

WHITEHEAD'S CONVERSION OF METAPHYSICS TO SPECULATIVE PHILOSOPHY

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Like many of his contemporaries such as Bradley and Collingwood, Whitehead wrote at a time when positivism was the dominant philosophical influence in British philosophy, following the disintegration of the Hegelian synthesis. Central to Whitehead's philosophical project is the task of rehabilitation of metaphysics against the backdrop of its deconstruction by logical positivism. While Whitehead is broadly sympathetic to the ideal of metaphysics, he believes that the grandiose conception of metaphysics as science of being qua being associated with traditional metaphysics is out of tune with scientific rationality and as such is problematic. At the core of Whitehead's rehabilitation of metaphysics, therefore, is an attempt to broker rapprochement between metaphysical rationality and scientific rationality by converting metaphysics into speculative metaphysics, with the ambition of focusing on our universe of experience rather than all universes of discourse, as is typical of traditional metaphysics. While there is no doubt that Whitehead's rehabilitation of metaphysics is an answer to positivism, it is at the same time an attempt to tone down the claims of metaphysics such as to bring it in accord with scientific rationality. Yet it remains to be seen whether Whitehead's rehabilitation of metaphysics is successful in so far as the reconciliation of metaphysical rationality and scientific rationality through speculative philosophy focuses only on particular experiences rather than universal experiences, so that the concern of metaphysics to address the fundamental nature of the real in all its expressions remain pressing beyond the ideal of speculative philosophy.

INTRODUCTION

Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) was a British philosopher of the Twentieth century. Born in Ramsgate, Kent, near Canterbury in Southern England, Whitehead is best known for his contributions in metaphysics, albeit he also made significant contributions in philosophy of science, philosophy of religion and aesthetics (cf. Hosinski 1993, 1; McHenry 1992, p. ix). Like many of his contemporaries such as Bradley and Collingwood, Whitehead

wrote at a time when positivism was the dominant philosophical influence in British philosophy, following the disintegration of the Hegelian synthesis (McHenry 1992,p.ix). Central to Whitehead's philosophical project is the task of rehabilitation of metaphysics against the backdrop of its deconstruction by logical positivism (Ayer 1952, 33-45; Whitehead 1959, 20; 1932, 160-165 and Wilmot 1979, 6-10).¹ While Whitehead is broadly sympathetic to the ideal of metaphysics, he believes that the grandiose conception of metaphysics as science of *being qua being* associated with traditional metaphysics is out of tune with scientific rationality and as such is problematic (Whitehead 1959, 20; Hosinski 1993, 1).

At the core of Whitehead's rehabilitation of metaphysics, therefore, is an attempt to broker rapprochement between metaphysical rationality and scientific rationality by converting metaphysics into speculative metaphysics, with the ambition of focusing on our universe of experience rather than all universe of discourse, as is typical of traditional metaphysics (Hosinski 1993, 1-5). While there is no doubt that Whitehead's rehabilitation of metaphysics is an answer to positivism, it is at the same time an attempt to tone down the claims of metaphysics such as to bring it in accord with scientific rationality (Mays 1977, 9-16; Wilmot 1979, 9). Yet it remains to be seen whether Whitehead's rehabilitation of metaphysics is successful in so far as the reconciliation of metaphysical rationality and scientific rationality through speculative philosophy focuses only on particular experiences rather than universal experiences, so that the concern of metaphysics to address the fundamental nature of the real in all its expressions remain pressing beyond the ideal of speculative philosophy. Our concern in what follows, therefore, is to interrogate the adequacy of Whitehead's concept of speculative philosophy and its associated reconciliation of metaphysical and scientific rationality.

For the sake of convenient exposition we develop our argument in terms of the following procedure. After a brief consideration of the question of Whitehead's intellectual development we examine his concept of speculative philosophy and its credentials. In the final moment of our reflection we assess the impact and adequacy of Whitehead's concept of speculative philosophy, especially in relation to the claimed reconciliation of metaphysical and scientific rationality and then conclude with a statement on the contemporary relevance of Whitehead.

THE QUESTION OF WHITEHEAD'S INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Whitehead wrote on virtually every area of philosophy and even beyond. Like most philosophers his views went through a long period of evolution. It is usual to divide Whitehead's intellectual development into three periods (Hosinski 1993, 2-3; Irvine 2015). We will briefly consider his writings in terms of these periods into which his philosophical career is classified.

First is the Cambridge period which started in 1884 at the completion of Whitehead's mathematical studies at Cambridge. From there he began to teach Mathematics in Cambridge and remained there for the next twenty five years until 1910 when he moved to London. The highlights of this period are mainly Whitehead's first book, *A Treatise on Universal Algebra* which appeared in 1898. Another is Whitehead's association with Bertrand Russell, then his student in Cambridge, which resulted in the publication of the *Principia Mathematica* in 1910, a work in which the thesis on logicism is advanced, that is the view

that “the Principles of Arithmetic are extensions of the principles of logic,” as Irvine (2015) puts it.

The second period of Whitehead's philosophical development is the London period which started in 1910. He taught Mathematics there and became Professor of Applied Mathematics in 1914 and then later rose to the post of Dean of the Faculty of Science and the President of the Senate of the University of London. His philosophical works that belong to this period include the following: *An Introduction to Mathematics* (1911), *The Organization of Thought* (1917), *The Concept of Nature* (1920), and *The Principle of Relativity*.

As some of the titles indicate the London period already reflects the beginning of a shift in Whitehead's interest from matters that are purely scientific to issues in philosophy of science. This shift attains its maturation in the third period of his career associated with his movement from London to Harvard in 1924, at the age of 63. At the invitation of the University, he joined the philosophy Department and remained there for the next thirteen years. As far as his speculative philosophy is concerned, this period is by far the most significant as it witnessed the publication of his more speculative works in terms of which his reputation as a philosopher is secured. These works include: *Science and the Modern World* (1925), *Religion in the Making* (1926), *Process and Reality* (1929) *Adventures of Ideas* (1933), and *Modes of Thought* (1935).

As should be evident from the brief intellectual biography of Whitehead presented above, Whitehead's speculative philosophy is a product of his mature philosophical period. He did not come to metaphysics (speculative metaphysics) directly but indirectly through science. Long before he wrote his *Process and Reality* in which he makes his contribution to speculative philosophy, Whitehead's reputation has been secured as a philosopher of science. He was heavily involved in Mathematics. Indeed, as a mathematician in Cambridge at the turn of the century, he collaborated with his student Bertrand Russell, in writing the *Principia Mathematica* which is today recognized as a fundamental contribution to mathematical logic. His association with Russell ended shortly after this publication on account of their diverging interest. At this period, Whitehead's interest was more and more moving away from merely scientific issues to issues raised by the status of science as a whole such as the question of the philosophical foundation of science. It was in response to this fundamental question that Whitehead developed his speculative philosophy (Paci 1961, 237-250).

The speculative period of Whitehead's philosophical career belongs to the latter period but even here his scientific background continues to manifest itself and affect the way that Whitehead deals with the big issues in philosophy (see Palter 1960, 1 and Irvine 2015).² In order to understand Whitehead's speculative philosophy, it is important to consider his strong scientific background as this is a central factor in the formation of his philosophical ideas. We certainly cannot suggest a dichotomy between Whitehead's preoccupation with Science and his speculative philosophy. We should see them rather as continuous with the other. His speculative philosophy tries to address issues which his involvement with science raised and could not be settled within the province of science (May 1977, 9-12).

Apart from Whitehead's scientific background, there are a number of other factors that impacted on his philosophical formation. One is the fact of his religious background. He was the son of an Anglican pastor. Growing up in this environment meant that Whitehead

had a strong sense of religion as well as a strong sense of community. He grew up in an environment that enabled him to enjoy close-knit relationship. He also had many strong characters in his life as well as a strong sense of history. These factors are biographical. It is not usual to lay much emphasis on biographical considerations when discussing philosophers. Whitehead's case, perhaps, is one instance in which this plays a significant role with regard to the evolution of his philosophical ideas—and as such, they have to be taken into account in order to understand his philosophy.

Anyone familiar with the traditions of philosophy knows well that before the intervention of Whitehead in the philosophical conversation, philosophers of diverse persuasions have placed emphasis on the reality of change as a constitutive element of reality (Baird and Kaufmann 1987, 41-44). This emphasis goes back to Heraclitus in the Greek period of philosophy (Lawhead 2002, 490-492) In the modern context, we can think of Hegel, who says in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977, 10) in an attempt to rethink the classical concept of substance in terms of the resources of dialectical subjectivity, that the Absolute is not only substance but is also subject. Or, again, the Romantics who argued for the interrelation of every aspect of reality, in obvious reference to the inherent dynamism that pervades the whole of reality (Ilodigwe 2006, 34-46).

These developments arguably anticipate what Whitehead (1959, 5-12) characterizes in the context of Twentieth century as philosophy of organism. Perhaps Whitehead's credit lies in the fact that he makes this category the central thrust of his philosophy (Ilodigwe, 34-46). The category serves him very well in his struggles with issues raised by the nature of scientific fact. In *Science and the Modern World*, where Whitehead (1967, 56-60) is still focused on the localized expression of the problematic, the category would prove strategic in Whitehead's critique of scientific materialism as well as Whitehead's constructive effort to articulate an adequate philosophy of nature that does better than scientific materialism (see Mays 1977, 10). Specifically it would enable Whitehead to jettison what he describes as fallacy of simply location and the fallacy of misplaced concreteness by replacing the atomistic concept of fact that undergirds Newtonian physics with a holistic concept of scientific fact (Whitehead 1967, 43-58).

Nonetheless by the time Whitehead comes to *Process and Reality*, he would generalize this entire consideration by making the concept of organism to apply not only to scientific fact, but to every domain of existence, so that emerging as a universal feature of the real, the category of organism consequently becomes a substantive category in terms of which Whitehead articulates his speculative philosophy (Whitehead 1959, 130-151; Jones 1975, 73-81; Lawhead 2002, 487-490).

WHITEHEAD'S CONCEPT OF SPECULATIVE PHILOSOPHY

A key feature of Whitehead's philosophical system is its neologism.³ This is evident, for instance, in his deployment of the concept of speculative philosophy. As it is often the case, when philosophers resort to neologism they do so sometimes in view of need to change the category of discourse, believing, as it were, that the prevalent category defining the *status quo* is part of the problem that needs to be solved. Such is the case with Whitehead's invention of the concept of Speculative philosophy (Whitehead 1959, 5-12). His introduction of this concept into philosophical lexicon is part and parcel of his critique of the traditions

of metaphysics. Indeed Whitehead uses the term as replacement for the concept of metaphysics. We see a similar strategy in Heidegger's philosophy of Being, which proceeds by deconstructing the entire history of Western metaphysics in attempt to recuperate a sense of being that is not hostage to the excesses of philosophy of subjectivity. His introduction of the concept of Dasein and specifically what he calls the existential analytics of Dasein is meant to overcome the burden of the Cartesian dualism by developing a notion of subject that is inseparable from the world but is co-given with the world (see Heidegger 1962, 21-55; Heidegger 1959, 53-101).

Speculative Philosophy, Metaphysics and Science

In replacing the concept of metaphysics with the concept of speculative philosophy, Whitehead's point essentially is that as currently understood the concept of metaphysics promises more than it can deliver. In other words it is too grandiose. In deploying the concept of speculative philosophy instead of the concept of metaphysics, therefore, Whitehead protests the ambitious agenda that metaphysics sets for itself. Rather than pursue such a grandiose project, Whitehead's intent, on contrary, is to tone down the claims of metaphysics in order to facilitate a rapprochement between metaphysical rationality and scientific rationality (cf. Ilodigwe 2015, 221-252).⁴

One of the major developments in the last couple of centuries is the huge impact of science on the human condition (Whitehead 1938, 25-58)

With more than three hundred years since the scientific revolution, the pragmatic efficacy of science is not in doubt, which incidentally has been the inspiration behind positivism, scientism and humanism (Pery, Peden and Laue 1995, 395-405). We see the import of the pragmatic success of science especially today in the emergence of new information technologies that have reduced the world into a global village (Steger 2013, 1-16). In the face of the revolutionizing of the human condition and man's understanding of his place in the universe it will be utterly unrealistic to continue to ignore the claims of science (Steger 2013, 1-15).

Yet to pay attention to the claims of science means that a basic tension must arise in respect of the relationship between scientific rationality and scientific rationality. This tension is at the heart of many debates that define the contemporary landscape such as the one between science and religion, or again, between philosophy, religion and culture. The tension is at the heart of the debate between liberalism and communitarianism in politics, or again, between tradition, modernity and post-modernity, or conservatism and liberalism within the various religious traditions.

Whitehead is one of the thinkers at the forefront of bringing together the two rationalities. He certainly does not believe that matters should be formulated such as to privilege metaphysical rationality to the point where the claims of scientific rationality becomes unsustainable. Any adequate philosophical scheme must have a place for both metaphysical rationality and scientific rationality.

In Whitehead's view, the traditional concept of metaphysics as developed by thinkers like Plato, Aristotle and Bradley does not allow for justice to be done to scientific rationality. Whitehead blames the limitation of traditional metaphysics on its privileging of the concept of substance over and above the category of event (Mays 1977, 54). In Whitehead's view,

to accomplish an effective reconciliation of scientific rationality and metaphysical rationality, we must recognize that the category of becoming must supplant the category of being as our fundamental concept of reality (Whitehead 1959, 5-19; Jones 1975, 73-8; Lawhead 2002, 487-490).

Traditional philosophy of substance falls with Newtonian physics. The supplanting of Newtonian physics by Quantum physics warrants that traditional philosophy of substance be rethought in terms of philosophy of process, where the category of event replaces the category of substance just as the long held view that matter is indestructible is replaced with the quantum understanding that matter is not only destructible but that nuclear fission results in nuclear energy and power in confirmation of the superiority of the concept of process over the concept of substance as our fundamental metaphysical category (Whitehead 1959, 22-48).

This is essentially the line of thought that Whitehead's philosophy of organism pursues (see Whitehead 1967, 103-110). Consequently Whitehead's deployment of the concept of speculative philosophy already witnesses to his attempt to tone down the claims of traditional metaphysics in order to bring metaphysical rationality in line with scientific rationality (Whitehead 1959, 6-15).

This process of toning down the claims of traditional concept of metaphysics is already evident in Bradley.⁵ Like Whitehead, as we have seen, Bradley is also suspicious of the grandiose claims of metaphysics especially in respect of the sovereignty of reason.⁶ Indeed his insistence that existence is irreducible to thought is part of his attempt to delimit the claims of metaphysics without denying its possibilities (Bradley 1930, 43 ff).

Whitehead continues in this line but will drop the concept of metaphysics altogether and replace it with the concept of speculative philosophy even though he is talking about the same reality that has been traditionally discussed under the head of metaphysics. In view of this consideration the affinity between Whitehead and Bradley is undeniable (McHenry 1992, 1-13; Basile 2002, 83-106).

As pointed out by Whitehead (1959 vii) him-self the views articulated in *Process and Reality* under the rubrics of philosophy of organism is heavily indebted to Bradley and indeed it is an approximation of Bradley's metaphysics of the Absolute. The affinity between the two thinkers can easily be seen in the title of their *magnum opus*. The title of Whitehead's *magnum opus* apparently mimics that of Bradley but with a clear indication of Whitehead's attempt to tone down the claims of metaphysics. Bradley's calls his work, *Appearance and Reality: An Essay in Metaphysics*, while Whitehead calls his own, *Process and Reality: an Essay in Cosmology* (Whitehead 1959).

Whitehead's decision to baptize his work as an essay in Cosmology realizes part of the dream to clip the wings of metaphysics since this clearly indicates that his concern is not to investigation reality qua reality, but on the contrary, he wants to focus on a limited sphere, namely, the universe of our experience (Whitehead 1959). Obviously this is an important aspect of reality, but it certainly does not include all possible worlds. He is interested only in the world of our experience and not all possible worlds, so that his cosmological investigation has a much more limited scope with respect to the validity of the results it establishes.⁷

This is in sharp contrast to the dream of metaphysics as traditionally conceived which aims to make its results apply in all possible worlds. Metaphysics does not claim to deter-

mine the nature of truth in respect of a particular world. On the contrary its ambition is to pontificate on what is true for all possible worlds (Ilodigwe 2016, 20-38). It is precisely this dream of making its results applicable to all possible world of discourse that Whitehead wants to get away from by re-conceptualizing metaphysics as a form of cosmology.

This is the grand motivation behind his concept of speculative philosophy and it is clear from the definition of speculative philosophy he offers us in *Process and Reality*. Here he tells us that: "Speculative philosophy is the endeavor to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted" (Whitehead 1959, 4).

Metaphysical Rationality: Between Finality and Provisionality

We can make a number of remarks about the above definition. The first remark we should make concerns his use of the word "endeavor" to qualify the task of speculative philosophy. The term "endeavor" connotes some sort of trial or ideal experimentation, or again an effort at something that does not necessarily presuppose any note of finality with respect to the results of such effort.⁸ Whitehead's use of the term, in fact, tells us something about his attitude towards speculative philosophy, namely, that it does not claim any kind of finality with respect to its results but that it is wholly open to the possibility that its results are reversible. The results are not final but provisional, meaning there is always room for update as new information emerge in respect of the subject matter at issue.⁹

Like Bradley, therefore, Whitehead has a humble conception of the task of speculative philosophy and as we have seen this attitude is part of his broader objection to the way metaphysics has been practiced in the great traditions of philosophy. This view of speculative philosophy certainly brings speculative philosophy, understood as metaphysics, in close harmony with the method of science (Randall and Butler 1971, 57-73). As is well known the hallmark of science is the open-ended nature of its investigation. No result is taken as final (Randall and Butler 1971, 57-73). Even theories long established are open to revision once new facts emerge and it is clear that we have a better explanation of the facts that the currently fashionable theory guarantees (Whitaker 1996, 12-72).

By describing speculative philosophy as an endeavor the idea is to allow room for possibility of revision in respect of its findings. That this is the intent behind Whitehead's deployment of the word in describing the task of speculative philosophy emerges clearly once we consider his further specification of the task of speculative philosophy as an interpretation. As he (1959, 5) says, "it is an endeavor to frame a system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted." The emphasis on interpretation throws real light on the nature of the task of speculative philosophy.

The term is popular in current usage where it connotes a form of understanding by analyzing and synthesizing the data before us.¹⁰ We do not manufacture the data. The data are given and the task is to understand them. The data cannot be understood unless it is first broken down into its component parts and then studied in terms of how they relate to each other and indeed how the parts relate to the whole in general. In this sense interpretation involves analysis and synthesis at the same time (Whitehead 1959, 4-5). This general understanding of interpretation is effective in virtually every field of human endeavor. It is effective in the world of science, it is effective in the world of business and commerce; it is effective in the world of statistics and economics.

Yet from the standpoint of Whitehead's project, he wants to make the point that metaphysical understanding involves a form of interpretation of facts and to this extent it is not different from what obtains in other sciences. But Whitehead is not oblivious that there are different types of interpretations so that it will be necessary to specify what is unique about the sort of interpretation that subsists in metaphysics in contradistinction from what obtain in the world of science. No doubt there are convergences but the divergences is what is important in order to accentuate the nature of interpretation involved in speculative philosophy.

Whitehead as is well known is a fierce critic of scientific materialism and his key objection is that owing to the rigid empiricism that informs it scientific materialism is quite incapable of doing justice to the nature of fact and to this extent risks basis misunderstanding of the nature of experience (Mays 1979, 54). While Whitehead objects to a rigid empiricism that fails to recognize the dynamism of fact, Whitehead (1959, 6-11; Jones 1975, 73-81) is nonetheless convinced that we cannot do away entirely with the ideal of empiricism.

In this sense he recognizes the fundamental import of the scientific method in insisting that our investigation and attempt to understand the nature of things must be based on fact. But if, as he says, facts are dynamic, it means that our attempt to understand the nature of things must take into cognizance the dynamism of fact. To this extent therefore any interpretation must be informed by the facts of our experience otherwise there is no way we do justice to the nature of things (Mays 1979, 13-14).¹¹

It is in this regard therefore that, as a form of interpretation, speculative philosophy is rooted on human experience. The interpretations lack any appeal unless they are anchored in our experience. But to have appeal it is also important to take into account the fact that those facts are not rigid but are open to development. Indeed it is because facts are dynamic that the findings of speculative philosophy cannot enjoy but a provisional status since the dynamism of fact means that we are all the time confronted with new shades of meaning with respect to the fact before us, so that if we are attentive to the dynamism of things, we will need to revise our interpretations to align with the contemporary situation of the facts in question (Mays 1979, 13-14).

Speculative Philosophy and the Logic of Interpretation: The Interplay of Reason and Reality

Once we take into account that interpretations are not mere interpretations but are informed by facts and take into account the dynamism of fact we begin to understand that speculative philosophy is dealing with the traditional problem of the relation between reason and reality (Ilodigwe 2016, 20-38). In the traditional context the understanding was that relying on the instrumentality of reason metaphysics can cast light on the nature of reality. But in the context of speculative philosophy what we witness is a transformation of this structure of relation between reason and reality into a different plane in which the relation emerges as relation between general ideas and experience. In this scheme ideas relate to experience just as reason relates with reality in the traditional scheme (Ilodigwe 2016, 20-38).

Indeed as Whitehead (1959, 5) says speculative philosophy is "framing of system of general ideas in terms of which every element in our experience is interpreted." Obviously the ideas that constitute the system of interpretation are ideas of reason, so that this is clear

commitment to rationalism (Whitehead 1959, 10-15). But so far as the ideas do not merely operate a priori in being used to interpret the data of our experience, but in fact take them into account, there is also a clear commitment to empiricism (Whitehead, 10-15).

Yet the point is that it is important to understand the nature of these ideas and the dynamics behind their deployment in interpreting our experience. Here Whitehead (1959, 6) makes clear that the ideas are "coherent and logical." This simply reflects Whitehead's commitment to holistic interpretation, meaning that the task of speculative philosophy is essentially to harmonize our understanding of our experience and this can hardly happen unless there is coherence and logicity in the manner in which ideas are harmonized in shedding light on the meaning of our experience.

In insisting on these qualities he more or less accentuates the affinity between metaphysical rationality and scientific rationality. The same affinity is accentuated by insisting that the ideas must be anchored in the data of our experience. Yet in this move we see a subtle departure from a common emphasis in the traditional account of the meaning of metaphysics.

Notice that Whitehead speaks of experience and not reality. He says that the systems of general ideas aid the interpretation of elements in our experience. Is there any difference between reality and experience? Perhaps there is but we might say it is negligible given that experience is part of reality. Reality obviously is a more fundamental concept than experience. Reality can manifest itself in different forms of experience.

Because the concept of experience carries less metaphysical burden in the sense that it is less universal than the concept of reality, Whitehead understandably prefers the use of experience to the use of reality.¹² The crucial point in this context, however, is that he does not speak of interpretation of reality but interpretation of experience. But more importantly, he speaks of our experience. The obvious indication is that he wants to get away from the language of *being qua being* or *reality qua reality* which seemingly encompasses everything.

Preferring the term experience to reality is part of the strategy of getting away from the talk of everything. He wants to concentrate not on all possible worlds but a particular dimension of reality, our universe and not the universe as such. With the transposition of reality into experience, he makes his intent even clearer by not wanting to deal with *experience qua experience* but simply our experience.¹³

This is a significant point of distinction between metaphysics and cosmology. The latter is obviously limited in its scope and as Whitehead makes clear his concern is our experience. We must take this into account to understand his point that speculative philosophy is a form of interpretation—interpretation of human experience. Without denying existence and pertinence of experiences beyond our experience, Whitehead is clear that the scope of speculative philosophy is our experience.

As interpretation of our experience, Whitehead adds quite significantly that the aim of speculative philosophy is to do justice to every element in our experience. The interpretation will be of little use unless it takes into account every element of our experience and is able to explain them. Here Whitehead is insisting on the ideal of comprehensiveness which we also noted in Bradley. For our experience to be adequately interpreted, the interpretation must be holistic as possible. If the interpretation ignores certain elements in our experience then the interpretation is vitiated by its very one-sidedness (Whitehead 1959, 10-18).

In attempting to broker a rapprochement between metaphysical rationality and scientific rationality by re-conceptualizing metaphysics as speculative philosophy, a key strategy Whitehead adopts is to tone down the claims of metaphysics by shedding its grandiose aura relative to which it is seen as grounding all other disciplines, given, as it were, that it is said to be first philosophy which investigates fundamental principles that other sciences presuppose as their foundation (Ilodigwe 2016, 20-38).

As we have seen Whitehead pursues this project of clipping the wings of metaphysics by settling for the more humble investigation of the universe of our experience and not the all-inclusive reality, or ultimate reality, if you prefer these terms. Aside from the fundamental shift of emphasis it appears that Whitehead retains all the features of traditional metaphysics in new forms. Of course, the moment he limits himself to interpreting our experience and all its elements, Whitehead rules out the possibility that the findings of speculative philosophy will apply in all worlds.

True Whitehead says that the task of speculative philosophy is to interpret experience in terms of the general system of ideas that are coherent, logical and necessary the truth is that he is not talking of experience as such but a specific form of experience, so that we cannot generalize from one form of experience to all forms of experience.

Let us take, for instance, the situation of seminaries in Nigeria. On Whitehead's provision, each seminary will have its own unique experience and could well become a subject of investigation. Going by the demands and provisions of speculative philosophy we can develop schemes in terms of which we interpret the experience of Ss. Peter and Paul Seminary, Ibadan, Nigeria, for instance. Our interpretation may be as comprehensive as possible taking into account every element of our experience. So far as the scheme is used in explaining the situation of Ss. Peter and Paul Seminary, we are secure.

But the point is that we cannot generalize on the basis of this finding and conclude that what we discover of Ss. Peter and Paul Seminary will be true of every seminary in the world; or any seminary as such. Whitehead will object to this sort of generalization owing to the fact that it exceeds the limit of our world. It may tell us something about the structure of other seminaries and what obtains in them but so long as it does not take into account their unique experience and the elements that make up this experience there is a limit to which it can aid our understanding of what happens in other seminaries.

We can enlarge this illustration and apply it to other forms of experience. When we do we see immediately that on account of the disparity between forms of experience we cannot move from one experience to another experience and apply the results of our finding without qualification. The attempt to restrict the scope of our interpretation and make it apply to only our experience and not *experience qua experience* appears to be the overall intent of Whitehead's speculative philosophy and to this extent it is heavily indebted to empiricism.

Even though it criticizes any form of rigid empiricism the fact remains that his concept of speculative philosophy is brokered in the crucible of empiricism. True it is committed to certain rationalism, but even its moment of commitment to rationalism is driven by its inherent empiricism. If the schemes of general ideas we frame in order to interpret our experience are limited, it is the ideal of empiricism that limits them. So long as we are within our experience we can speak of certain openness as suggested by Whitehead's criticism of scientific materialism.¹⁴

ASSESSMENT

I think this is the point of the holism that drives his concept of interpretation of experience. However it is arguable that this openness does not apply if we are dealing with the inter-relation between forms of experience otherwise we should be able to establish some common grounds between forms of experience that will enable us to determine the structure of *experience qua experience*. The claim to determine the structure of *experience qua experience* and not merely the structure of particular forms of experience has been the fundamental hallmark of metaphysics (Ilodigwe 2016, 20-38). Indeed the truth is that even with the category of experience that Whitehead prefers, the fundamental question of metaphysics does not seem to disappear.

The fundamental question of metaphysics can be formulated either in terms of the category of being or the category of reality or again the category of experience. Whatever formulation we prefer the challenge is the same, namely, whether we can speak of *reality qua reality*, or *experience qua experience* or again *being qua being*. Of course, we are dealing here with the vexed problem of the distinction between universal and particular. Metaphysics aligns itself with the universal and not the particular without necessarily disdaining the particular (Ilodigwe 2016, 20-38). If and when it focuses on the particular it is the universal in the particular that it is concerned with. The same challenge remains even with the transposition of the vocabulary of being into the vocabulary of experience.

Whitehead says that speculative philosophy interprets our experience and tries to do justice to all its elements. But if we compare our experience to it's others, or again if such comparison can be undertaken at all, we set up immediately the question as to how our experience is related to its other. Now we could choose to dwell on the question of the internal structure of our experience but we cannot but deal with the question of the structure of our experience in relation to other experience, once we begin to consider the other of our experience.

In other words the moment we have two or more particular experience we are bound to face the question as to whether there is anything that bind them together as forms of experience. This is the supreme question of metaphysics. One may shy away from it and refuse to ask it but that does not make it any irrelevant or non-existent. Indeed one may choose to concentrate on the lesser question of the structure of our particular experience but this will not replace the question of the structure of experience as such.

It is understandable that Whitehead wants to broker a rapprochement between metaphysical rationality and scientific rationality by toning down the claims of metaphysics and reformulating it as speculative philosophy. But we can raise the question whether Whitehead has done justice to metaphysics. His concept of speculative philosophy, as we have seen, reflects something of the traditional concern of metaphysics. Yet it undermines something that essentially belongs to metaphysics as traditionally understood. We may settle for speculative philosophy as cosmology, but it is doubtful whether it will be sufficient to address the unique concerns of metaphysics as traditionally conceived (Ilodigwe 2016, 20-38).

By toning down the claims of metaphysics in attempt to align it with scientific rationality Whitehead seems to destroy something that is vital to the being of metaphysics. It is doubtful then whether the rapprochement is successful. It would seem that Whitehead has

conceded so much to science that in the end terrible injustice is done to metaphysics.¹⁵ No doubt the need to bring metaphysics and science together is laudable especially in view of the groundbreaking success of modern science but this has to be done in a way that preserves the unique identity of metaphysics and science.

Whitehead's concept of speculative philosophy is an attempt to strike at such balance but it remains to be seen whether the reconciliation is successful so far as the price we have to pay is to give up all talk about *being qua being* or *experience qua experience* and content ourselves with the investigation of merely our experience.

CONCLUSION

We are reminded of Locke's earlier initiative more than three centuries before Whitehead in the same direction in the wake of the emergence of the new philosophy. Locke's own effort was also to appease science and the new philosophy he came up with bears the imprint of science (Locke 1993, 3-11). Just as the under-laborer status that Locke assumes in developing his scientific philosophy makes massive concession to science at the expense of the essence of true philosophy, Whitehead's attempt to reconcile metaphysics with science similarly makes massive concession to science at the expense of the true essence of metaphysics. We may adopt his concept of speculative philosophy but it certainly has to be shored up if it is to be regarded as addressing the true situation of metaphysics.

Is speculative philosophy metaphysics? It is not but it certainly captures something of the dynamics of metaphysics. The claims of metaphysics far exceed the claims of speculative philosophy and the burden is to justify those claims and not to tone them down. Toning them down may not constitute a valid argument against metaphysics but it may serve as another form of metaphysics but the question, as always, is whether it does justice to the true nature of metaphysics?

NOTES

1. Alfred. J. Ayer's *Language, truth and logic* (1936) offers a classic statement of the positivist prejudice that undergirds much of the anti-metaphysical bias of contemporary philosophy. See especially the first Chapter of the work with the title, "The elimination of Metaphysics" in which he formulates the principle of verification as the criterion of meaningful utterances. If we accept the verification principle as valid, Ayer's proscription of metaphysics and theology will stand. However, as Whitehead like many critics of positivism maintain, the problem with the verification principle is that it is too narrow and can hardly pass its own test, so that if we endorse it we cannot invariably entertain the notion of progress in science as science and metaphysics rely heavily on creative imagination.

2. As some commentators such as Robert Palter (1960, 1) point out, to do justice to Whitehead's thought will always require a clear understanding of the relationship between his scientific writings and his metaphysical writings. The two cannot be understood independently of each other without mutilating Whitehead's thought. For what is clear is that his earlier scientific writings are important for an understanding of his metaphysical writings since the latter grapples with issues arising from the former.

3. Unfortunately this feature of Whitehead's thought has not helped Whitehead's image and cause for all too often his writings prove quite inaccessible to most readers. Indeed as Wolfe Mays (1979, 9) correctly notes, "Too often Whitehead's views have been neglected because of his later reputation for obscurity in his metaphysical writings. Although few would wish to say that his major philosophical work, *Process and reality* is completely without philosophical significance, what this significance is; is not always clear to the cursory reader."

4. In contemporary philosophy such thinkers as Robin Collingwood and Michael Oakeshott pursue an agenda of toning down the claims of metaphysics in various ways. (See Ilodigwe 2015, 221-252).

5. See, for instance, the final chapter of Bradley's *Appearance and reality* (1930) which is titled "Ultimate doubts." In concluding his *magnum opus* on a note of skepticism, Bradley underscores the limitation that bedevils metaphysics without prejudice, of course, to its possibilities.

6. This way of reading Bradley effectively makes him a transitional figure and renders suspicious any facile categorization of Bradley as an absolute idealist in the mold of Hegel. Indeed all the time the impression is that aware of the limits of idealism, Bradley, like later Schelling, is already mounting an internal criticism of idealism, in view of a position that transcends idealism (see James Bradley 1996, 147-168).

7. Ibid.

8. On this emphasis Bradley and Whitehead are strikingly close as should be evident from Bradley's definition of Metaphysics as 'an attempt to know reality as against mere appearance, or the study of first principles or ultimate truths or again the effort to comprehend the universe in a piecemeal or by fragments, but somehow as a whole' (Bradley 1930, 1; Whitehead 1959).

9. Without doubt this is an aspect in which Whitehead's thought strikes a rapprochement with scientific rationality, so far as in science also nothing is treated as final (see Jones 1975, 73-81; Lawhead 2002, 487-490).

10. Whitehead's emphasis on speculative philosophy as involving a basic interpretation of experience aligns his thought with the movement in contemporary philosophy known as hermeneutics but interestingly Whitehead maintains a basic sympathy with the ideal of metaphysics even as he tries to underscore the limitation that bedevils metaphysical rationality (see Gadamer 1997, 205-231).

11. This is very much similar to the basic thrust of Husserl's phenomenology and so it is not surprising that Whitehead is sometimes compared to Husserl. (See Mays 1979, 13-14).

12. We find similar motivations in Oakeshott in dealing with the legacy of idealism for like Whitehead he prefers to present matters in terms of the category of experience rather than the category of reality, and to this extent his concern is to understand the nature of the relationship between experience and modes of experience (see Oakeshott 1930, 1-12).

13. All these are in keeping with the contemporary craze to tone down the claims of metaphysics in order to make peace between metaphysics and science (see Ilodigwe 2015, 221-252).

14. It is not surprising that the overall result of Whitehead's speculative philosophy is often compared to Kant's transcendental idealism particularly the emphasis the latter

places on the possible experience as the matrix in terms of which pure reason legitimately operates in respect of its ambition to cognize reality. Indeed Whitehead himself mentions Kant as one of the major influences on his speculative philosophy (see Whitehead 1959,p.iv).

15. It is arguable a similar case can be made against Collingwood's attempted reformation of metaphysics in terms of the ideal of the historical (see Ilodigwe 2015, 221-252).

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