

PART I

The Togetherness of Everything

Any appeal to the whole of existence begins with intuition. It is the intuition that anything, really, only exists and can be known because it is “together with” everything else (PR, 19–22). This intuition is beyond any further foundation, without foundation in anything deeper, and it appears only if we allow the whole of “everything” to be brought into one comprehensive view. Yet this does not mean that we must subtract from anything in particular to arrive at a view of the whole, say, the universe, Earth, humanity, nature, society, goodness, meaning, or the like. Rather, we appeal to their togetherness with *all* of the particularities we know or feel or expect of having implicitly enriched our intuitive grasping of the wholeness of their gathering in our appeal. In a sense, as we “grasp” something, we are becoming aware that we are already grasped by a vibratory whole, being part of a *living* togetherness of anything and everything.

“Everything,” here, means that anything at all and in particular, whatever it is, already appears in the horizon of this wholeness of connectivity. Connectedness is the background *felt* in this intuitive approach as the condition *sine qua non*, without any further condition, the original condition for anything to exist and to be known. “Anything” does not mean any “thing,” however, as it is still undecided whether the “thingness” of the encounter with anything must be the most basic characteristic of its grasping and, beyond the limitations of the act of grasping, its existence, whether or not we would know of it. Rather, what is experienced in “its” knowing (being known as such) is the *becoming* of its being together with anything and everything. It is this connectivity that is experienced and known “in which” specific formations of grasping settle relations to individual experiences and elements of knowledge that may *appear* as things, as individuals, as sufficiently independent entities, so as to be able to be insulated from the whole in which they are related modes of being together.

Whitehead expresses this fundamental relational togetherness of anything and everything with a terminology of primordial connectivity: what “is” is a connection of *experience*, of actual *becoming*, of the interaction of individuality and collectivity

through *symbolization*, and of the fusion of physicality and mentality in *knowledge*. All of these forms or perspectives of togetherness are in one sense *universal*, that is, applicable to anything and everything that exists and can be known, and, in another sense, they imply a layering of complexity of the organization of organisms in a universe in which complexification and interaction of that which is together describes its existence as *activity*, that is, not only as *modes* but as *movements* of togetherness.

Certain implications are unavoidable and inherent in this constellation of togetherness. I will only name four that further describe the choice of the chapters of this part of the book. First, if togetherness is not of merely external entities causally pushing one another like in the proverbial billiard ball scenario, all relationality implies some degree of *internality* of the beings they inhere in and with which they commune. Whitehead calls this relation “experience.” Second, connectivity is not formed as a fixed block, either of individual things or of global structures (like a block universe), but is inherently flexible and moving. The fundamental relational entities of togetherness—that which “is”—are really themselves the *becoming* of such relations. Beings are “becomings.” Third, if the becoming of relationships forms individual “nods” of identity—temporary, spatially, or (and) characteristically limited “beings,” as it were—and, concurrently, a “field” of such nods in relations concretized by such nods, then, the movements of becoming and perishing of the “entities” of relationship in “actuality” and the “activity” of the moving whole of such actualities form a complex dominion of differentiations and divergences, connections and disconnections. Yet this multiplicity is neither falling apart like a host of self-contained, individual entities nor is it defined by any preeminent global unity that dictates the structural coherence of the whole. Rather, singular becomings and universal wholeness in this multiplicity interact by *negotiating* their togetherness ever anew. This is basically what Whitehead means with the “symbolic” character of the experiential togetherness of the All proceeding in constant becoming. Fourth, and maybe surprisingly, then, in all connectivity inheres a spark of *mentality*, of not only physical externality but idealization, mirroring, perceptivity, grasping, the forming of internal feelings of being touched by something else, the other, relational complexity and multiplicity. The whole of a “world” becomes “knowledgeable” not only as something or everything but as anything in relation to itself. The “Self” of anything, experiencing becoming and symbolizing its own negotiations, is borne here. As the ancients already knew: being *is* knowing, knowing *is* being! The exact concurrence of being and knowing has deeply driven the history of thought and has divided it into parties elevating one over the other or trying to either identify both or deny one of them or simply identify them with one another. Whitehead “identifies” them as *mutually* generating aspects of *one* kind of relationship of becoming that he calls “prehension”: beings are knowledgeable because they are in becoming *with* and *within other* becomings; knowledge is the *actual* happening of such relationships; being is knowing the becoming of relationships.

It is in this sense that “togetherness” is the most profound intuition of Whitehead’s philosophy: that togetherness is always one of experience in nodes of actual becoming that negotiate their individuality with the moving whole of existence through symbolization; and to the extent and intensity that they do, they know of the world as one in becoming and of their becoming in the whole as their own transient self—as one within, and that of, the moving whole. We are natives of the universe. Even if our selves are unique expressions of a cosmos that simultaneously demands our perishing, it guarantees our importance in the memory that pervades the togetherness of everything. In this sense, we *are* the togetherness of everything.

Imagine for a moment what such an insight may hold for the wounds of a world that ravishes itself by self-aggrandizing hypes and mutual humiliating degradations of the other, in antagonistic polarizations of society and the deterioration of the environments of the Earth, that sinks into an age of nihilism and prefers the search for the superiority of race and gender, social status and megalomaniac dreams of immortality, in a posthuman machinery of artificiality beyond the flesh and the sensitivity of physical organisms, in a time of weaponized dreams of domination of the many by the few, and a lost spirit in a universe that slowly drifts into perpetual darkness.

Whitehead’s insight of “togetherness” would be shocking, enlightening, transformative, and inspiring to this world: It suggests that the world *can* be different, can be imagined *beyond* these predicaments, because it is *not* fatally bound by these calamities. That these *horribiles* are not unavoidable universals, are not necessities of existence, but contingencies of our own making. That, while the All tolerates its own negation, any negation is still an expression of this tolerance of the togetherness of a becoming universe in which divergence, polarization, opposition, antagonism, and their expressions in hate and war, jealousy and egotism, are nothing but the perversion of togetherness—a togetherness that whispers even when it is silenced and that breathes even if it seems to have been suffocated.

Here, Whitehead’s intuition becomes an *activating vision* of a world that *can* be different, because it *is* already, and always has been, different, and that *has* the resources and the strength to recover from is denigration. Intense meanings begin to shine through wherever the shells of isolation and antagonism fall away and the cynicism (which is itself only a symptom of the painful presence of the connectivity of everything in the modes of neglect) dies the good death by exhausting its own illusionary character. It is in this hope that Whitehead’s intuition may indicate the future of a new civilized humanity on an ecologically integrated Earth and in the “natural” performance of a universal spiritual renewal through the peace that the insight in the togetherness of the moving whole of existence provides for all of its creatures.

* * *

CHAPTER 1

Experience

I contend that the notion of mere knowledge is a high abstraction, and that conscious discrimination itself is a variable factor only present in the more elaborate examples of occasions of experience. The basis of experience is emotional. Stated more generally, the basic fact is the rise of an affective tone originating from things whose relevance is given.

(AI, 176)

Imagine the moment of awakening. What is it like? If you have a moment, just before you do anything, you find yourself to have become aware of a world that impresses its voices on you, of which you are a recipient, not an actor yet. It is in this moment, this thick moment beyond time, really, chronologically irrelevant but fleeting, that the greatest manifold of feelings may appear from the surroundings that begin to constitute your consciousness. Say, you wake to the night of an empty house that seems in its waking to watch over you; or you suddenly leave any dreamscape and listen to the absence of sounds that whispers undeclared secrets to itself; or you find yourself in the midst of a serene meadow on mellow afternoon, for a short while resting after hiking, when the colors of flowers and the sounds of birds and all kinds of momentary impressions saturate you—a lush world of all kinds of vague creatures has already presented itself in one such moment before you begin to grasp this world *as* world and yourself *as* your own self. In his poetic mode of recognizing these concrete manifolds of experience that is as yet unowned by anyone, more an invitation to participate than to serve interests, Whitehead captures this moment in this way:

In the dark there are vague presences, doubtfully feared; in the silence, the irresistible causal efficacy of nature presses itself upon us; in the vagueness of the low hum of insects in an August woodland, the inflow into ourselves of feelings from enveloping nature overwhelms us; in the dim consciousness of

half-sleep, the presentations of sense fade away, and we are left with the vague feeling of influences from vague things around us. (PR, 176)

We find ourselves already as participants of a surrounding world that constitutes our presence on its own before we begin to claim it for our selves as ours. And as this moment fades, we begin to “grasp” the world *as* world and us *as* ourselves, as different entities, as unities of specific identity. We begin with experiences and we end with constructs of how to sort them out. We find ourselves always already in our experiences, but then we become their architects. We are connected before we know what that means. If we listen closely, we feel and feel to be felt already before we feel ourselves, before we begin to understand and know the world surrounding us and our own selves in it. All connections we make as we experience this process are already felt as happening while we are still riding their surface on their admission. All that *is*, really is, as we release all layers of constructing a world and our own identities in this manifold of experiences, nothing but experiences.

These experiences make their own living, and greet us as we become companions in their gathering; they release us to our way of experiencing these experiences. As we become aware of the primordial layers of experiencing, we realize—this time in conscious reversal of the construction process—that we have not experienced our selves or our constructions or our “grasping” or our extractions of knowledge, but nothing less than experiences themselves. What a profound insight: We are our experiences; these experiences are experiences of a world that is patient enough to bear us even as we begin to isolate ourselves from it, assuming control and identity; and these experiences relate to us that we are already connected to a world beyond us that impresses its own life on us and invites us to value its life of a concrete manifold that in our experiences mirrors its *being* as experiences. We experience not isolated objects, but experiences with all the wealth of feeling and value that they convey in our experience of their experiences.

This is the secret of the togetherness of experiences and of the experience of togetherness—the deepest ground of being in Whitehead’s universe! In the following segments of this chapter—headed by peculiar poetic formulations of Whitehead’s imagination of the involved ideas—I will lay out this equation of togetherness and experience in Whitehead’s thought as a process of awakening and its discourse as a deconstruction of its layers back into its very arising.

* * *

IN A BUZZING WORLD

Experience is a complex phenomenon. From times immemorial, philosophers have pondered over its character and importance. In Plato’s differentiation between being

and illusion, he held against the theophanic immediacy of the old God-singers and the relentless relativism of the Sophists that we can be tricked in our impression of immediacy of how and what we experience: that it really is a “representation” of reality beyond ourselves by emotions, passions, values, the individual and collective shaping of characters and education, social and cultural grooming of language and ideas; that, however, the *forms* in which these mixed impressions appear are not hopelessly indistinguishable from what the world is “really” like; that reality can be discerned by intellect and reason, by the reliability of certain methods of reasoning, that is, even more profoundly, by our ability to recover the categories by which we canalize our empirical encounters with the world as the innate “perception” of our intellect—because it is an effulgence of Reality itself. If Reality is intellect and also not devoid of values, that is, is in its origin the overflow of the Good, then all forms are truly expressions of the Good. We can experience Reality because we participate in this reality of the Good of which all experiences are formed even if they produce relativistic illusions (MT, 68). These illusions are due to the divide between the eternal and the temporal, the eternal life of the Ideas and the temporal impermanence and decay of empirical reality. Experiences are constituted by both (AI, 120) and, hence, can lead us to recognitions or mislead us to misperceptions and misinterpretations.

While this Platonic understanding implies the problems of abstraction and the quest for eternal reality in distinction from and (often) the degradation (“becoming” is less real) or even denigration of the world of becoming and perishing (“becoming” is not real at all) (MT, 68)—a problem I will revert to in the next chapter—of immediate interest, here, is the fact that further discussions of these Platonic discoveries have led to the divide between “rationalism” and “empiricism.” While rationalism trusts the innate ideas that structure experiences of the impermanent material world, the world of potential realizations, empiricism does not accept the pre-existence of such ideas and forms of experience and sees all such formations arising from the interaction of material reality among itself. Interestingly, the still upheld “platonic division” between being and becoming, reality and illusion, while shifting boundary as they define diverse philosophical positions, is not addressed yet *as such*, namely, that its acceptance already implies that we are, in our experiences, insulated from Reality, be it ideal or material, insofar as both ideas and materials are, in this view, mutually inaccessible and exclusive of one another.

In other words, this divide implies and justifies and reiterates an antagonistic dualism between subject and object of and in all experience that, wherever one shifts the boundaries between them and all other divisions, remains untouched as the basic aporia of experience: that in our “subjective” experience we are either dependent on abstractions or ideas that themselves are not experiences but “objective” conditions or formations of patterns, or we only experience our subjectivity as the material reality which is itself only a plurality of insentient objects of experience. How, in both cases,

a “subject” is constituted *as* subject, inherently feeling sentence, and *as* unity or self-awareness, must remain a complete riddle within this scheme!

While rationalists such as René Descartes (1596–1650) envision the subjectivity of experiences arising from their “situation” as a mysterious reservoir in the mind of God, empiricists such as David Hume (1711–76), denying such idealistic and theological foundations of subjectivity, find them mysteriously arising from the interaction of material particles with some inherent ideal or emotional reality. But it was Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) who, in a titanic effort to fuse both strains of the divide, ended up recognizing the subjective unity of experience to be the only “thing” (object) we can experience “directly,” while the objects in these experiences remain beyond this unity and unknown. What we experience is really only ourselves (PR, 173)—and our mind and thoughts (PR, 216). We as subjects of our experiences remain forever divided from the world and other sentient beings as mere objects of our experiences (PR, 178).

Whitehead, however, questions the whole scheme of the “platonic divide” (CN, 48). Consequently, he accepts one and denies the other of these insights. He accepts that we experience a unity of experiential subjectivity, a subject of experiences as necessary moment of the experiential character of experience as such—Kant’s “transcendental apperception” or consciousness of experience as united in its subjectivity. Yet he denies that we only experience this unity in isolation from the objects of experience or in isolation of their subjective character (PR, 156) and, instead, moves the whole platonic divide *into* the subject of experience itself (SY, 37–39). Instead of being an aporetic inaccessibility of objects by subjects and the merely objective character of objects of experience, devoid of any subjective character, Whitehead understands subjects as being constituted by objects, but as being accessible because they are but such subjects of experience themselves, albeit in objectified form. With the empiricists he agrees regarding the constitution of subjectivity by the objects of experiences; but, in an expansion of the Kantian “apperception,” that which is experienced is itself an experience or the “perception” of an experience. With the rationalists, Whitehead agrees that no experience is devoid of the “apprehension” of certain forms and structures in which they “materially” appear; but in the expansion of the Kantian categories or pure concepts, such mind-patterns are part of all objects of experience in their own “mental” sustenance of ideas and forms as potentials of realization (Chapter 4).

Hence, for Whitehead, the platonic divide has transformed itself into a moment of the inherent dialectic of experience itself as a process of the mutual transference of objects to subjects and of subjects to objects of new subjects (PR, 156). All experiences experience experiences—being both subjects and objects. One of the most radical implications is this: that experience is always a togetherness of experiences and that in the process of experiencing we really experience the world beyond ourselves; we are not isolated from the world. Rather, we *are* the world of experiences and we contribute to the experience of the world of itself through our own experiences.

In the end, the platonic divide becomes unmasked as an abstraction from the process of experience and not as its condition. The “objective world” (*realitas obiectiva*) is not a plurality of isolated objects or particles or merely of abstract ideas and forms or categories, but a togetherness of a becoming multiplicity of experiences (PR, 49). Hence, we “find ourselves in a buzzing world, amid a democracy of fellow creatures; whereas, under some disguise or other, orthodox philosophy can only introduce us to solitary substances, each enjoying an illusory experience” (PR, 50).

* * *

DROPS OF EXPERIENCE

Another radical implication of this view is this pan-experiential view itself. We must listen to this in its radicality: that nothing that exists is not experiential! Nothing that exists is not an experience or based in experience. Being is the togetherness and becoming of experiences. Whitehead emphasizes this aspect of the character of being by a statement that sounds like hyperbole, but is meant as a universal affirmation without exception: that “apart from the experiences of subjects there is nothing, nothing, nothing, bare nothingness” (PR, 167).

Now, if nothing is not an experience itself or an ingredient of experiences, what does that mean for the constitution of the world, a world, any world, this or any universe, and of us as human beings or as humanity in our relationship with the non-human world? Three consequences come immediately to mind, and Whitehead has given all three of them some attention: the experiential *unity* and *multiplicity* of the world, the *dipolarity* of experience, and the priority of *becoming* over being.

First, as there are, now, no isolated classes of beings anymore, some of which designated as subjects and others as objects, some of which classified as with experience and others without, we can speak of a monism of experience: the most profound unity of the world is the togetherness within experiences such that whatever does not seem to be an experience, must be non-existent; even illusions are moments of experiences; and without them is anything else nothing, non-existent, non-entity (PR, 11). One of the implications of this monism of experience is that the search for any metaphysical or ontological ground of being—this is the longstanding philosophical search after ultimate Reality—cannot be answered by referring to anything devoid or beyond experience. This implies, as I will explicate later in the book, that neither can there be any ground of being arising from abstractions from experiences, such as abstract ideas or forms or even the idea of (subject-less) “matter,” nor can there be only one subjective ground of all such ideas, such as the Mind of God. Rather, the unity of experience is always that of a multiplicity of experiences, of their togetherness (PR, 348).