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Science and Transphysical Worlds

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(WHITE)HEAD OVER HEELS:  
THE EROTIC SIDE OF PROCESS PHILOSOPHY

An important part of what is missing in our development and connection with the divine is a deep connection with the erotic. Process philosophy guides us through the erotic creating a deep connection with the eros that brings forth the creativity of the universe in every moment. A truly integral, holistic<sup>1</sup> approach to ourselves includes reverence for elements of the erotic and the following of our desires. For quite some time we have become comfortable identifying ourselves as spiritual beings; however, our inability to identify fully as sexual beings has hindered our ability to fully realize the divine within us. This dodging and belittling of the basic libidinal urges keeps us trapped in the superficial level of eroticism. I believe it has significantly stunted our development as spiritual beings. The process philosophy of Whitehead offers us a way to experience reality in its fully eroticized brilliance, showing us the consistency we crave in existence is actually found in the continual yearning for more.

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<sup>1</sup> I use integral in this paper to mean a balanced and comprehensive.

I was initially interested in how neuroscience and process philosophy intertwine as the way we perceive romantic love. However, the pull and yearning behind desire isn't just found within our bodies. Eros is everywhere and connects us deeply to the whole. Yet, for some reason or another we avoid it. To become fully balanced beings includes acknowledging and diving into this divine part of ourselves. The aspect that pulls us down into our depths of shame and shadow and on another level pushes us to new heights. A fully integral way of being celebrates sexuality, eros, and the erotic as bringing us closer to God.

### *EROS, EROTICISM, AND DESIRE*

It's important now to differentiate among the words sexuality, eros, and erotic, which are used in this paper with specific intention. I use sexuality throughout as a way to describe the way we experience the erotic and ourselves as sexual beings. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines "eros" as a part of love typified by passionate, intense desire for something, or someone. Plato in *The Symposium* states that lovers and philosophers seek truth through eros.<sup>2</sup> Philosophy being the love and desire for wisdom and wisdom considered the greatest of all virtues. According to Plato eros then becomes the desire for the greatest of goods. He goes on to describe it as more than just sexual expression, and instead a universal force that pushes everything into being.<sup>3</sup> In this sense it becomes anything that arouses attention or passion. Eros penetrates the world as desire for fulfillment in wholeness. Erotic, from the same word, would be

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<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, 83.

<sup>3</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, 83.

something, or someone, who arouses sexual desire. Eros drives eroticism to become more, to notice what hides behind its seemingly simple allure.

Eros and science have deep ties. For centuries we have explored how our bodies react and create “romantic love” through neuroscience, biology, and even psychology. What becomes obvious through these studies is how our bodies so easily mirror a deep inner and outer reflection - our bodily desire for sex mimicking the universe’s pulls towards creation. Brian Swimme speaks often of a cosmology overflowing with eros, when he describes Eros as the “attractive, binding energy of the Universe.”<sup>4</sup>

Swimme points to allurements towards life as eros. This process of surrendering to what seduces us activates and enlivens eros, moving us forward towards greater purpose. The same yearning and magnetism that created all entities in our universe. “By pursuing your allurements, we then bind the universe together; as if unity of the world rests on the pursuit of passion...”<sup>5</sup> If the same passion created the entire cosmos, we can only speculate the power it holds within us to cultivate connection with ourselves and therefore the all of existence.

The idea of a residual primeval force responsible for the creation of the physical universe also resides in the yogic concept of Kundalini.<sup>6</sup> It is here the wise serpent power rests within the lower chakra, the muladhara. The muladhara chakra houses not only kundalini but also the fundamental primal erotic passion of life and all survival

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<sup>4</sup> Swimme, *The Universe is a Green Dragon*, 49.

<sup>5</sup> Swimme, *The Universe is a Green Dragon*, 49.

<sup>6</sup> Stovanksy, *Eros, Consciousness, and Kundalini*, 83.

instincts. Through yogic and meditative practices we are able to arouse our kundalini drawing it up to our crown chakra, sahasrara, and come into contact with pure consciousness and oneness. While I was living at an ashram I heard people often describe Kundalini experiences are discussed similarly to the way people would describe an orgasm using adjectives such as sweaty, chills, or excitement.<sup>7</sup> For Kundalini yogis the identification with our “lower” instinctual self we are able to truly experience the divine.

We have two options when encountering eros and our desires - to express or repress it.<sup>8</sup> It shows up for many of us with similar conditioning as a decision between sin or purity. As if it is only a purely sexual yearning without a higher purpose or drive. Yet, sexuality and eros transform. The sexual revolution served its purpose in putting people in touch with their eroticism. It didn't connect with something they were truly seeking - a relationship and striving towards the whole. Eroticism enters as a needing or wanting with a desire for fulfillment, pointing to something much larger than what we usually assume. However, with Kundalini and as I will discuss in my process philosophy comparison, it develops into an ever-opening gateway for the mystery of life and God. Eros can be amplified beyond the sexual and becomes the principle of connectedness, integration, and life. This great initiator, eros, has more concern with heightening the senses in order to intensify the satisfaction level than a simple consummation.

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<sup>7</sup> Sovatsky, *Eros, Consciousness, and Kundalini*, 27.

<sup>8</sup> Sovatsky, *Eros, Consciousness, and Kundalini*, 26.

Desire doesn't equate to fulfillment. As Brian Swimme says, "Desire is a path, not a destination."<sup>9</sup> The path of longing bridges our everyday lives with eros. It ignites us when the fires of desire are dimly lit. The bubbling inside of us should be honored and respected. Listening to it doesn't mean getting the object of desire.<sup>10</sup> Each craving shows us a bit more of where we want to go and how to get there. When watching a desire we notice how we judge it, and how we judge others based on their aching for something perceived to be outside of ourselves. Our desires hold pure potentiality and with it pure power. Process philosophy offers us a choice in the realization of our deepest yearnings and the choice to create.

### *PROCESS PHILOSOPHY AND WHITEHEAD*

Process philosophy, a form of metaphysics, blends the best of individual experience with science. Unlike the traditional modes of philosophy with Plato and Aristotle, positing permanent substances, process philosophy sees reality as modes of change without any fixed entities. Instead of life as ontology of being, it instead develops into ontology of becoming.<sup>11</sup> Inside of every moment everything constantly changes, coming in and out of existence. Every "thing" then actually would be a moment or occasion, and not a "thing" at all, a "matter" comprised of serially ordered events, and not physical objects, and also serially ordered sub-atomic matter.

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<sup>9</sup> Swimme, *Universe is a Green Dragon*, 27.

<sup>10</sup> Swimme, *Universe is a Green Dragon*, 65.

<sup>11</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 23.

Mathematician turned cosmologist/philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, wanted to integrate quantum ideas in order to make them understandable within the framework of human experience.<sup>12</sup> Underlying his work was the idea that for philosophy to be worthwhile, it must explain the connection among objective, scientific, and logical descriptions of the everyday world and those of subjective experience. Whitehead's unification of time, matter, events, and God proved to be somewhat divisive to the Christian traditions of his time. In part, this may be because of the connections Whitehead saw between his metaphysics and traditional theism. He grew up in a deeply religious family, his father a clergyman and his brother a bishop, which may account for his sometimes firm stance on faith.<sup>13</sup> According to Whitehead, religion craves permanence amid constant change, and attempts to make up for it. He believed there was indeed order to be found within existence, called the "primordial nature of God," but was against the permanence associated with such an entity.<sup>14</sup> For Whitehead the everything was in constant flux and that became its best quality. He also recognizes flux can only be coherent if there is an underlying something that does not change. He proposes such a "something" to be Creativity and the Primordial Nature of God.

Whitehead was impressed by the mysterious evolving universe, which in all of its chaotic randomness, seemed to possess a high degree of order. The universe consists

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<sup>12</sup> Weiss, *Science and Transphysical Worlds*, 66.

<sup>13</sup> Vetter. *Alfred North Whitehead*.

<sup>14</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 343.

of countless droplets of experience that occur and then disappear.<sup>15</sup> For Whitehead, reality existed as a dynamic process filled with structured events and “personally ordered societies” occurring successively. He explains his system as a “philosophy of organism” or an “organic philosophy,”<sup>16</sup> now more commonly referred to as process philosophy. Mutually dependent parts sustain the vital processes felt in every moment. Whitehead refers to the events of which the world is composed as “actual occasions.”<sup>17</sup> The entire universe occurs as occasions of experience, influenced by the past and building the future. These ever-evolving events informing our every thought and feeling. Feeling all there is, for “to be causally affected is to feel.”<sup>18</sup> For without particles, life, the Universe and everything consists of myriads of little passions moving toward each other. All the feelings have the same form: that of the human mind. Atoms, electrons, bodies and brick walls arise out of these emotions. Whitehead called this entire process the “creative advance.”<sup>19</sup>

### *CONCRESCING AND PREHENSIONS*

Other essentials of Whitehead’s philosophy include “prehensions” and “concrecence.”<sup>20</sup> Prehension explains the process when an actual entity grasps

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<sup>15</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 18.

<sup>17</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 18.

<sup>18</sup> Weiss, *Science and Transphysical Worlds*, 81.

<sup>19</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21.

<sup>20</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 17.

another entity as an object of its experience and therefore composes more complex drops of experience.<sup>21</sup> An example being when we notice something in our experience as influencing us or our experience. Whitehead describes prehensions as the mode in which we understand the world because to prehend something is to have a concrete concept of that thing. Our preheating of something, not merely thinking about it, or someone in a sense invites it into existence. This “sense” about something is a way of feeling the other’s experience.<sup>22</sup> Prehension also changes the actual constitution of the preheating subject, which becomes the beauty of its relationship. One entity has become forever changed by another entity.

Whitehead defines the becoming of entity, or actual occasion, as a “concrecence.” The converging of various aspects of experience into unison and at the moment when an occasion ends or moves into another. Whitehead defines a “satisfaction” as a final phase of “concrecence”<sup>23</sup> (or the process of fully integrated feeling) in which prehensions are incorporated into an existing unity. A “feeling” is the unification of an actual entity or occasion into the internal constitution of another. Through concrecence each actual entity is in the process of becoming another actual entity. Thus, the becoming of an actual occasion occurs through the building of prehensions and the satisfaction/concrecence is the attainment of its final actuality.

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<sup>21</sup> Weiss, *Science and Transphysical Worlds*, 73.

<sup>22</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, ??



Why then do events and entities even exist, and what is a final actuality?

Whitehead answers these fundamental questions about life with the idea of aim and God. The creation and completion of an actual occasion concrescing implies some sort of objective towards which all the experiences move. Whitehead's concept of an "aim" bridges material objects with "direction" from the divine.<sup>24</sup> In this sense life and every human, and therefore event, chooses and moves towards something, inspired by a purpose, or "aim"<sup>25</sup> as Whitehead calls it. The ongoing production of actual occasions, each of which has an aim of existence as a universal creative impulse, or "creative advance."<sup>26</sup> Creativity is the process of things coming into being, a principle everywhere and in everything. This aim towards creation is the same ambition pervading all living entities moving into wholeness with God.

### *WHITEHEAD'S GOD*

Whitehead says of God:

"Creation is a continuing process. Insofar as we partake of this creative process we partake of the divine, of God, and that participation is our immortality. Our true destiny as co-creator in the universe is our dignity and grandeur."<sup>27</sup>

In Whitehead's thought, God was the first creature of creativity, not the cause or be all end all.. The advance into novelty that pervades the universe, and God as the entity envisioning its pure potential. The universal creative impulse we experience as

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<sup>24</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 105.

<sup>25</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 67.

<sup>26</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21.

<sup>27</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 345.

actually “the gentle persuasion of movement towards God” and “living urge towards possibility”<sup>28</sup> Existing everywhere and creating continuously in us and around us. In this understanding, God's the potentiality of all existing actual occasions at all moments of their creation. God wants existence and further creativity and nudges us towards this path, as humans we decide whether or not to take it.

Every entity has the choice to actualize or refuse God's life-enhancing aim. God entices us to make creative choices, but does not eliminate our freedom to make them. This freedom of choice inherent in the way we as humans unfold our lives, choosing things that create more life or destroy it. Ways we align more closely with our unity or deny it. We make decisions that rule out other possibilities from reaching their further concrescence. We notice, or prehend, certain entities and ignore others. This process of creation and disappearance alters existence in every moment. In this system of thought nothing stays the same, not even God. God does not change, only adapts with and to the world's unfolding creativity. It is important to note, for Whitehead, the Primordial Nature of God does not change, but the Consequent Nature of God does. Existence never reaches completion and neither does God, for both are seized by the desire to continue moving forward in creativity. Divine reality is always in a mutually enhancing process with creation – the world and God rely upon each other to continue the progression. Interdependent and yet developing together.

### *EROTIC WHITEHEAD*

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<sup>28</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 344.

In *Adventures of Ideas*, which I found to be the most accessible read of Whitehead's works, he discusses in more detail his thoughts of eros and its relationship to God. Eros is the power in the universe urging toward the realization of ideals, and as such it plays a major role in his later work.<sup>29</sup> Whitehead defines eros as "the living urge towards all possibilities, claiming the goodness of their realization."<sup>30</sup> And God as "Eros urging towards perfection"<sup>31</sup> Whitehead points to Eros as leading to God, the creativity behind every creation. This interconnectedness of the divine and wholeness as desire and yearning for each other as the same entity. By following eros, we're on the path to God.

In process philosophy the yearning for fulfillment and concrescence is the only constant, even aims change depending on the grade of an occasion and each occasion having its own aim. If this is true, the Eros that puts us in touch with our longing becomes the thing to actually achieve, over and over again - perpetuating the desire for more creation and life. God changes constantly and connecting with unchanging power of eros keeps us moving towards divinity.

He calls his system a "philosophy of organism."<sup>32</sup> The eros ooze from the pages of his books, and might suggest a more appropriate title be a "philosophy of orgasm."

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<sup>29</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 163.

<sup>30</sup> Whitehead. *Adventures of Ideas*. 381.

<sup>31</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 382.

<sup>32</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 18.

His theories of experience offer a new way of connecting with the erotic. This missing piece of a complete cosmology that integrates the sacred with science and quantum mechanics accessed through eros as the divine desire. Whitehead described God as "the lure for feeling, the eternal urge of desire,"<sup>33</sup> which sounds like a deeper expression of Eros.

Whitehead described the cosmic process as a "cosmic inter-penetration" and the words seem to insinuate an infiltration of the erotic.<sup>34</sup> With this in mind, walking through an actual occasion becomes an erotic fantasy of sorts. We prehend and feel others inside of us. The prehending of an entity as the way in which we are able to create empathy for the act of procreation. Beginning with the desire for creation (sex) towards the final "satisfaction" of an occasion occurring with concrescence or orgasm. I would describe this way of creativity as the building of an orgasm that never quite reaches fulfillment and creates anew. When looking at an actual occasion we see desire building up becoming creativity. The energy of yearning channeled towards life enhancing acts. In the same way eroticism without wisdom becomes pornography or sex simply for pleasure without awareness. This satisfaction, or aim, based on its attainment of its actuality never fully happens. It then satisfies itself in an event being actual, actualization itself doesn't end there. The ultimate fulfillment of occasions within God and through consistent creativity.

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<sup>33</sup> Whitehead. *Adventures of Ideas*. 174.

<sup>34</sup> Whitehead. *Adventures of Ideas*, 117.

In the words of Whitehead, the creative advance is when “The many become one and are increased by one,”<sup>35</sup> conjures an image of procreation between life forms resulting in a new lifeform. Procreation as the object of love is closest humans get to becoming immortal.<sup>36</sup> Eros’ concrescence ultimately completes with the creation of a new human being and then begins again as its own desire for procreation continues the cycle of desire. The same movement towards life as an atom flickering in and out of existence fueled by desire creates a molecule, an element, and so on. The same desire coursing through my body in every cell relies upon the entire cosmos for fulfillment and perpetuity.

## CONCLUSION

The beauty of process philosophy, and in particular Whitehead’s theory, is that it offers us a choice to see the erotic tension play out in each moment of life everyday life. We crave the static in an ever-changing universe, where nothing remains the same. Something does stay – eros as the desire for fulfillment. When we look for it, eros is always there ready and waiting - interwoven with every experience waiting for discovery and acknowledgment. This “urge to merge,” as Swimme puts it in the film *Journey to the Universe*, grants us access at any time we are willing to become enmeshed in it. Our desires hold the power of the universe, opening us to be penetrated by all the cosmos. In this allowing we fulfill the missing pieces of our evolving consciousness and connect with our deepest depths. The way into the divine is eros. Our unity with the whole

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<sup>35</sup> Whitehead. *Process and Reality*, 10.

<sup>36</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, 87.

contains deep elements of the erotic for us to be turned on by. Knowing that just beyond our reach, just beyond pure yearning lies God.

Seeing the concrescence of an actual occasion as turning us on connects us even more so with the Hermetic belief system “As above, so below,” an even further justification and philosophical approach to the classic phrase.<sup>37</sup> The eros we seek outside of ourselves through sex or following libido, in turn brings us back to God and the divine within ourselves. An integral approach to sexuality is neither a modern version of valueless freedom, nor a dogmatic view stemming from religious traditions. Instead it encourages us to joyfully inhabit our bodies and our senses as a way to embody our erotic desires. And not stopping at eros and desire, for just beyond our yearning lies pure consciousness and the key that unlocks the door of integration. A deep recognition that our longing for one another and for transcendence contains the mysterious eros. Cultivating conscious choice of the erotic tension brings us into touch with our sexuality, intentionally assisting us in evolving closer to God’s aims. Reminding us that creation doesn’t begin in chaos and instead within moments of choice. The realization that in each actual occasion and moment we have the opportunity to embody ourselves fully and the erotic world in the way we choose. In choosing to experience life as erotic we unify with the whole of the existence.

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<sup>37</sup> Weiss, *Science and Transphysical Worlds*, 73.

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