

## ON THE MEANING OF 'REALITY'

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We have to search whether nature does not in its very being show itself as self-explanatory. By this I mean that the sheer statement of what things are, may contain elements explanatory of why things are.<sup>1</sup>

[P]hilosophic truth is to be sought in the presuppositions of language rather than in its express statements. For this reason philosophy is akin to poetry, and both of them seek to express that ultimate good sense which we term civilization.<sup>2</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** Modern physics has revealed the intractability of the problem of interpretation in so-called 'exact' science, thus vindicating, at least in part, A. N. Whitehead's highly unorthodox non-modern naturalism. For his attempt to rescue life from modern self-styled naturalists points to the need for a would-be naturalist to 'let the dialectic go,' as Victor Lowe put it. That is, to enlist the 'method' of 'imaginative generalization' as the proper way to do speculative metaphysics. Whitehead's reasonings thus in effect illustrate a 'living' (or 'artful') reason that renders otiose his elaborate attempt in *Process and Reality* to construct a systematic, comprehensive theory of actuality based upon a formal categorial scheme. For his writings actually show how to frame a vitalistic metaphysics based upon a metaphysical imaginary that revolves about the most salient characteristics of a wisely ensouled human self.

**KEYWORDS:** A.N. Whitehead; Imaginative generalization; Vitalistic metaphysics; Metaphysical

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York, Free Press, 1967, hereafter referred to as SMW), p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York: Free Press, 1968, hereafter referred to as MT), Preface.

imaginary; Modern science

**i. The problem of interpretation in modern science grows ever** murkier as science `progresses,' especially in those areas of modern physics and biology which aim to explain life itself. Some moderns even dream of a scientific theory of Everything. Doubts as to the good sense of this lofty ambition not only put into question the popular hope that all interesting natural phenomena of the macro-world can be explained in terms of what goes on at the level of the micro-physical world. So doubts as to good sense of this popular presumption provide would-be nonmodern (i.e., non-scientific) naturalists with an unignorable challenge: to find a more appropriate way to think sensibly about the curious business called thinking. For it is hardly obvious that this is an activity capable of being `explained' adequately in terms of physical brain-processes since it is bound up with the perennial puzzle of the meaning of meaning itself.

This longstanding puzzle has recently been exacerbated by some of the more striking advances in modern science. Such as that which has emerged in micro-physics. The puzzling existence of `quantum phenomena' puts into question the appropriateness of the orthodox language of interpretation used in modern science; that is, the one that arose in tandem with the very useful Newtonian approach to natural science. That this language is wholly unsatisfactory for natural philosophy is shown by, for instance, the results of Young's two-slit experiment which not only puts paid to the Newtonian conception of matter as composed of inert and eternally existent bits of immutable `stuff.' What appears to behave in a particle-like manner in certain experimental set-ups appears essentially wave-like in other setups. Hence it may make much more sense to speak of `reality' not in terms of an ultimately `solid' ground of Being but rather in terms of interleaved, dynamical entities whose interdependence defies systematic elucidation.

In any event, the would-be nonmodern naturalist might well wonder why he/she should think that specialized investigators who deploy precise logico-mathematical methods of reasoning enjoy a frequently unquestioned authority. Why not think that the perennial question of what reality `really is' alludes to a world comprised of indissociable relationships between different forms of `minding' and `mattering'?

How to illuminate this very vague idea is perhaps the real problem facing the would-be non-modern naturalist. This does not require a blanket denial of the importance of the contributions to an understanding of the worlding of the world by science *tout court*. On the contrary, one of the more important and reliable achievements of modern physics, in Whitehead's view, is that

[p]hysical science has reduced nature to activity, and has discovered abstract mathematical formulae which are illustrated in these activities of nature.<sup>3</sup>

**2. If so, the first lesson of modern physics is that a dynamic picture** of the worlding of the world is required; one that elicits a dance of meaning-making in a context outlined by the premodern distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. If modern physics indicates that this dance is comprised of a complexly interwoven tapestry of vibratory activities, is not the real difficulty a matter of language: of how to describe a constantly changing complex of mutually influential connectivities that link different forms of 'minding' and 'mattering'?

This rough image of a dynamic tapestry of psycho-physical relationships is, however, not easy to think about, for it may be one of Whitehead's most important insights that

[m]ind is inside its images, not its images inside the mind. I am immersed in a topic of mathematics, not the reverse. We are actors in scenes, not the scenes inside us.<sup>4</sup>

That is to say, if the key to understanding the natural activity of 'minding' lies in the mysterious business of imaging, it is highly significant that imaging itself is an activity that is accorded prime importance by indigenous thinkers. They suggest that the idea of a sentient organism refers at bottom to a living cosmos suffused with a plurality of various forms of making sense, among which a capacity for imaging stands out.

The implication of the above remarks is that would-be naturalists who seek explanations for natural phenomena must accept in the first instance that it is a fatal error to try to separate the psychical from the physical aspects of sentient

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<sup>3</sup> MT,166.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by W. E. Hocking (from a recollected conversation) in 'Whitehead on Mind and Nature,' in P.A. Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead* (New York: Tudor Publication, 1951), pp. 383-404, esp. p. 385.

forms of organization. The real difficulty in doing natural philosophy revolves about the question of how to tell a coherent and adequate story about the restless production of a 'reality' which is far from being captured by the traditional notion of a static state of eternal Being. What actually happens to exist 'now' is impossible to pin down exactly. It rather refers to a continually shifting assemblage of dynamic processes of Becoming whose essential nature refers in the first instance to a world which appears to be continually making and re-making itself--for reasons unknown.

Yet it is not out of the question that this 'making' is infused with a *telos* that involves, for instance, an urge to make ever more sophisticated or profound meanings. The implication is that the system-loving modern have traduced their own quest for rational understanding in choosing to discount the thinking of indigenous peoples who value all aspects of their concrete experiencing. One might thus begin by looking for important hints as to the most important aspects of human sensibility in the imagery they use to illuminate the naturing of nature. But if this is so, it is no small thing that there may be much wisdom in the words of native languages that has escaped erasure by abstract concepts.

But if this is so, where else could the natural philosopher begin to try to elucidate the naturing of nature except in a mute state of wonder, just as Whitehead suggests? And where else end but in a similar state with no guarantee that the apparently unquenchable human desire for understanding has been well served?<sup>5</sup>

In any case, this line of thought indicates that the worlding of the world can only be partly 'explained' in terms of a cosmic drama involving a flux of changing forms of relationship between material and immaterial entities. Complete understanding may in fact be impossible since it is well known that attempts to separate the activities of minding from those of mattering in some natural form of organization yield nothing but a corpse.

On the other hand, those strangely vital mental events called intuitions and insights bespeak sensitive body-minds which, as part of the naturing of nature, are conceivably capable of being in some sense in harmony with it. However, the difficulty in saying something 'true' about what is going on in the world cannot

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<sup>5</sup> See, the masterful essay on "Understanding" in Chapter Three of MT.

be over-estimated, as indigenous thinkers remind us. For they indicate that the strange business of thinking itself is a total mystery.

It is thus worth noting that the methods of education of indigenous peoples are based on figuratively infused stories about the naturing of nature.

But if this is so, it is also not hard to think that so-called 'primitive' nature-cultures which lack systematic methods of reasoning may be in a better position to tell us something important about what is actually going in the world. It is not incidental that the kind of reasoning employed by indigenous reasoners usually involves the free use of myths and metaphors. These common forms of literary expression may in fact enable thinkers to do proper justice to an ever-changing 'reality' comprised of both material and immaterial aspects of a vast cosmic dance of meaning-making. Since such a dance can only be guided by more or less sensitive aesthetic sensibilities, as Whitehead in fact suggests; that is as a search for understanding that involves a more or less fruitful interplay of imaging which renders the human quest for knowledge of 'reality' into a kind of Adventure of Ideas.

**3. At this point we come face to face with the unorthodox 'axiom of empiricism'** that Whitehead is proposing and which lends support to the claim that some indigenous thinkers have the ability to intuit important truths about reality. Such thinkers tend however to be maligned on account of lacking systematic means to justify their intuitions. As for those supposedly more rational and disciplined moderns who pay no attention to the emotional side of their experiencing, it is in order to wonder whether they have seriously traduced their own desires to reason rationally. Perhaps they most seriously undermine this aim when they downgrade the moral/ethical feelings of concern that accompany much of what human beings experience.

Not only do many indigenous thinkers believe that they dwell in a moral universe; they also indicate a predilection for relativistic thinking that suggests they may be better nonmodern rationalists than most moderns. So in view of the mounting evidence that the presumably civilized nature-culture of the West is anything but rational, for it is blithely leading the whole world towards an abyss, it is not going too far to say that a radical examination of the idea of good thinking is long overdue. And that the need to first overcome the fatal constraints the moderns have put on reason is to regard all highly abstract notions as possible

attractors of a subversive unwisdom. This is most evident, according to Nietzsche, in the tendency to force serious thinkers to adopt narrow perspectives.

Indeed, according to him the moderns tend to endorse a hegemonic unwisdom since they foster a culturally endorsed 'educated stupidity' by forcing thought to practice what Nietzsche calls 'conceptual idolatry.' Thus forcing thought to adhere to narrow perspectives, a kind of stupidity is institutionalized which cab described as a perverse way to foster understanding.

It is thus highly significant that Whitehead concludes his philosophical investigations with the observation that 'as we think, we live.'<sup>6</sup> He might have added, in the light of the mindless tendency of the moderns to strip nature of its 'quicknesses,' that 'as we live we likewise think.' Thus the would-be nonmodern who laments the world-narrowing tendencies of modern reason might do well to ponder Nietzsche's views on the value of wisdom---which is necessary, he suggests, for setting limits to knowledge-seeking.

His charge that modern education involves the teaching of a kind of stupidity thus alludes to a system of cultivating unwisdom that has led to growing stores of ingenious methods of destruction that have resulted in nuclear weapons capable of destroying all life on earth. By contrast, an indigenous respect for life itself bespeaks an attitude of mind that is urgently in need of being cultivated. It is thus no small thing that such an attitude seems to be encouraged in most indigenous collectivities who imply that good thinking *tout court* depends mainly on acquiring a certain wisdom when journeying through life. They herewith allude to the importance of considering the health of the souls involved in would-be rational thinking.

It is thus no small thing that one of Whitehead's most important observations that bear on the question of the proper way to do natural philosophy concerns the immaterial side of thinking. It is by no means insignificant, in other words, that he declares (in the Preface to *Science and the Modern World*) that in philosophy 'the spiritual precedes the material.' He herewith implies that it is necessary for the would-be natural philosopher to first cultivate 'a proper sense of the sacred' in order to do justice to the 'quicknesses' of life.

That is to say, it is not an anomaly that in a treatise on the philosophy of

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6 MT, p. 63.

science, in which he aims to elucidate the esoteric results of quantum theory and relativity physics, Whitehead assigns a good deal of space to certain so-called Romantic poets. Referring in particular to William Wordsworth and Percy Shelley as rebels against scientific materialism who are protesting on behalf of value, he indicates that his own rebellion might well be called a protest on behalf of spirit.

**4. The foregoing remarks do not however amount to a blanket denial** of the value of systematic methods of reasoning. But in praising Wordsworth for his references to 'haunting presences' in nature and Shelley for his allusions to 'the secret springs' of thought, Whitehead is gesturing towards a highly unorthodox view of good reasoning. Few scientific materialists, however, are likely to endorse his evocation of Spirit. Their methods, as Whitehead in fact maintains, save a good deal of time and energy; but at what cost? No doubt thinking is very hard work, perhaps the hardest work there is. It is just that this saving of energy comes at a great cost for it requires the suppression of those moments of experiencing which include more or less strong emotions.

Hence would-be nonmodern naturalist might profit hugely from attending closely to indigenous story-telling. Hence one of the first things a would-be non modern naturalist has to overcome is the modern tendency to assume that the imaginative productions of minding are irrelevant and unnecessary distractions. This may be a fatal mistake since as indigenous thinkers hold, these involve emotions that may be sure signs of spiritual powers in nature.

In any case, it is somewhat ironical that Whitehead might at one time have been counted as a leader in the company of modern naturalists on account of his outstanding contributions to the 'exact' sciences. He is however especially critical of the sensationalist approach to perception which links genuine cognition solely to what is delivered up by the bodily senses. He thus condemns John Locke for promoting the sensationalist view of perception while at the same time praising him for the 'admirable accuracy' of his insights.<sup>7</sup>

Whitehead affirms in particular the 'rightness' of Locke's claim that a perception

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<sup>7</sup> Whitehead neatly summarizes the difficulty in overcoming the hegemony of sensationalism when he notes that 'pure sense perception does not provide the data for its own interpretation.' MT, p. 133.

includes in it some kind of relation--- a relation to action or change; as, indeed, which of our ideas, of what kind soever, when attentively considered, does not?<sup>8</sup>

He seems moreover particularly impressed by Locke's allusion to the relational powers that must be inherent in the ability to think, powers that he describes as both active and passive. That is, he suggests that observers and observed may not be completely foreign to one another; that veridical perceptions manifest a kind of 'elective affinity' that suggests two-way negotiary relationships in which subjects and objects do not really stand apart and alien to one another.

Whitehead reads Locke, in short, as claiming that 'the problem of perception and the problem of power are one and the same.'<sup>9</sup> Locke can thus be credited with opening up the possibility that to perceive is to engage in a two-way meeting of elements of sensibility that bring into play both passive and active natural powers, not all of which need pertain to the material side of 'reality.' That is to say, he opens up the possibility that different perceivers not only 'see' different realities, they tend to participate in unchoreographed dances of meaning-making that involve more or less spiritually sensitive actors spontaneously capable of responding to each other's immaterial as well as practical interests.

For the moment, however, it is enough to assume that perception can be viewed as a shifting assemblage of interacting natural powers that vary according to current circumstances and the interests of the species of organism involved. It is thus no small thing that in his later theory of actuality, Whitehead chooses as the 'glue' that holds the world together the idea of a generalized human perception which he calls a 'prehension.'

It is thus also worth noting that a similar situation is invoked by Gilles Deleuze whose ontology of 'event-encounters' is close kin to Whitehead's ontology of 'experience-events.'<sup>10</sup> Both philosophers thus proffer event-ontologies which depict a world of interacting, more or less vital, extended events that cannot be reduced to punctiform none-entities.

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8 See Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (1929), corrected edition, eds. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherbourne (New York: Free Press, 1978), hereafter referred to as PR), pp. 51-60.

9 Or as Whitehead puts it, the sort of perceptual activity taking place attests to a complicated two-way action in which 'the power of one actual entity on the other is simply how the former is objectified by the constitution of the other.' See PR, p. 58.

10 I discuss Deleuze's major metaphysical work, *Difference and Repetition*, in which he sets out his vitalistic ontology of event-encounters, in Chapter 7 of my PRPS.



Holding that the key to framing an adequate idea of cognition lies in the trope of 'complicity,' Deleuze in fact elicits a conception of human minding as a natural part of an extremely complex cosmic activity that calls for a highly unorthodox theory of perception. That is, a connected world that at bottom consists of interlinked, dynamic states of Becoming rather than an essentially mindless, eternally static state of Being.

**5. A picture of the world as a cosmic interplay of different forms of sensibility** exemplifying an unimaginably complex web of inter-linked events proposed by Whitehead and Deleuze can be illuminated using the extremely vague idea of concern. Indeed, Whitehead expressly links the key idea of an actual entity to feelings of concern. He states, for instance, that an actual entity should be regarded in the first instance as 'an activity of concern in the Quaker sense of that term.'<sup>11</sup>

Feelings of concern are herewith elicited as the impetus driving the perhaps innumerable natural powers that are involved in the becoming of a new natural entity. Hence the notion of a natural power also needs to be placed near the forefront of the search for a truly nonmodern natural philosophy. Indeed, Whitehead expressly states that

power is the basis of our notions of substance....Our experience starts with a sense of power, and proceeds to the discrimination of individualities and their qualities. [As a consequence] actuality is in its essence composition. Power is the compulsion of composition.<sup>12</sup>

The idea that generalized perceptions indicate that various natural powers hold the world together is also implicit in Whitehead's early attempt to define a 'natural entity.' Here he enlists the idea of 'sense-awareness' that does not presuppose the existence of sense organs. For in his early *Concept of Nature* he evokes localized 'percipient events' that are capable of 'recognizing' certain relevant 'objects of significance.'

The common, everyday assumption that we live in one and only one world is here elaborated as a complex network of dynamically interacting natural powers (which must include powers of choosing, deciding, judging, and so on) that decide

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<sup>11</sup> MT, p. 167.

<sup>12</sup> MT, 119.

the worth of what presents itself as in need of attention. The upshot is an image of a dance of inter-communicating, more or less astute, meaning-makers whose essential nature, As Deleuze intimates in the title of *Difference and Repetition*, may well be vibratory. So it seems worth noting in passing that most native nature-cultures accord to rhythms and patterns (that is, assemblages of differences and repetitions) an important place in their sacred ceremonies and rituals.<sup>13</sup> This factor of sensibility perhaps indicates an intuitive awareness that however you choose to depict 'reality' it must generally elicit the image of a complex dance of assemblages of differences and repetitions.

So let us just assume that the would-be non-modern naturalist might begin again with the assumption that every living organism possesses a species-specific set of natural powers for making its own peculiar kind of sense. Such is the primary assumption behind Deleuze's ontology of event-encounters that is based on the assumption that an adequate naturalism must enlist a doctrine of faculties. Such an assumption is not only compatible with the existence of more or less commensurable 'realities' of different nature-cultures. It also elicits a rough image of nature as a process of making and re-making itself, for reasons unknown. However, this does not mean that all this cosmic activity is without purpose.

But to what end could such an ongoing process be directed if not towards ever more complex forms of meaning-making? It is true that any exercise of meaning-making elicits an at least vague *telos*. Hence world-making *tout court* may generally be aimed not at some definite goal but rather for something 'deeper' in the sense of better capacities for dealing with the many exigencies and unpredictable contingencies that typically arise in attempts to make sense of it. Furthermore, nothing warrants the common assumption that the worlding of the world is either completely chaotic or is developing smoothly along calculable and/or predictable lines. The restlessness of the cosmos, in other words, need not have a definite origin nor a clearly identifiable end.

On the contrary, the idea of a vague *telos* is just what one would expect if the world, as indigenous thinkers intimate, for it can be likened to a restless human mortal whose changing circumstances require a continual making and remaking of her/himself. Not being definable, the extreme vagueness of the notion of a self

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<sup>13</sup> See e.g. *Highwater*, pp. 150-51.

elicits a grand cosmic experiment that resembles an artistic attempt to create something new and worthwhile without the aid of a definite preconceived plan. Hence a cosmos that seems bent on producing ever more sophisticated ways of making meaning may bear witness to a desire for wisdom; that is, for an ever more profound knowledge of itself as a living sentient self.

Attesting to a constant impetus to survive, a living organism reflects in any case an inherent tendency to develop various strategies for survival---which, if achieved, entails a certain species-specific wisdom. Hence the intrinsic vagueness of the cosmic *telos* leaves plenty of room for the growth of a multi-faceted wisdom that is neither universal nor eternal; mistakes can always be made which may seriously degrade rather than steadily enhance extant forms of sensibility.

Hence given that the world does hold itself together by means of perceptual relationships, as the early Whitehead suggests, these may involve both material and/or immaterial acts of 'recognition.' For he proposes a rough picture of the naturing of nature comprised of inter-acting, inter-communicating 'percipient events' that are capable of 'recognizing' pertinent 'objects of significance' having relevance to their interests. One is thus led to wonder what else but a more or less wise soul could be responsible for 'right recognitions' that may be material or immaterial, or perhaps better, both at once.

Whitehead points out that the notion of 'percipient event' need not presuppose the existence of embodied sense organs. So if the meanings being made in a world of percipient events somehow involve natural powers of decision, judgment, choice and so on, they point towards an embodied and ensouled cosmos infused by a 'living reason.' That is a reason that is perhaps very like that which indigenous thinkers instinctively presume in their figurative methods of reasoning.

Indeed, Jamake Highwater suggests that the most inclusive and vital form of human reasoning may well be illustrated by those indigenous people who like certain 'modern artists' rely on their aesthetic feelings to guide them in their attempts to make 'good art.'<sup>14</sup> The implication is that the would-be nonmodern naturalist who is seeking a more inclusive and penetrating reason may have much

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<sup>14</sup> See Jamake Highwater, *The Primal Mind: Vision and Reality in Indian America* (New York: Meridian, 1981) who suggests that the most significant differences between different nature-cultures lie in their attitudes towards the activity of imaging.

to gain from studying the languages of indigenous peoples. Notably based not on systems of abstract concepts but rather concrete but elusive imagings, meanings that can only be captured by myths and metaphors.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps indigenous seekers of meaning just go a step further than most moderns and associate their strong emotions with spiritual powers in nature. They can thus be credited with cultivating an artful reason designed to take in nature and spirit at once; that is, in a kind of contemplation that admirers of modern art believe is capable of doing justice at once to both the immaterial and the material aspects of experiencing.

By contrast, the modern naturalist who is mesmerized by the powers of mathematical reasoning can be suspected of having submitted to a hubristic, god-like desire for absolute control of the worlding of the world. This desire, which seems to be intuitively eschewed by indigenous thinkers, indicates that one of the first steps that a serious would-be naturalist must take is to humbly acknowledge that the world may well be an unresolvable mystery.

It can however be partially illuminated through a certain kind of story-telling, which implies that the most interesting and important events in human experiencing may occur in the intersection of the realms of the imaginal and the conceptual.

**6. We thus begin to glimpse the way to deal with the burning question** of how best to do natural philosophy. As Deloria indicates, part of the difficulty lies in choosing a proper language for synthesizing and unifying all the best intuitions and insights that human investigators of all types happen to have uncovered/discovered. Thus since the problem of interpretation hangs over every attempt to make good sense, it is worth taking careful note of Victor Lowe's declaration that Whitehead is being strictly Whiteheadian when he describes the metaphysician as a seeker 'amid the dim recesses of his ape-like consciousness and beyond the reach of dictionary language, for the premises implicit in all reasoning.'<sup>16</sup>

Could it be that the most important feature of Whitehead's philosophy of

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<sup>15</sup> This claim is implicit in Whitehead's basic claim that 'philosophic truth is to be found in the presuppositions of language rather than in its express statements.' (MT, Preface). For these presuppositions may belong primarily to the realm of the imaginal.

<sup>16</sup> Victor Lowe, *Understanding Whitehead* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966), p. 367.

organism is not the formal categorial scheme he proffers in *Process and Reality* to support his very complicated discussion of actuality? More significant may be the various anthropomorphic images he enlists to illustrate his complex formal discussion. Indeed, Victor Lowe remarks that Whitehead is almost unique in his approach to natural philosophy since 'almost no-one is really willing to *let the dialectic go.*'<sup>17</sup> One might even go a step further and ask whether Whitehead lets the dialectic go far enough. For insofar as his attempt to provide a formal justification for his theory of actuality is based on an explicit categorial scheme, it does not seem insignificant that the one he proposes lacks a special slot for the notion of a natural power.

On the other hand, Whitehead frequently appears to enlist a kind of figurative reasoning which alludes to very common experiences of a sentient human self. He brings to mind the cryptic remarks of Heraclitus who, when asked how he came by his insights, replied that he had looked into himself. It is thus not incidental that Heraclitus declared that in order to understand one's own experiencing it is first necessary to cultivate a wise-enough soul.

As for how one might go about doing this, indigenous thinkers suggest that the trope of an ensouled human self may hold the key to understanding the worlding of the world. Any discussion of this conjecture seems however bound to be circular and inconclusive. However, Whitehead's frequent use of such anthropomorphic notions as 'desire' and 'feelings of satisfaction' suggest that his theory of actuality is ultimately based on a close study of his own all-too-human emotional self who happens to be moved by a desire for an ever more profound understanding of how the world actually goes.

That is to say, in short, Whitehead's formal presentation of his theory of organism seems best read as an insightful exercise in speculative metaphysics that enlists an artful reason guided not by strict rules of reason and/or laws of nature but rather by an anthropotropic metaphoric. That is, a metaphysical imaginary centered on the most salient features of an embodied and ensouled human self. If this is so, it is not at all hard to think a good many indigenous reasoners tell stories that attest to an intuitive realization that the best way to illuminate this 'living cosmos' is through the fashioning of certain myths and metaphors.

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<sup>17</sup> Lowe, p. 366.

In other words, it is not incidental that Vine Deloria Jr. stresses the fact that their thinking evidences an instinctive refusal to commit what Whitehead calls the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness. Deloria rather stresses the fact that indigenous thinkers tend to take seriously all aspects of their experiencing---even those that resist inclusion in their current stories about how the world goes. Thus Deloria suggests that indigenous modes of thought are paradigmatically rational in so far as they take the whole spectrum of human experiencing seriously. Which means they do not make serious thinking subservient to systems of lifeless notions that skirt mention of the emotional side of thinking.

But those who urge an aesthetic appreciation of mathematics still face the problem of how to illuminate the 'mattering of matter' inasmuch as the aesthetic side of the efficaciousness of mathematics pertains to the most elementary material forms of a cosmic activity that is comprised of various species of vibratory motion.<sup>18</sup> So the would-be nonmodem naturalist is still bound to wonder about the psychical aspects of this appreciation.

It thus seems worth noting that indigenous peoples would appear to be bent on incorporating the underlying rhythmic or vibratory character of physical existence in their rituals, ceremonies and dances. It is at least conceivable that they are instinctively emulating, if not repeating, rhythms and patterns of movement that reflect the most significant motions of a living cosmos. That some of these movements are spiritually significant is, as it happens, obliquely acknowledged by Whitehead who notes that the

energetic activity considered in physics is the emotional intensity entertained in life.<sup>19</sup>

**7. But without doubt this convoluted line of thought takes us deep into** the vast and unknown Middle Kingdom of sense-making where would-be naturalists must face up to a world which may be inherently unknowable. This is because the situation appears to call for a resurrection of the Heraclitean idea that only wise souls can understand their own experiencing. Since the idea of a

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<sup>18</sup> The allusion is to the ontology of Deleuze who in his book *Difference and Repetition* sketches an ontology of events exemplifying patterns of activity that are repetitions of differences that are not mainly mechanical since they are amenable to the insertion of novel differences into the repetitions.

<sup>19</sup> MT, p. 168.

wise soul has been made taboo by modern, supposedly more rational, modern naturalists, the lesson is that the would-be nonmodern naturalist must strive above all to overcome his/her suspicions/fear of metaphysics.

The problem is that the idea of a wise self capable of insights and intuitions is as obscure as an embodied soul. It is thus no small thing that Whitehead states as an 'axiom of empiricism' that 'all knowledge is derived from, and verified by, direct intuitive observation.'<sup>20</sup> This is a bold declaration that seems implicit in the belief of some indigenous thinkers that their main aim in journeying through life is the getting of wisdom.

This aim seems closely bound up with the view that a 'good education' is one that produces whole, integrated personalities.<sup>21</sup> As for the difficulties involved in this profoundly challenging task, it is worth recalling Nietzsche's claim, that serious inquiry is sooner or later obliged to enlist a 'mobile army' of figurative methods of reasoning. So it is also worth noting that literary critics have long since known that an especially cunning use of 'words of power' warrants speaking of a 'great text.' It thus seems highly significant that Whitehead also holds that the only available 'method' for doing metaphysics is 'philosophic generalization.' Since he maintains that another name for this 'method' is 'imaginative rationalization,' he in effect states that the sort of reasoning the would-be naturalist ought to cultivate is that which indigenous reasoners employ when choosing the myths and metaphors that illuminate the living cosmos in which they dwell.

Expanding upon this reference to the cognitive powers inherent in figurative reasoning, Whitehead elicits a kind of thinking wherein

words and phrases...[are]stretched towards a generality foreign to their ordinary usage; and however such elements of language be stabilized as technicalities, they remain metaphors mutely appealing for an imaginative leap.<sup>22</sup>

By thus tying the quest for understanding to an imaginative use/choice of 'words of power,' Whitehead underscores the need for the would-be naturalist to cultivate his/her poetic imagination. For 'good' metaphors and myths not only

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<sup>20</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York, Free Press, 1967), p. 177.

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., SR, p. 14 where Deloria summarizes how a life-time of experiencing ought to proceed to a stage of maturity where a person's life-history would illustrate a journey 'from information to knowledge to wisdom.'

<sup>22</sup> PR, p. 4.

enliven the expressive capacities of a language, they more importantly provide the necessary vehicles for expansion of meanings and deepening of understandings---either by uniting hitherto disconnected meanings or by providing a way to bring new meanings into the world.

The would-be naturalist in search of an appropriate figurative language is thus in a position not unlike that of a modern painter who deploys a kind of 'artful dialectic' that involves an emotionally-guided shuttling back and forth of a hand holding a paintbrush which is moving in tandem with a affectively attuned eye. He/she thus bears witness to a kind of unconscious ability to 'intuit' a kind of 'rightness' that is probably impossible to articulate discursively.

It is thus highly significant that Highwater associates indigenous 'visions' with the creative/critical work of modern artists while noting that indigenous peoples do not regard artists as a special class of citizen. All kinds of thinkers, in fact, indicate that it is their aesthetic feelings that keep them on track. This view is implicitly endorsed by Whitehead who decries the modernist desire for 'proof' as the hall-mark of good reasoning. Noting that the word 'proof' is just another word for 'self-evidence,' Whitehead implies that genuine understanding requires an especially well-prepared activity of minding that is perhaps not unlike that manifested by wise indigenous elders who do not attempt to explain how they can 'see' that some views about reality just happen to be 'good.'

**8. One of Whitehead's chief aims is to remedy the tendency of naturalists to assume that mind refers to a kind of organic machine that can churn out thoughts, feelings, ideas, and, *mirabile dictu*, images. He is even more opposed to the sanguine view of good reasoning which 'is completely dominated by the presupposition that mental functionings are not properly part of nature.'<sup>23</sup> Indeed, if 'minding' and 'mattering' are indeed indissociable aspects of the naturing of nature, it is not to discard hard to think of thinking itself as a spiritual activity. Indeed, when Whitehead claims, in the Preface to *Science and the Modern World*, that the spiritual takes precedence over the material, he is in effect advising the would-be nonmodern naturalist to step well back from any view of nature that is under the influence of the modern approach to mind which is under the sway of an imperialistic scientific ideology.**

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<sup>23</sup> MT, p. 156.



The naturing of nature, in other words, may involve a continual activity of balancing material and immaterial factors. The modern faith in science as capable of explaining everything worth explaining bespeaks, on the other hand, a dread of becoming mired in the sticky problems of metaphysics: a once-respectable branch of philosophy that appears to have become conflated with mysticism.

The irony is that this fear is partially justified since the complexity of human experiencing bespeaks a world comprised of a plurality of forms of energetic activity. But while the concept of energy certainly deserves to be accorded an important place in the class of important notions of natural philosophy, it is not obviously a metaphysically fundamental concept. It is better conceived as expressive of the general activity that pervades the worlding of the world. That is to say, energy, as ordinary experience bears witness, is 'real' only in the sense of alluding to a definite happening infused with a characteristic quanta of activity.<sup>24</sup>

Hence if one begins with the assumption that all organisms are complex assemblages of active forms of organization, the life of an organism can be viewed as comprised of an only more or less stable web of affectively guided relationships that link differently energized modes of existence. Hence the idea of a living, whole organism is a prime candidate for a fundamental notion in natural philosophy.

So it is worth noting that Whitehead initially referred to the fundamental representatives of the 'mattering of matter' as 'primates'; that is, very primitive organisms which, if not wholly alive are at least potential bearers of the 'quickness' inherent in Life. The possibility that the indigenous reverence for all aspects of the worlding of the world indicates that the notion of a living cosmos provides the most promising context in which to try to elucidate the naturing of nature. This approach, however, elicits a vague *telos*. Such a view may have long since been held by various indigenous thinkers whose awareness of the pervasiveness of change led them to assume that only certain figurative methods of reasoning can illuminate the world.

In any case, while this line of thought may well repel most modern naturalists,

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<sup>24</sup> 'Energy is merely the name for the quantitative aspect of a structure of happenings.' SMW, p. 102.

Whitehead shows that it is quite possible to develop a vitalistic metaphysics which accepts that vital forces for change are the principal feature of a nonmodern natural philosophy. He in fact is especially approving of the myth of *Timaeus* which he interprets as based on the metaphysical insight that change and transformation are everywhere manifested in nature in its drive towards novelty. He thus evokes the highly unorthodox notion of a self-creative cosmogenesis which contrasts sharply with Newton's *Scholium*--- in which the cosmos is made subservient to 'a wholly transcendent God' who has simply (for no apparent reason) created an 'accidental universe' out of nothing.<sup>25</sup>

Whitehead's acceptance of myth in general can also be regarded as consonant with Nietzsche's claim that a healthy culture requires 'vital illusions.' This phrase elicits the notion of a 'good myth' which is one that is essentially life-enhancing--unlike many of the myths that currently guide the nature-culture of the West. For this complacent hegemony-seeking collectivity has uncritically embraced the mind-numbing dogma of neo-Darwinism which promotes a de-vitalizing view of the naturing of nature. Accompanied by a despiritualizing scientific materialism, it has led the moderns to believe that the whole universe can be regarded viewed as a resource to be exploited for gain.

The evolutionary character of the naturing of nature indicates however a need for a much broader approach that might lead to a more satisfactory theory of cosmogenesis. And Whitehead indicates that this evolutionary cosmos can be regarded as a self-constructing assemblage of living entities, for as he puts it,

Self-realization is the ultimate fact of facts. An actuality is self-realizing, and whatever is self-realizing is an actuality.<sup>26</sup>

Put another way, the poet-philosopher S. T. Coleridge sums up the matter with the claim that 'whatever is, lives.'<sup>27</sup> This is a view the would-be nonmodern naturalist cannot ignore if he/she wishes to illuminate the ongoing production of a complex and dynamic assemblage of more or less sentient selves. That is, if he/she does not want to resort to the idea of a Grand OverSelf--a universal Overseer who is the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent reason for everything that happens.

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<sup>25</sup> PR, p. 95.

<sup>26</sup> PR, p. 222.

<sup>27</sup>See my PRPS, chapter 5.

Hence insofar as 'actual entities' are, as Whitehead holds, representatives of the 'really real,' their acts of self-making reflect a kind of concern for how the world is proceeding. The latter manifests a principle of creativity which evokes a natural potentiality for change that presupposes individualized creative powers in a cosmic project wherein Becoming supervenes over Being. The question of what the becoming of a self-constituting actual entity aims to achieve thus immediately confronts the would-be naturalist. So granting that 'reality' refers to a restless, complex interaction involving many natural powers, not least of which is a power capable of imagining what is not yet might still be, it would be better to speak of cosmogenesis than evolution. This involves powers that must work hand in hand with a power of remembering pre-existent states of being. The relentless activity of self-making is thus supportive of the indigenous view that the past experiencing of insightful ancestors is 'present' when trying to make sense of the world. Indeed, indigenous thinkers problematize the very idea of the 'present' since for them the 'past' is never really finished and done with.

They thus open wide the question of what might be the 'right' figurative means for telling stories about a cosmic movement that need have no definite beginning nor a final or ultimate end. Cosmogenesis, in other words, must be infused with a non-rigid telos which guides but does not dictate the melding of immaterial and material natural powers. This elicits a process that can be conceived as an artful meaning-making that aims not for ultimate truths but rather a certain wisdom. Hence it is highly significant that in his last book, *Modes of Thought*, Whitehead indicates that the extremely vague notion of a soul must first be rescued from oblivion since this representative of Spirit can be identified as the principal agency on the imaginative side of meaning-making. So if this is in fact the most important side of sensibility, what else but the power of imagination could be in charge of balancing the contributions of all the natural powers that are involved in the multitude of processes of sense-making?

For good sense or wisdom might be roughly defined as that which an especially healthy human soul is capable of producing in its lifelong efforts to deal properly with all the challenges it must face. Hence the importance of Deleuze's claim that a doctrine of faculties is necessary in natural philosophy.

Consider, then, the indigenous idea that a 'good education' (which aims to educate wise, well-integrated personalities) may be intuitively based on a firm belief

that all sense-making is dependent on the proper education and deployment of the powers of imagination in making sense of the world. The upshot would be a more or less plausible as well as adequate way of story-telling designed above all to encourage healthy imaginations in the young. For it seems a sad truth that even highly 'civilized' cultures, as Arendt has amply shown, are prone to betray this very virtue through fostering educational systems that actually subvert the development of young imaginations. This reflects the indigenous person's main task in journeying through life.

As for the getting of a little wisdom, if it is not hard to think that all human infants begin this task at birth, if not before. For regardless of their origins, all human infants appear to be endowed by nature with a latent linguistic faculty that may or may not be subsequently well educated by the 'methods' of education prevalent in that culture. By the same token, many indigenous nature-cultures are very likely at a definite advantage in this respect since their story-telling methods of education are well-suited to teach appropriate behaviour in respect to the encounters with the different kinds of personality each person will meet when journeying through life. That is, with the great variety of souls they will inevitably influence. Indeed, it may be that only by choosing the 'right' kind of story-telling that educators can avoid the normalization of the kind of unwisdom that Nietzsche associates with the systematic methods of modern reason. Not to mention the fostering of the 'banality of evil' that Arendt suggests tends to be quickly 'normalized' in nature-cultures that fail to properly cultivate the imaginations of the young.

For a good example of the aptness of Arendt's depiction of this failure, one need look no further than the putatively civilized American society that seeks global hegemony in the exercise of spiritual as well as secular powers. All the while blithely proceeding to institute globally a kind of hypocrisy that Nietzsche indicated would lead to the emergence of a new form of totalitarian government. It thus seems no accident that the degenerating culture of the West involved an attempt to destroy the native languages of indigenous nature-cultures by means of enforced assimilation. This destructive programme is ultimately soul-destroying, as Whitehead indicates when he claims that

the mentality of mankind and the language of mankind created each other....that

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the souls of men are the gift from language to mankind.<sup>28</sup>

The lesson for would-be nonmodern naturalists is that the world as we now find it bears witness to the absolute necessity for a rethinking of the meaning of good reasoning. And a recognition that a truly radical cure for a sick culture requires is to first recognize the importance of a wise choice of language when speaking about nature and all her creatures. This must be a language in which the human animal is able to humbly take its rightful place in an ongoing cosmogenesis wherein the ubiquity of change demands deep respect rather than fear. The question is, then, whether the would-be nonmodern naturalist may have enough world and time to develop a brave enough soul bent on having sufficiently well-cultivated powers of imagination to formulate life-enhancing values.

For when Whitehead sums up his critique of modern reason by noting that 'the mentality of mankind and the language of mankind created each other,' he not only forces us to face up to the ever-burning question---of how one might best to do natural philosophy? For Whitehead also provides reason to think that the natural languages developed in many indigenous nature-cultures may contain many gems of wisdom. For the idea of imaginative generalization can take into account the possibility that most native languages may be replete with hints as to what sort of imagery is most likely to take us as close to 'reality' as it is possible for human beings to get.

In any case, the indigenous quest for good sense can be regarded as anything but irrational. The members of indigenous nature-cultures may even deserve to be regarded, some of them anyway, as true representatives of '*homo sapiens*.' But the task of justifying this view is hardly easy insofar as it alludes to the wonderful human capacity to intuit 'truths' that suggest a more or less reliable ability to 'see' how the world actually goes.

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<sup>28</sup> MT, p.41.