

RECUPERATING THE CONCEPT OF EVENT IN THE EARLY WHITEHEAD

KENNETH C. MASONG

The article recovers the earlier meaning of event as found in Alfred North Whitehead's works, Principles of Natural Knowledge and Concept of Nature. In the early Whitehead, the event is considered as the metaphysical ultimate; such that events are the metaphysical building blocks in order to account for the temporal and spatial extensiveness of reality. The recuperation of the pre-PR concept of event is expressive of a dynamic of extending over, or passing into, of one event to another. This dynamic is explicitly absent in the actual occasion of Process and Reality, after Whitehead's "turn to atomism."

INTRODUCTION: MAPPING THE CONCEPTUAL LANDSCAPE

The concept of event in Whitehead is itself a flux of meanings reflective of the development of his metaphysical thoughts. Scholars are wont in agreement as to how it plays exactly in the development of his metaphysics from *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Natural Knowledge* (heretofore, PNK) to *Modes of Thought*. In his early writings, particularly on the philosophy of science, the concept of event plays a significant role as one of the types of entities "yielded for our knowledge by our perceptions of nature" (PNK 60). Events are the ultimate units of reality; they are "the ultimate facts of nature" (PNK 4). A few years later, after the publication of *Principles of Natural Knowledge* in 1919, there was a fundamental metaphysical shift in the thought of Whitehead, a "turn to atomism" in 1925. In the evolution of Whitehead's thought concerning the event, at the time of *Process and Reality*, (heretofore PR) the concept of event recedes from metaphysical importance. The event in *Process and Reality* does not even have a

categoreal status; it does not count as one of the Categories of Existence (see PR 22). This “turn” in Whitehead’s philosophy Stengers identifies as happening around April 1925. She explains that in *Process and Reality*, “l’événement aura tout bonnement disparu, ou plus précisément, aura perdu son statut conceptuel. Nous sommes donc parvenus ici au point critique, en ce point où s’est produit, pour Whitehead, ce que j’ai appelé une “adjonction,” au seuil également d’une aventure qui, en quelque quatre ans, fera de lui le plus singulier des penseurs spéculatifs du XX^e siècle. Nous sommes en avril 1925” (Penser 217).

After the “turn,” Whitehead still continues to refer to the “ultimate facts of nature” in his metaphysics, but now no longer in reference to events but to actual occasions.¹ The concept of an actual occasion accommodates the “atomistic turn” in Whitehead’s philosophy. This is clearly evident in the fact that though events (in *Principles of Natural Knowledge*) are capable of extending over or passing into other events, actual occasions (in *Process and Reality*) perish in the completion of their becoming. Furthermore, the event as found in *Principles of Natural Knowledge* and *Concept of Nature* (and to a certain extent *Science and the Modern World*) becomes generalized after the “turn” to mean a type of a “nexus of actual occasions” (PR 73). It is not the goal of this essay to chart the evolution of the concept of event in the whole metaphysics of Whitehead. The task at hand here is a *recuperation of the earlier*

¹ Although there is an analogy of role played by these two concepts especially with respect to being the ultimate reality, the *rēs vera*, I think it is an oversight to categorically identify events with actual occasions in such a way that the subtle distinctions between them are thrown out. Indeed, this is bluntly reflected in an author who reviewed Stengers’ *Penser avec Whitehead* who concluded that what Whitehead calls events in *Concept of Nature* becomes the actual entities or occasions in PR. “Depuis Le concept de nature et, en réalité, les *Principia mathematica*, Whitehead distingue dans l’expérience deux sortes de facteurs : d’une part, des facteurs de passage, qui sont singuliers, c’est-à-dire ne se reproduisent pas, qui comportent un devenir et sont étendus dans l’espace comme dans le temps ; d’autre part, des facteurs immobiles, susceptibles de se reproduire et, par conséquent, de faire l’objet d’une reconnaissance, et qui ne sont pas soumis à l’extension. Les facteurs en devenir sont les “événements dans Le concept de nature, et ces événements deviendront les “entités actuelles” les “occasions d’expérience” dans *Procès et réalité*.” Pierre Cassou-Noguès, “Compte-rendu de : Isabelle Stengers, *Penser avec Whitehead*, (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 582.” *Methodos* 6 (2006), accessed on 5 May 2008, <http://methodos.revues.org/documents527.html>.

meaning of event as found in *Principles of Natural Knowledge* and *Concept of Nature*.² This is important because the pre-PR concept of event is expressive of a dynamic of extending over, or passing into, of one event to another. This dynamic is explicitly absent in the actual occasion of *Process and Reality*.

EVENT AS THE METAPHYSICAL ULTIMATE

The concept of event figures most importantly in the second phase of his career, during the stage of his life where Whitehead was reflecting on science and education. During this time, his thoughts were already circling on certain concepts that would constitute his mature contribution in cosmology and metaphysics. The concept of event particularly played a prominent role in his book *Principles of Natural Knowledge* (1919).³ This book emerged as a reflection upon the general deliverances of experience and how these are to be understood in the light of the then recent advances in modern speculative physics particularly that of Einstein's theory of relativity that he finds rather disconcerting.⁴ Already in here, one intimates Whitehead's peculiar insistence on "concrete experience" (PNK 11) over speculation that tends to be in danger of falling into the snare of the fallacy of misplaced

² This is not to suggest that the concept of event in the later Whitehead is devoid of any metaphysical significance. The earlier notion is recuperated here precisely because it expresses more the sense of (1) organic unity and (2) inclusion. These are elements compromised by the atomic turn in Whitehead where reality becomes viewed as discrete and separate.

³ It is interesting to note that though the concept of event in the early philosophical / scientific writings of Whitehead plays a large role in *PNK*, in the two sections that Isabelle Stengers devotes to the concept of event ("*Événement et passage*" and "*L'événement de son propre point de vue*"), no references appear coming from *Principles of Natural Knowledge*. It appears that in the first section ("*Événement et passage*") references come most from *Concept of Nature*, while in the second section ("*L'événement de son propre point de vue*") references come mostly from *Science and the Modern World* and *Process and Reality*.

⁴ One notes this when he prefaces the book by saying that it "is largely concerned with providing a physical basis for the more modern views [of speculative physics] which have thus emerged. The whole investigation is based on the principle that the scientific concepts of space and time are the first outcome of the simplest generalizations from experience, and that they are not to be looked for at the tail end of a welter of differential equations" (PNK vi).

concreteness. The first deliverance of this insistence on concrete experience is the disclosure of the event. As Isabelle Stengers argues “‘[é]vénement’ est le premier des noms associés par Whitehead à ce dont nous avons l’expérience” (*Penser* 59). That this book is a work of natural philosophy rather than metaphysics is clearly indicated by Whitehead when he avers that his concern here is with “[n]ature, that is, with the object of perceptual knowledge, and not with the synthesis of the knower and the known” (*PNK* 7). Nonetheless, his own philosophical reflection does bear significant consequences in metaphysical thinking particularly on the concept of event. Indeed, one can almost say that the whole book is an elaboration of a natural philosophy founded on a theory of event. In the words of Whitehead:

The fundamental assumption to be elaborated in the course of this enquiry is that the ultimate facts of nature, in terms of which all physical and biological explanation must be expressed, are events connected by their spatio-temporal relations, and that these relations are in the main reducible to the property of events that they can contain (or extend over) other events which are parts of them. (*PNK* 4). In philosophy, events are more ultimate than space and time, constituting them as interconnected.⁵ When one considers nature as an object of inquiry, the whole of nature is discriminated as a complex of entities that comprise the data of perceptual knowledge. Whitehead calls this process of discrimination “the diversification of nature” (*PNK* 59ff). Although there are infinite types of entities disclosed in this diversification depending on the varieties of procedures accomplished for this task, Whitehead limits the list to five types of entities: events, percipient objects, sense-objects, perceptual objects and scientific objects. It is not the goal here

⁵ “The externality of nature is the outcome of [the] relation of extension. Two events are mutually external, or are ‘separate,’ if there is no event which is part of both. Time and space both spring from the relation of extension.... It follows that time and space express relations between events” (*PNK* 61).

to elaborate fully on the interrelatedness of these five types since what concerns us presently is the elucidation of a certain understanding of event. Nonetheless, these five types may be subdivided into two, namely *events* and *objects*, and it is to these that our attention shall be focused.

In *Principles of Natural Knowledge*, Whitehead speaks of the event as the metaphysical ultimate. As we see quoted above, Whitehead identifies events as “the ultimate facts of nature” (PNK 4). Whitehead continues with this identification of events as the “ultimate facts” in his other earlier works: “If we are to look for substance anywhere, I should find it in events which are in some sense the ultimate substance of nature” (CN 19); “Events are the “more concrete elements of nature” (CN 33); “The event is the unit of things real” (SMW 152). One sees here that events, in the early Whitehead, are the metaphysical building blocks in order to account for the temporal and spatial extensiveness of reality. In *Principles of Natural Knowledge*, the event plays a singular role in explaining the deliverances of experience and the essential concepts of science.⁶ For Whitehead, the fundamental metaphysical problem is how to account for both change and permanence, being and becoming, and he finds this in the very concept of event:

The ultimate facts of nature, in terms of which all physical and biological explanation must be expressed, are events connected by their spatio-temporal *relations*, and that these relations are in the main reducible to the *property* of events that they can contain (or extend over) other events which are parts of them. (PNK 4, emphases added).

⁶ “Our perception of time is as a duration, and these instants have only been introduced by reason of a supposed necessity of thought. In fact absolute time is just as much a metaphysical monstrosity as absolute space. The way out of the perplexities, as to the ultimate data of science in terms of which physical explanation is ultimately to be expressed, is to express the essential scientific concepts of time, space and material as issuing from fundamental relations between events and from recognitions of the characters of events. These relations of events are those immediate deliverances of observation which are referred to when we say that events are spread through time and space” (PNK 8).

We have already quoted this aforesaid text but what needs to be emphasized this time is the phrase: relation of events and the property or character of events. There is exhibited in experience an externality of nature, and this externality is the outcome of the relation of extension whereby events are the relata. The relation between two events is explicative of space and time, like how, in geometry, two points in a plane convey extensiveness, either temporal or spatial.⁷ Different properties issue from relations of events. If they be properties issuing from spatial relations then what is exhibited in the relation of extension is that events are actualities; they are matters of fact. If these properties issue from temporal relations, then what is exhibited therein is that events involve the becoming of nature. Explaining this further, one has to bear in mind that because of this conveyance of extensiveness in the relations between events, this same “relation of extension exhibits events as actual—as matters of fact—by means of its properties which issue in spatial relations” (PNK 61). In this regard, an event then is what occupies the place in a determined locus: “an event is there and not here [or, here and not there]” (PNK 62). The relation that events exhibit is something determined and final; it establishes spatial boundaries (that is, here *not* there) that account for externality. In this regard, an “actual event is divested of all possibility” (PNK 61). Whitehead continues that an event

... is what does become in nature. It can never happen again; for essentially it is just itself, there and then. An event is just what it is, and is just how it is related and it is nothing else. Any event, however similar, with different relations is another event. There is no element of hypothesis in any actual event.... Time and space, which are entirely actual and devoid of any tincture of possibility, are to be

⁷ It needs to be noted that events here are not to be confused with objects. “Other natural objects which are not events are only in time and space derivatively, namely, by reason of their relations to events. Great confusion has been caused to the philosophy of science by this neglect of the derivative nature of the spatial and temporal relations of objects of various types” (PNK 61).

sought for among the relations of events. (PNK 61-62).

With regard to relations of events that exhibit externality, “events are essentially elements of actuality” (PNK 61), that is, they are explicative of the ingression of possibilities into the realm of the concrete or real. Since events are already devoid of possibilities, “[e]vents never change” (PNK 62). But this does not exhaust the whole drama of events in the early Whitehead, that is, events are not only constitutive of the domain of Being. They are likewise essentially “elements of becomingness” (PNK 61). How is this to be explained, especially if relations of events constitute them in spatio-temporal determinateness? Indeed, if events never change, they are final, how then are they essentially elements of becomingness? On this respect, one may notice Whitehead’s metaphysical incorporation of the notion of evolution into his system of thought. Nature is evolving, developing, but how does this come about? Whitehead explains himself thus:

Nature develops, in the sense that an event *e* becomes part of an event *e'* which includes (i.e. extends over) *e* and also extends into the futurity beyond *e*. Thus in a sense the event *e* does change, namely, in its relations to the events which were not and which become actual in the creative advance of nature. The change of an event *e*, in this meaning of the term ‘change,’ will be called the ‘passage’ of *e*; and the word ‘change’ will not be used in this sense. Thus we can say that *events pass but do not change*. The passage of an event is its passing into some other event which is not it (PNK 62, emphases added).

This approach of Whitehead is an ingenious synthesis of the problematic of the unity of being and becoming. Instead of reducing one as a phenomenon of the other, even sometimes reducing one as a mere shadow of reduced reality, Whitehead tries to affirm the reality of both actuality and becoming. He accomplished this by articulating a view of events as passing but not undergoing change. Indeed, change is accounted for by the

inclusion or extending over of events beyond another event which it is not. The singularity of event then is preserved, yet its own transformation is accommodated in terms of inclusive relation or extending over.

FIGURING THE CONCEPT OF EVENT IN RELATION TO OBJECT

How does an event enter into experience? For Whitehead, events are properly speaking *apprehended*. This is a distinct nomenclature that Whitehead introduces, particularly in *Principles of Natural Knowledge*, in order to suggest that events are happenings that are not alien from us. Events infect our own experience with their own texture and consistency. Events surround us and likewise pass through us as “the medium within which our physical experience develops, or, rather, they are themselves the development of that experience” (PNK 63). When one considers the event of looking before a MacBook while typing these very words, the event as such is never independent of me. Standing before the event, I can never be a mere spectator.⁸ The event is that very condition of comportment whereby that which is conscious of and that of which one is conscious participate in a unique structure that is permanent and unrepeatable. As of this moment that I am still here before my laptop typing these very words, the earlier event (*e*) now extends over this very event I find myself in the present (*e*). The earlier event is unique and permanent, yet passes over into the current event because they are both related within a single extensive continuum (read: I am still in front of my laptop typing these words). These events are said to be apprehended because I am aware of these things happening and these happenings involve me as playing a character in the unfolding of the drama of each event.

⁸ John Dewey is critical of what he calls a “spectator theory of knowledge,” that is, the view that the acquisition and management of knowledge are accomplished independently of the immediate milieu of the knower. See Nicholas Rescher, *Process Metaphysics: An Introduction to Process Philosophy* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996), 124-25.

However, it is not simply events that enter into experience. Indeed, an event as such is not solely explicative of reality. Other than relations of events exhibiting extentionality, one has to take account likewise of permanences. If an event is characterized by happening or passing over, one may speak of objects as the “permanent” side of the event. Experience divulges two things: on the one hand, events which are *apprehended*, and on the other hand, objects which are—and this is the distinct nomenclature given by Whitehead—*recognized*. The relation of event to object is that objects “convey the permanences recognized in events” (PNK 62). If experience does not recognize any permanence in the flux of events that it apprehends, then no object is divulged, undermining experience’s own intentional structure, a scenario that logically ends in chaos. For Whitehead, rational thinking entails the comparison of events and this would not be achieved without the recognition of objects, which are the recognitions of permanence amidst the passing over of events.⁹

How does Whitehead account for the object of experience? In broad strokes, objects are the opposites of events. If events do not change and instead pass, objects do change. The passing of event is an event extending itself over another event. An object is supposed to change because of the same object’s relation to diverse events. For example, the Basilica of Koekelberg in Brussels is said to be changing in the sense that it is not the same now as it was way back in 1971, the year of its completion. It is the same basilica (permanence), yet in relation to events that surround it so to speak, one acknowledges change in the object. The basilica is permanent because, in Whitehead’s view, objects are without time and space. This is not to mean that objects are *not in* a specific time and space, but that there is no “fixedness of relations,” temporal or spatial, which an event possesses (PNK 64).¹⁰ That the object changes “is merely the variety of its relations to the various events which are passing in time and in space” (PNK 63).

⁹ “Rational thought which is the comparison of event with event would be intrinsically impossible without objects” (PNK 64).

¹⁰ “Events (in a sense) are space and time, namely, space and time are abstractions from events. But objects are only derivatively in space and time by reason of their relations to events” (PNK 63).

Furthermore, if events are matters of fact, that is, they are actualities that no longer accommodate possibilities in themselves, whenever “the concept of possibility can apply to a natural element, that element is an object” (PNK 64). Since relations are external to an object’s being (unlike the case of events), there will always be the possibility of recurrence of objects in different events. Indeed, as we see in the case of the Basilica of Koekelberg, this object traverses various (temporally related) events such that even at the present time it still holds a relation to the event that is expressed in saying “I am visiting the Basilica.”¹¹ In Whitehead’s estimation, the theory of natural object has been wrecked by misplacing the axiom that one thing can only be in one place at a time from the event to the object. An object can be in any place at a particular time. Its spatio-temporal relations are not intrinsic to it, accommodating possibilities of localization from other spatio-temporal locus. Only events can be here (*not* there) and now (*neither* before *nor* after). Consequential to an object’s indifference to spatio-temporal relations, the identity of an object is internally constituted. An object is a unity in itself. It does not have “parts” because strictly speaking it has no fixed relation to time and space. As such, this character of having parts belongs to events. Whitehead explains himself more clearly in the following:

The fundamental rule is that events have parts and that—except in a derivative sense, from their relations to events—objects have no parts. On the other hand the same object can be found in different parts of space and time, and this cannot hold for events. Thus the identity of an object may be an important physical fact, while the identity of an event is essentially a trivial logical necessity. Thus the prisoner in the dock may be the man who did

¹¹ In *Concept of Nature* Whitehead gave the example of the Great Pyramid in speaking of the relation of an object to different events: “An object is an entity of a different type from an event. For example, the event which is the life of nature within the Great Pyramid yesterday and to-day is divisible into two parts, namely the Great Pyramid yesterday and the Great Pyramid to-day. But the recognizable object which is also called the Great Pyramid is the same object to-day as it was yesterday” (CN 77).

the deed. But the deed lies in the irrevocable past; only the allegation of it is before the court and perhaps (in some countries) a reconstitution of the crime. Essentially the very deed itself is never there. (PNK 66).

That our experience of the natural world divulges flux (event) and permanence (object) is clearly the goal that Whitehead is pursuing in his natural philosophy and metaphysics. Even before his famous critique of scientific materialism in *Concept of Nature* and *Science and the Modern World*, the concept of event in *Principles of Natural Knowledge* lays already the foundation of a process metaphysics that avoids the bifurcation of nature that Descartes and the modern development of science have bequeathed.¹² His own natural philosophy, particularly in his critique of the theory of relativity, is a rejection of the substance-quality model of metaphysics and the priority of matter over space-time in physics.¹³ “On the old theory of relativity, Time and Space are relations between *materials*; on our theory,” continues Whitehead, “they are relations between *events*” (PNK 26). In order to schematically illustrate the distinction between events and objects, particularly as these concepts are explicated in *Principles of Natural Knowledge*, a table is provided below (see Table 4.1.).

Table 4.1. On the Distinctions between Event and Object

EVENTS

OBJECTS

Relations of objects

Qualities of events

¹² Materialism here understood as the view whereby “the material, the space, the time, the various laws concerning the transition of material configurations, are taken as ultimate stubborn facts, not to be tampered with” (SMW 142).

¹³ See Ronny Desmet, “The Rebirth of the Ether,” in *Chromatikon III: Annuaire de la philosophie en procès*, eds. Michel Weber and Pierfrancesco Basile (Louvain-la-Neuve: Presses Universitaires de Louvain, 2007), 69-93. See likewise Yutaka Tanaka, “Einstein and Whitehead: The Principle of Relativity Reconsidered,” *Historia Scientiarum* 32, (1987): 43-61.

Never change	They change
They have parts	They have a unity (i.e., don't have parts)
Events enter into experience by being lived through; they extend around us	Objects enter into experience by intellectuality of recognition
They don't have the possibility of recurrence; their self-identity is wholly dependent on its relations; there is fixedness of relations	They have the possibility of recurrence because their self-identity is not dependent on relations; they lack fixedness of relations
Can only be in one place at one time	Not the case with objects
The continuity of nature lies in events	Atomic properties of nature lies in objects
We apprehend events	We recognize objects
They are not permanent	They are permanent
Whatever is purely matter of fact	When the concept of possibility applies, that is an object
Identity of an event is essentially a trivial logical necessity	Identity of an object is an important physical fact

One can see from the foregoing discussion that the concept of event in the early Whitehead appears richer and denser than the later concept of event as "nexus of actual occasions" (PR 73) because it articulates, surprisingly, a more *organic* notion of "the ultimate substance of nature" (CN 19). This is noticeable because it seeks to preserve the dynamic of extending over of events into another. This

early concept of event typically accommodates Whitehead's own penchant of maintaining healthy tensions between dualities. The event is explicative of both being and becoming, of flux (event) and permanence (object), by the properties and relations of the extensionality of events. If the extension issues into spatiality, actualization ensues, and if extension issues into temporality, event becomes constitutive of becomingness. Defining an event as a process of integration, as "the grasping into unity of a pattern of aspects" (SMW 119), the event as such is characteristically *open* to that which is beyond itself, supplying data for its integration.¹⁴

What we have, then, in the early Whitehead is a denser conceptualization of event ontology. The subject-quality model that one finds in classical metaphysics of substance is transformed by Whitehead into a metaphysics of process whereby reality is constituted by the interrelation of events in some determinate continuum. Matter, given prominence in classical metaphysics because it becomes the repository of qualities to which they are predicated, is subsumed conceptually as the recognition of permanence that one apprehends in events and relations of events. The question now is, why is it that the theory of event in *Principles of Natural Knowledge*, which accommodates a balance between flux (event) and permanence (object), recedes in the background by becoming generalized as a type of "nexus of actual occasions" (PR 73) in the development of Whitehead's metaphysics in *Process and Reality*? In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead no longer speaks of events as "the ultimate substance of nature" (PNK 4). The "final real things of which the world is made up" is now referred to as actual

¹⁴ This openness is crucial for the articulation of the event because it provides the avenue for the interruption of transcendence. Whitehead's event is open to the *advenire* of the divine. In saying that the event is capable of extending over or passing into other events, one intuits the dynamic of the event of the religious. It is capable of transforming, molding and renewing the lives and thoughts of those that have attained contact with the divine. The event of the religious *endures*, and "by reason of this inherent endurance the event is important for the modification of its environment" (SMW 119). This concept of event is capable of articulating the notion of unfolding, of *evenire* in the event of the religious. See Kenneth C. Masong, "Becoming-Religion: A. N. Whitehead and a Contemporary Philosophical Reflection on Religion" PhD diss., (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2008).

occasions (PR 18). Isabelle Stengers, as quoted above, argues that in Whitehead there is a turn of thinking in the 1920's. According to the notes taken by William Ernest Hocking, on 7 April 1925, Whitehead remarked that he's in a "state of confusion" perhaps primarily because he had come to the conclusion that science has a need for an "atomic theory of time" (*Penser* 217). Indeed, by the time of the writing of *Process and Reality*, Whitehead concludes already that "the ultimate metaphysical truth is atomism" (PR 35).

CONCLUSION: THE ATOMISTIC TURN

This "atomistic turn" in Whitehead's thought, Stengers argues, proceeds from his consideration of event "from its own standpoint" (or in the words of Stengers, "*l'événement de son propre point de vue*"¹⁵). In her *Penser avec Whitehead*, Stengers offers a fresh interpretation of Whitehead based on some reflections on his works arranged in a generally chronological order.¹⁶ It is not our goal here to elaborate on how Stengers reads Whitehead. The concern is regarding the concept of event and the two sections ("*Événement et passage*" and "*L'événement de son propre point de vue?*") that deal precisely on this issue in her book. It needs to be noted that both sections are found in the first part, that is, on the transition from the philosophy of nature to metaphysics. The first section deals with the early thoughts of Whitehead on the event, that is, the suggestion of the passage as delivered in experience with references mostly coming from *Concept of Nature* and roughly reflecting what we had been pondering on the concept of event in

¹⁵ The elaboration of this otherwise unnoticeable phrase in Whitehead forms a whole section of the first part (from natural philosophy to metaphysics) of Stengers' *Penser avec Whitehead*.

¹⁶ The 581-page book is basically divided into two parts, the transition of his thought from natural philosophy to metaphysics (part I) and an elaboration of his cosmology (part II). Far from simply being a chronological commentary, Stengers aims instead "to think *with* Whitehead." As such, the book, though profoundly insightful, does not unfortunately help any novice in process thought in making distinctions as to where Whitehead ends and where Stengers begins (not to mention the Deleuzean rhizomatic networks that pervade throughout). But this she clearly expects as the point is to embark on an adventure of thinking, as on a raft, to "get wet" (or perhaps even to submerge oneself) in the act of thinking with Whitehead, but without getting drowned. See Stengers, *Penser*, 18-19.

Principles of Natural Knowledge. The more crucial one is the second section wherein Stengers asks herself (or perhaps it was a question to Whitehead): “*L’événement de son propre point de vue?*”

For Whitehead, reality is constituted by a two-fold change or transformation. On the one hand, reality itself is said to be changing: “all things flow” (PR 208). On the other hand, it is not just reality as such that is perceived to be in constant becoming, our own perspective of reality likewise changes. Consider what he says regarding religion: “It is the peculiarity of religion that humanity is always shifting its attitude towards it” (RM 13). This shift of attitude or modification of viewpoints accrues not simply due to an internal conversion of a mind dislodged from all external influence. The change of perspective in fact is but part of the very texture of reality. For Whitehead, reality is not a theatre whereby there is a clear-cut separation between the actors and the audience; the actors doing their thing on stage and the audience as flaccid receptors of scenes, music, conversations and emotions. The Whiteheadian view of reality approximates what Charles Taylor, commenting on Rousseau, calls the model of “public festival, where everyone is both performer and spectator.”¹⁷ If “relations are treated as fundamental” (PNK 61), and if “[n]ature is a process” (CN 53), it is but logical that the very character that typifies reality is likewise inclusive of the relation of the knower and the known. For Whitehead, to approach nature as an object of enquiry is the domain of natural philosophy, but when the investigation deals already with the synthesis of the knower and the known, one traverses the province of metaphysics (cf. PNK vii). Metaphysically considered then the advancement of knowledge entails what Stengers calls an “ethopoietic character,” that is, in the production of knowledge there is a concomitant transformation of the knower

¹⁷ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 205. In the same page, Taylor quotes Rousseau: “*Mais quels seront enfin les objets de ces spectacles? Rien, si l’on veut. Avec la liberté, partout où règne l’affluence, le bien-être y règne aussi. Plantez au milieu d’une place publique un piquet couronné de fleurs, rassemblez-y le peuple, et vous aurez une fête. Faites mieux encore: donnez les spectateurs en spectacle; rendez-les acteurs eux-mêmes; faites que chacun se voie et s’aime dans les autres, afin que tous en soient mieux unis.*” Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre à d’Alembert sur les spectacles*, in *Du Contrat Social* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 1962), 225.

also (*Thinking* 8). What natural philosophy considers its object of study, metaphysics generalizes in such a way that the fundamental principles derived from perceptual knowledge become exemplified in the subject of knowledge itself. The radicality of the metaphysics of process that Whitehead espouses lies in the contention that “no individual subject can have independent reality, since it is a prehension of limited aspects of subjects other than itself” (SMW 151). The Whiteheadian subject is not purely an agency of effect; it is a duality, the *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem* of concrescent feelings. It is a subject-superject (See PR 28). The external world contaminates us. The idea of a pure self-identity is rendered an illusion before the truth of nature as the unfolding of becoming. What we have here then is the case whereby the vision discovered by Whitehead concerning the understanding of nature as a flux enters into self-reflexivity such that the very truth discerned with regard to the understanding of nature as a rhythmic dance of flux and permanence becomes the principle that underlies the very nature of the inquirer. When Stengers asks, “*L’événement de son propre point de vue?*” she was not suggesting that our perspective of reality should be taken *from* the standpoint of events, but that our self-identity, and all perspectives we take, is recognized as an *instantiation* of the evental character discerned in reality.

Kenneth C. Masong

Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City
and St. Vincent School of Theology, Quezon City
Email: kmasong@ateneo.edu