Alfred North Whitehead’s *Process and Reality* is based on the Gifford Lectures which he delivered at the University of Edinburgh in 1927-8. Whitehead presents a system of speculative philosophy which is based on a categorial scheme of investigation, designed to explain how concrete aspects of human experience can provide a foundation for our understanding of reality. Whitehead also investigates how reality can be defined as a process of becoming.

The lectures are divided into five parts: "Part I: The Speculative Scheme;" "Part II: Discussions and Applications;" "Part III: The Theory of Prehensions;" "Part IV: The Theory of Extension;" and "Part V: Final Interpretation."

Part I describes how abstract concepts may arise from the examination of concrete actual entities. Part II describes how ‘symbolic reference’ may arise as an interplay between two modes of perception: ‘causal efficacy’ and ‘presentational immediacy.’ Part III presents a theory of the nature of feelings, and discusses the relation between propositions and feelings. Part IV discusses how perception and feeling of extension in space and in time may be analyzed. Part V presents Whitehead’s view of God as the absolute unity of all actuality.

According to Whitehead, there are four types of categories: 1) the Category of the Ultimate, 2) the Categories of Existence, 3) the Categories of Explanation, and 4) the Categoreal Obligations.

The Category of the Ultimate is a category by which a disjunctive diversity of actual entities becomes a conjunctive unity. The Ultimate is a metaphysical principle by which the ‘many’ become the ‘one,’ and the ‘one’ becomes the ‘many.’

The eight Categories of Existence are: 1) Actual Entities (or Actual Occasions), which are Final Realities; 2) Prehensions, which are Concrete Facts of Relatedness; 3) the Nexus of Relations known as Public Matters of Fact; 4) Subjective Forms, which are Private Matters of Fact; 5) Eternal Objects, which are Pure Potentials for the Specific Determination of Fact; 6) Propositions, which are Impure Potentials for the Specific Determination of Matters of Fact; 7) Multiplicities, which are Pure Disjunctions of Diverse Entities; and 8) Contrasts (or Patterned Entities) which are Modes of Synthesis of Entities in One Prehension.¹

The twenty-seven Categories of Explanation include: 1) that reality is a process consisting of the becoming of actual entities (or actual occasions); 4) that being is a potential for becoming; 8) that ‘objectification’ is the mode by which the potentiality of an actual entity is realized in another actual entity; 11) that prehensions which involve actual entities are physical, while prehensions which
involve eternal objects are conceptual; 12) that ‘positive’ prehensions include feelings, while ‘negative’ prehensions do not include feelings; 18) that the ‘ontological principle’ of any actual entity can only be found in another actual entity (i.e. that the reason or cause for an actual entity can only be found in another actual entity); 23) that the ‘immediacy’ of an actual entity is the self-functioning of that actual entity; and 25) that ‘concrescence’ is a process in which prehensions are integrated into a fully determinate feeling or satisfaction.

Whitehead defines a ‘satisfaction’ as a final phase of ‘concrescence’ (or the process of integration of feeling) in which prehensions are integrated into a concrete unity. A ‘feeling’ is the integration of an actual entity or occasion into the internal constitution of a subject.

The nine Categoreal Obligations are: 1) the Category of Subjective Unity (that feelings may be integrated according to the unity of the aims of their subject); 2) the Category of Objective Identity (that each element in the objective datum of a satisfaction has its own identity, as defined by its function in that satisfaction); 3) the Category of Objective Diversity (that diverse elements in the objective datum of a satisfaction each have their own function, and insofar as they are diverse, are not identical in their function in that satisfaction); 4) the Category of Conceptual Valuation (that conceptual feeling may be derived from, or may reproduce, physical feeling); 5) the Category of Conceptual Reversion (that conceptual diversity may be derived from physical feeling); 6) the Category of Transmutation (that physical and conceptual feeling may be integrated into a transmuted feeling, which has a nexus of relationships as its objective datum); 7) the Category of Subjective Harmony (that the importance of a conceptual feeling to a subject may depend on its congruence or harmony with the aims of the subject); 8) the Category of Subjective Intensity (that the intensity of a feeling may be changed by the aims of the subject; and 9) the Category of Freedom and Determination (that concrescence is an internally-determined process in every actual entity, and that it is free from external determination).

Whitehead describes his system of speculative philosophy as a ‘philosophy of organism,’ or as an ‘organic philosophy,’ in that he views reality as consisting of interrelated and mutually dependent parts which are involved in sustaining vital processes. Whitehead refers to the final realities of which the world is composed as ‘actual entities,’ or as ‘actual occasions.’ These are the concrete facts on which our thoughts and feelings are based. The other basic elements of human experience include ‘prehensions’ (or concrete concepts and feelings) of actual entities, and the ‘nexus’ (or system of relationships) which connects the development and functioning of all actual entities (or actual occasions).

Whitehead describes prehensions as concrete modes of analysis of the world. To prehend something is to have a concrete idea or concept of that thing. However, prehension is not merely a mode of thinking. A prehension is a process of
appropriation of an element of an actual entity, or of an element which is derived from an actual entity. A prehension of an object, or of an element of an object, changes the internal constitution of the prehending subject. Prehension is a process by which an actual entity, or prehending subject, becomes itself by appropriating elements from other actual entities. Thus, the becoming of an actual entity occurs through a concrescence of prehensions.

Whitehead defines ‘concrescence’ as a process in which prehensions are integrated into a fully determinate feeling or satisfaction. A ‘satisfaction’ is a unity of physical or mental operation attained by an actual entity.

The nature of each actual entity is bipolar, physical and mental, and the concrescence of each actual entity may involve the integration of physical and conceptual feelings. The ‘satisfaction’ of each actual entity is the completion of its becoming in a complex feeling, which establishes a fully determinate relation with the world.

Whitehead’s ‘philosophy of organism’ is concerned with two levels of meaning and reality: 1) the formal structure of actual entities (or actual occasions), and 2) the ‘givenness’ of the world in which actual entities or occasions occur. According to Whitehead, actuality is the ‘givenness’ of potentiality. 'Givenness' is the definiteness of actuality, which both excludes and includes potentiality. Each actual entity is in the process of becoming another actual entity. The satisfaction of a feeling is the attainment of its final actuality.

An actual entity may become an object of prehension for another actual entity. Actual entities may become objects of prehension by a process of either 'causal' or 'presentational' objectification. In 'causal objectification,' an eternal object is directly perceived as an expression of the formal nature of an objectified actual entity. In 'presentational objectification,' an eternal object is indirectly perceived as a result of a direct perception of an actual entity. Whitehead distinguishes between ‘causal efficacy’ and ‘presentational immediacy’ as two modes of perception. Causal efficacy is a direct perception of prior actual occasions which are causally related or relevant to a subsequent actual occasion. Presentational immediacy is a direct perception of present actual occasions, which may lead to a process of integrating these occasions with actual occasions in the past.

Whitehead describes ‘symbolic reference’ as a mixed mode of perception, or as the interplay between the modes of causal efficacy and presentational immediacy. Actual entities which are perceived in the mode of immediacy may give information about physical or conceptual objects in the mode of efficacy, and physical or conceptual objects which are perceived in the mode of efficacy may give information about actual entities in the mode of immediacy. Symbolic reference is also the nexus or system of relations between symbols and meanings. Symbols and meanings may be integrated or synthesized into subjective feelings.
The ‘presented locus’ of perception is a 'common ground' for causal efficacy and for presentational immediacy. The presented locus is a datum for both modes of perception, and is thus a unifying principle for physical and mental operation. The presented locus is an object of direct perception by presentational immediacy, and is an object of indirect perception by causal efficacy.4

According to Whitehead, primary feelings may be physical, conceptual, or transmuted. ‘Hybrid physical feelings’ combine physical and conceptual feelings. Simple physical and conceptual feelings may be integrated to form complex feelings. Purely physical feelings may be transmuted into conceptual feelings, and hybrid feelings may be transmuted into purely physical feelings. Actual occasions may be the objective data of physical feelings, while eternal objects may be the objective data of conceptual feelings.

The transmission of feelings contributes to the process of concrescence in actual entities. According to Whitehead, conceptual feelings may be integrated into more complex feelings, such as ‘propositional’ or ‘comparative’ feelings. 'Propositional feelings' have propositions as their objective data, and may include: 1) ‘imaginative feelings,’ and 2) ‘perceptive feelings.’ 'Comparative feelings' have (comparisons or) contrasts as their objective data, and may include: 1) ‘intellectual feelings’ (such as conscious perceptions and intuitive judgments), and 2) ‘physical purposes.’

Whitehead also explains that entities (or occasions) may be classified as either primary or hybrid. Primary entities include: 1) actual entities, and 2) pure potentials (eternal objects). Hybrid entities include: 1) feelings, and 2) propositions.5

Whitehead’s ‘philosophy of organism’ may be described as a metaphysical pluralism, in that he sees reality as consisting of a multiplicity of actual entities. On the other hand, the 'philosophy of organism' may also be described as a metaphysical monism, in that Whitehead defines prehension as a mode of analysis which can be applied to every actual entity.

Whitehead’s philosophy may also be described as metaphysical atomism, in that he describes actual entities as the atomic units (or essential constituents) of reality. According to Whitehead, consciousness, thought, and sensory perception are not essential to our experience of reality, but are derived from the process of ‘concrescence’ by which prehensions are integrated into fully determinate feelings. However, actual entities may be further analyzed or divided into essential or primary components (or feelings). Each atomic actuality is divisible into other coordinate actualities which form a nexus. The universe is a nexus of atomic actual entities.
Whitehead says that prehensions are not atomic. Prehensions are physical or mental representations of actual entities. Objects of prehension may also include eternal objects, propositions, and the nexus of relations between conceptual objects.

Prehensions are both public and private, and are concrete facts which may have a perceptual, emotional, causal, or purposive quality. Public matters of fact are coordinate relations between actual entities. Private matters of fact are subjective forms imposed on public matters of fact. According to Whitehead, an actual entity is a prehending ‘superject’ in relation to public matters of fact. An actual entity is a prehending ‘subject’ in relation to private matters of fact.

Whitehead’s ‘philosophy of organism’ is subjectivist in that it accepts the doctrine that knowledge of objective reality is based on inference from subjective modes of perception. However, Whitehead rejects the sensationalist doctrine that all knowledge is derived from sensations and that knowledge can only be confirmed or verified by sensations.

Whitehead is also concerned with avoiding empty abstractions, and is concerned with investigating concrete aspects of human experience. He explains that an aim of the ‘philosophy of organism’ is to avoid the ‘fallacy of misplaced concreteness’ (or the tendency to describe concrete actual entities as if they were only categories of thought). Thus, he describes prehensions, or concrete facts of relatedness, as fundamental to our experience of reality. Concrescence is a process by which prehensions become more concrete. Prehensions bring evidence of concrete actual entities, which are the final realities.

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**FOOTNOTES**

2 Ibid., pp. 24-26.
3 Ibid., pp. 26-27.
4 Ibid., p. 169.
5 Ibid., pp.188-9.
6 Ibid., p. 235.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**
