from the divine, freedom may be used to create ugliness. ‘Unsurpassable Ugliness’ as a divine attribute is rationally meaningless, but the necessity for Beauty to be unsurpassably fulfilled every moment can lay the basis for Beauty as creativity’s ultimate purpose which, as a principle, is uniquely ubiquitous, and as such is the principle that ought to be fulfilled.
NEOCLASSICAL COSMOLOGY AND MATTHEW 22:36-40: NECESSARY COSMOLOGICAL DISTINCTIONS IMPLY THEOLOGICAL ETHICS

THEODORE WALKER JR.

Cosmology implies theology and ethics. Necessary cosmological distinctions include distinctions between the all-inclusive whole of reality, all the parts of reality, some part(s) of reality, and no part of reality. These necessary cosmological distinctions, plus the distinction between individual and nonindividual, imply distinct options for conceiving of the reality of God. Conceiving that God is the all-inclusive whole of reality—"the one universal individual" (Hartshorne, Reality as Social Process 1953, 176)—is the option embraced by neoclassical panentheism. Conceiving that "God" is a religious name for all the parts of no whole of reality (no universal individual) is the option defining classical pantheism. Conceiving that God is some special part(s) of no whole of reality (no universal individual) is the option defining classical theism. Conceiving that God is not part of reality, and that there is no whole of reality (no universal individual), is characteristic of atheism. A neoclassical account of variations in reality inclusiveness implies a fundamental distinction in values—the ultimate value of "the one all-inclusive whole of reality" (Ogden, Perkins Journal, Spring 1984, 21) distinguished from the many included lesser values of partly inclusive realities. These cosmologically distinct (and inseparable) values are consistent with the values distinguished (and emphatically not separated by Jesus) in the two great commandments: the value-love appropriate to God ("all") distinguished from the value-love appropriate to neighbors (some), enemies (some), and self (some).