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Beyond the Process God: A Defense of the Classical Divine Attributes

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Abstract

Because of the work of process philosophers Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, a view of God has emerged as being in a constant state of flux. The power and knowledge of the process God are much more restricted than the power and knowledge of the classical God, but such diminutions supposedly safeguard divine goodness from tyrannical implications. In this paper, I defend the classical divine attributes against process philosophers. More specifically, I argue that God's omnipotence does not diminish divine goodness and that a deity with such restricted power would not function as a proper object of worship. In the first section, there is a presentation of the historical and philosophical basis of process theology. The second section reveals the ways in which process theology has been applied to mysticism, gender equality, and environmentalism. In the third section, I demonstrate the weaknesses of the process God and argue for the superiority of the classical notion of God.

Part I

Historical and Conceptual Background of Process Theology

Historical Background of Process Thought

With the central focus on change as key to understanding reality, the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus may be said to be a forefather of process thought (Seibt). His claim that "one could not step into the same river twice" (Aristotle 1010a 10-15) inspired philosophers like Plato, but the Heraclitan doctrine would not experience any extensive development until the twentieth century with the advent of process philosophy (Aristotle 987b).

The philosophy and the theology that subsequently grew out of it is largely indebted to two men: Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne. Before investing himself in

philosophy, Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) devoted the early part of his career to mathematics. After studying at Trinity College in Cambridge, England, Whitehead became a Fellow in mathematics and gained the chair of Applied Mathematics at the Imperial College of Science in 1910. With his student, Bertrand Russell, Whitehead produced *Principia Mathematica* (1910).

As time went on, Whitehead became interested in philosophy of science. With a four-dimensional model of spacetime, he explored the connection between objects and events. His work evolved into metaphysical investigations of the ways in which objects are influenced by events. Using the term *prehension*, Whitehead explained that even inanimate objects receive the entirety of past events of the universe in each moment. In 1929, just five years after becoming a philosophy professor at Harvard University, Whitehead published *Process and Reality*. The book articulated his idea of the universe as an organism composed of actual occasions, or events. Part of *Process and Reality* presented a view of God as having two natures: primordial and consequent. The dipolar nature of the divine, as well as the metaphysical emphasis on process over substance, laid the groundwork for much of the work of Charles Hartshorne (Reese 622-625).

Hartshorne (1897-2000) was passionate about philosophy. When he served as a medic during World War I, he brought with him a box of philosophy books. After the war, Hartshorne studied at Harvard, where he earned a doctorate in philosophy. Harvard was also where he met Whitehead. During the course of his professional life, Hartshorne worked on developing Whitehead's process philosophy into a process theology. In 1928, Hartshorne began teaching at the University of Chicago. Although he was a professor in the Philosophy Department, Hartshorne had a much greater influence in the School of Theology ("Charles Hartshorne").

For a time, the University of Chicago was a center of process theology. In 1926, Henry Nelson Wieman gave a lecture on Religion in the Making, a published collection of lectures delivered by Whitehead. The university, due to its sociohistorical approach to Christianity and the presence of Hartshorne, produced theologians who borrowed greatly from process thought in order to reconcile their religious views with an increasingly secular orientation toward life. One of these theologians, Schubert M. Ogden, published *Christ Without Myth* in 1961. In his book, Ogden focused on Christ as the great example of human awareness of and obedience to God's loving desires for our lives. Also, as the title suggests, Ogden sought to demythologize the Christ event. John B. Cobb, Jr., another theologian from the University of Chicago, hoped to bring Whiteheadian thought to a larger audience. Whitehead's *Process and Reality* was a philosophically technical book, but Cobb borrowed ideas from Whitehead and used them in such a way that made them more accessible. In addition to teaching at the School of Theology at Claremont, California, Cobb published a number of books, such as *The Structure of Christian Existence*, *Liberal Christianity at the Crossroads*, and *Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology* (Cobb 176-180).

Process thought was later embraced in the areas of feminist philosophy and theology because of its focus on divine relationality and embodiment. Both Whitehead and Hartshorne were supporters of women's rights in their day (Christ 16). In his later life, Hartshorne changed the pronouns he used for God from the exclusively masculine "He" and "Him" to the gender-inclusive "He-She" and "Him-Her" (Christ 17). Mary Daly, a provocative professor at Boston College, credited Whitehead as one of her influences in her book *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Christ 4). Years later, Hartshorne influenced Carol Christ, a writer and leader in the Goddess Movement. After Christ published *Rebirth of*

the Goddess in 1998, Cobb informed her that much of her book dealt with concepts in process theology. While Christ admitted that she had done so somewhat unconsciously, she later delved more deeply into Hartshorne's works and wrote *She Who Changes: Re-Imagining the Divine in the World* (Christ 22-23). The process themes of embodiment, interconnectedness, and persuasive power that drew Christ and many other feminist theists toward the work of Whitehead and Hartshorne will be explored in Part II of this paper.

Conceptual Background of Process Philosophy

Although his work would become known as "process philosophy," Whitehead originally used the term "philosophy of organism" (*Process* 18). In his philosophy of organism, Whitehead saw the world as made up of occasions of experience rather than substances. Whitehead's occasions of experience are somewhat like Leibniz's monads; both actual occasions and monads are the most basic features of the world. Leibniz's monads, however, are not directly affected by any other monads. Each monad is windowless and functions entirely internally. The harmony that exists between monads (which results in our perception of cause and effect) is the work of the divine monad. Whitehead's actual occasions do function internally, but they have windows that prehend, or unconsciously take into itself, the events of the past (Cobb 19-20).

The occasion of experience begins with its windows open, prehending all the events that precede its existence. Once the prehension is complete, the windows close and the past events are processed internally (Cobb 20). The next stage is concrescence, the final formation of past events within the present occasion of experience. It is at the moment of concrescence that the occasion is said to "enjoy" existence. Following its enjoyment, the occasion of experience moves into the past and becomes one of the events that will forevermore influence future occasions of experience (Cobb 16, 20).

For example, an occasion of experience that makes up a rock will take in all the past experiences of the world, but most of those experiences will not be given a significant value for the rock's present moment. The experience of sunlight hitting the rock, as well as the dripping of raindrops onto the top of the rock, will be processed as some of the more pertinent past experiences that feed into the present occasion of experience. Having ordered the experiences of the past, the occasion of experience will embrace heat and erosion and then go on to inform the future of the rock as it passes out of existence. If many experiences of the recent past involve the heat of the sun, for instance, the rock may become steadily warmer over time.

A person, or any other subsisting entity, exists as a chain of occasions of experience. Even rocks, which are inanimate and appear to undergo little to no change, are composed of occasions of experience. Both people and rocks prehend the past and shape the future (Cobb 18, 20). While the rock lacks consciousness, its existence as an actual entity reveals its capacity for prehension. Without prehension, there can be no change, and change is the core identity of anything that is not abstract (Cobb 14).

As an actual entity, God is also constantly changing. Whitehead claims that "God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification" (*Process* 343). Such a claim flies in the face of what we will call "classical theism," a system of thought focused on an eternal, unchanging, and absolutely perfect God. The classical God exists beyond any of the metaphysical rules that seem to limit creatures. Creatures have potentiality, but the classical God is pure actuality. The process God has both actuality and potentiality.

Whitehead addresses the issues of divine actuality and potentiality with a dipolar view of God. According to process thought, God's nature has a primordial pole and a consequent pole.

The primordial pole is the "unlimited conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of potentiality" (*Process* 343). All goodness, power, and knowledge is held together within the primordial pole, for it expresses God's ultimate aim. While classical theists may recognize many elements of the classical God within the primordial pole, Whitehead dismisses this particular pole as lacking actuality. Conceptual perfection is indeed part of the divine nature, but in its abstract form, the primordial pole lacks consciousness and feeling (*Process* 343-344).

The consciousness and feelings of God are held within the consequent pole of the divine nature. It is there that God prehends all occasions of experience in the world, taking them into Godself and constantly being changed by them. The consequent pole represents the actual God that is experienced by all creatures. By prehending all things, the consequent pole brings unity to the world. From his thoughts on the dipolar nature of God, specifically the consequent pole, Whitehead developed a set of statements to express his philosophical view of God. Playing with contrasts, Whitehead declares that "It is as true to say that God creates the World, as that the World creates God" (*Process* 348).

The world contributes all occasions of experience to God, and God provides initial aims for each occasion, which originate in the primordial pole. The divine aims serve as the sources of novelty in the world, and their intended end is the intensification of feeling and greater levels of complexity (*Process* 88, 105). God's aims direct and propel the various evolutions of species and thoughts. Whitehead describes God and the divine aims as the desires of the world:

He is the lure for feeling, the eternal urge of desire. His particular relevance to each creative act, as it arises from its own conditioned standpoint in the world, constitutes him the 'object of desire' establishing the initial phase of each subjective aim. (*Process* 344)

Through the divine desires that God sends out, the world takes on new forms and continues to develop from simpler states to more complex ones.

An example of Whitehead's understanding of the evolution toward complexity can be seen in the way that he understands religion. In his four lectures at King's Chapel in Boston, which were later published as *Religion in the Making*, Whitehead explores the change and growing complexity of religion through four stages: ritual, emotion, belief, and rationalism. The primitive religions of the past originated as communal rituals. Each day, humans perform a number of rituals, such as taking a shower, driving to work, and cooking dinner. Some primitive rituals, like hunting and preparing meals, elicited enjoyment and other positive emotions from people. The rituals later came to be performed not only for their necessity but also for the emotional response that they produced (*Religion* 8-12).

Following the lower stages of ritual and emotion are belief and rationalism. Beliefs develop within communities to give explanations for the emotion-evoking rituals. In this stage, myths are created to connect the conscious, intellectual mind with the unconscious satisfaction that comes from ritual. The beliefs sustain the rituals and assign some deeper meaning to the practices of the past. After beliefs have taken root within a religion, the final stage of rationalism can take place. Rationalism places the rituals and beliefs within a coherent worldview. With the advent of rational religion, the religious practices and the beliefs that are centered around them are able to move from a social, perhaps tribal, model to a more personal, individualistic model. The reason that envelops the once primitive religion allows for each person to contemplate the world from the vantage point of his or her religion (*Religion* 13-22).

Apart from abstract concepts and the primordial pole of the dipolar God, process philosophy views change as the central feature of the world. As Hartshorne and other thinkers

coming out of the University of Chicago worked with Whitehead's concepts, the process view of God also took on a greater level of complexity, growing from a philosophical system to a theological one.

The God of Process Theology

Charles Hartshorne expanded upon Whitehead's thoughts about the connection between God and the world. Resurrecting an idea from Plato, Hartshorne proposes a view of God as the World-Soul or Divine Organism (Hartshorne 53). Such a view makes process theology panentheistic, the concept of God intimately containing all of the world within Godself while still transcending the world (Reese 407-408).

Panentheism differs from pantheism, the idea of the world as identical with God, because of the divine transcendence that panentheism maintains. Hartshorne uses the relationship between somatic cells and the human person to illustrate God's immanence and transcendence. A person is made up of many cells, but the person is greater than the sum of his or her parts. The immaterial, rational mind of the person allows for the formation of an identity that extends beyond a collection of cellular structures. While personal identity creates cellular transcendence, the person is still very much connected to the workings of the body. If cells are damaged or destroyed through something as minor as a papercut or a mosquito bite, the person feels the pain. Suffering within the cells results in a suffering for the person. In a similar way, the divine mind transcends the world, but God still suffers every sorrow and enjoys every joy that occurs in the world. The world is God's body, and we, along with every tree, rock, animal, and atom, are prehended by the divine mind (Deadwyler 155-157).

Following from Hartshorne's panentheism is his belief in panpsychism, the idea that everything in the universe has some ability to feel (Reese 408-409). Feelings, in Hartshorne's

view, are not only psychological emotions and sensory perceptions; they are acts "by which that which is *there*, in the object, is conveyed over into what is *here*, in the subject" (Deadwyler 150). In order for a panentheistic God to have a relation to all parts of the universe by which the divine enjoys all experiences, all parts of the universe must have the ability to feel to some degree. A metal amulet worn against the skin, for example, will feel the heat from the person's skin and, through that feeling, it will become warm to the touch. In *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method*, Hartshorne argues that any form of theism that views divinity as the supreme reality must include the experiential capability of all the universe:

If supreme reality is supreme mind or experience, lesser forms of reality can only be lesser forms of mind or experience. To introduce mere matter is to destroy the intelligibility of the doctrine. Mere matter, as the zero of feeling and intrinsic value, is an absolute negation whose meaning is wholly parasitic on what it denies.
(qtd. in Deadwyler 103)

Unless each part of the world feels experiences, God cannot share in the feelings of the entire world.

Because of the panentheistic nature of God and the panpsychism that facilitates a connection between God and the world, Hartshorne ends up rejecting or at least limiting a number of the classical divine attributes, such as omniscience and omnipotence. Omniscience is usually considered to mean that God always has perfect knowledge of all things. Hartshorne affirms that God has perfect knowledge of the past and present because of the divine prehension of everything in the world; however, Hartshorne denies that God has knowledge of the future (Hartshorne 26-27).

The future, in process thought, is the conglomeration of countless occasions of experience coming to the point of concrescence, and so it is highly contingent. The possibilities of every occasion of experience and the ways in which they can combine with other occasions of experience create a continuum for future events. In a continuum, the potential future events are "infinite, since a continuum is infinitely divisible" (Deadwyler 59). The actual entities that will exist tomorrow can be any number of the infinite possibilities of the continuum of the future. As a panentheistic divinity, the process God participates in the world in a temporal way and can only be said to be eternal through the primordial nature. Therefore, God cannot know what actual entities exist in the future since those entities do not exist at the moment (Hartshorne 39). God may have a good idea about what lies ahead and may be able to trace out multiple paths for the multiplicity of occasions of experience, but the future is beyond the scope of God's knowledge.

Most pertinent to my thesis is the rejection of God's omnipotence by process thinkers. The prefix "omni-" relates all power to the divine, but if God has all the power, then there is the implication that creatures have no power. An adherence to the idea of divine omnipotence "reduces creaturehood to sheer nonentity. For there to be genuine creations, there must be creatures of some degree of power, or, what is the same thing, freedom" (Deadwyler 40). According to Hartshorne, God has the greatest amount of power that God can have without stripping creatures of power. The power of God is considered unsurpassable by any creature, but not absolute.

The lack of all power not only preserves creaturely freedom but also provides a response to the perennial problem of evil. When asked why an all-powerful and all-loving God would allow evil in the world, a process theist can answer that God is not all-powerful and so does not

necessarily have the ability to prevent or stop evil. Since a panentheistic God suffers when anyone suffers in the world, though, God cannot be said to be apathetic to evil. God does not desire that any evil befall us because God loves us and suffers with us (Christ 95-97). God uses what divine power is to set certain limits on the potential for disorder in the universe, such as physical laws (Christ 106). Instead of blaming God for evil, Hartshorne views evil as the result of both intentional acts of powerful creatures and unintentional "combinations of free acts" (Deadwyler 42).

Besides the problems that the prefix "omni-" brings with it, there is also the issue of reconciling divine power with divine goodness. In order to show why omnipotence and omnibenevolence are incompatible, process theologians divide power into two types: coercive and persuasive. In "Divine Persuasion and the Triumph of Good," Lewis S. Ford defines the two types of power as such:

Coercive power directly influences the outcome, since the process must conform to its control. Persuasive power operates more indirectly, for it is effective in determining the outcome only to the extent that the process appropriates and reaffirms for itself the aims envisioned in the persuasion." (Ford 288)

Carol Christ understands coercive power as "power over" and persuasive power as "power with" (Christ 93). The God of classical theism wields both types of power, but the God of process theism only uses persuasive power. Process theists like Hartshorne connect coercive power with the image of God as tyrant. A tyrant uses power to control others and strip them of their freedom, but a person who uses persuasive power seeks to work with others by encouraging them to embrace their freedom and foster their creativity (Hartshorne 58-59). The persuasive power of

the process God can be seen most clearly in the divine aims that are sent out to each occasion of experience.

Because process theists avoid any connection of God to coercive power, they deny the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. If God were to create from nothing, then God would need to have direct, or coercive, power over the being of the world. Instead, process theists envision a state of absolute chaos from which God brings greater and greater levels of complexity. Cobb defines the absolute chaos from which the world as we know it comes as a state "in which there is nothing but very low-grade actual occasions happening at random, i.e., without being ordered into enduring individuals" (Cobb 65). By influencing the random occasions with divine persuasion, God can indirectly bring about the existence of protons and electrons. Those protons and electrons can be influenced into becoming atoms, those atoms can become molecules, molecules can become cells, and so on and so forth (Cobb 66-67). The denial of creation *ex nihilo* opens up questions about the origin of the random actual occasions of absolute chaos, but it does allow process theists to maintain a consistent rejection of coercive power, which they see as incompatible with a loving, relational deity (Clarke).

Part II

Implications of the Process View of God

The God of process philosophy is deeply related to the world. Such a close relationship to the joys and sufferings of human beings, animals, plants, and our planet as a whole has resulted in new understandings of how we should act. Many theists have incorporated process thought into their view of God because of the attractive implications of such a philosophy. In this section, I will explore the application of process theism to mysticism, gender equality, and

environmentalism. Our concept of God understandably affects our understanding of our mystical connection with the divine, but our view of God can also shape the way in which we relate to other people and the earth. The following applications depict religious, social, and ecological benefits that stem from an acceptance of the process God. While I applaud the work of the following philosophers and theologians, I will show in Part III of this paper that the positive effects achieved by process theism are possible in the context of classical theism. More than that, much of Part III will demonstrate the ways in which the process concept of God is religiously inadequate and unworthy of worship, despite the positive effects of such a concept of the divine.

Mysticism

Mysticism is a sense of spiritual union or connection with the holy, divine, or transcendent (Gellman). In “Rival Concepts of God and Rival Versions of Mysticism,” Daniel A. Dombrowski argues that a process approach to mysticism explains the experiences of mystics better than a classical approach. He begins by describing mystical experiences as either indirect or direct, either unmediated or mediated. As Dombrowski explains it, “[t]he distinction between indirect and direct experience is that between experience that relies on rational inference and that which does not, respectively” (“Rival Concepts” 154). An unmediated experience involves no language or bodily sensations while a mediated experience involves some use of language or bodily sensation to connect with the holy. Dombrowski claims that classical theism views mystical experiences as largely direct and unmediated; process theism sees mystical experiences as direct and mediated (“Rival Concepts” 155-156).

According to Dombrowski, mystics like John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila have been labeled as classical mystics. The two mystics described themselves as having encountered an

ineffable God (“Rival Concepts” 157). The ineffability of the divine is deeply connected with the unmediated nature of classical mysticism. A God who is beyond the scope of our language and exists as pure spirit may come to us without the use of any medium.

While John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila do exhibit some signs of being classical mystics, Dombrowski believes that placing them within the context of process mysticism allows for a better explanation of their experiences. After all, both mystics use physical, even sexual, language to describe their contact with God. The use of human language and bodily metaphors suggests that God approached them through a natural medium (“Rival Concepts” 157). If God had not used a medium, then any record of the mystical experiences would be impossible. An encounter with the ineffable God must, by definition, be one that cannot be described.

Accepting a process view of mysticism means that one expects a sense of union with the divine to come through a medium. Even for those who do not consider themselves mystics, there is often a sense of awe that accompanies events like births, marriages, and deaths. Within such experiences, God can be experienced (“Rival Concepts” 157). Even more mundane events like a walk along the ocean or a hug from an old friend can stir up a feeling of enchantment. In such cases, God is not the ocean or the hug, but God acts through those moments.

The process view of mysticism is one that many theists should be able to support because they have experienced the divine largely through a medium. The unmediated mysticism of classical theism, however, remains out of reach for most people, both in terms of understanding what it means for an experience to be unmediated and in terms of having such an experience themselves. Dombrowski cites William Alston, who rejects much of the religious naturalism of process theology, as stating that unmediated mystical experiences are extreme and may often be reserved for the otherworldly beatific vision (Dombrowski 162-164). The process concept of a

God who is embodied within the world's events allows for greater accessibility to mysticism, as well as greater intelligibility of it.

Gender Equality

Though Hartshorne uses “He-She” when referring to God, process theology has a much deeper appeal to those seeking gender equality. In her book *She Who Changes*, Carol P. Christ notes that the worlds of philosophy and theology have historically relegated women to a second-class status and that the idea of the process God may remedy such injustice. Inspired by the concept of the process God, Christ draws connections between the divine and the female body.

As a Religious Studies graduate student, Christ became aware of a tendency to separate the mind and body in much of the history of philosophy. In an attempt to leave behind the body negativity of centuries of male philosophers, she embraced the feminism of the 1970s. Her focus on reclaiming the value of bodies, particularly female bodies, led Christ to adopt a panentheistic view of the relationship between God and the world (Christ 20).

After studying process philosophy, Christ began to read classical theism as partly a result of misogynistic thinking. Through the biological processes of menstruation and pregnancy, as well as the social expectation that women care for both newborns and the elderly, women's bodies were viewed as both constantly changing and surrounded by change. In a dualistic philosophical system that favored spirit over matter, the ever-changing nature of women became associated with matter, while the contemplative nature of men became associated with spirit. Even though men's bodies did visibly change, the change was viewed as less dramatic than the physical changes of women. Additionally, several of the changes of men were blamed on women. For example, the visible changes in a man as blood rushes to his penis and semen is released were seen as being caused by women (Christ 48-49).

While Christ recognizes that process philosophy largely began as a way to understand God in the midst of scientific theories like evolution, she does believe that feminists can adopt process thought as a way to achieve greater equity for women (Christ 49). As a leader in women's spirituality and the Goddess movement, Christ calls for women to engage in and transform the male-dominated fields of philosophy and theology. By creating spaces for rigorous conversations about the intersections between female embodiment and the divine, Christ hopes that women can reimagine the divine in a way that celebrates the Divine Feminine and overcomes philosophies and theologies that negatively portray female bodies (Christ 11-13).

Additionally, Christ sees philosophy as a way for women to interrogate and reflect more deeply upon their religious practices. Such reflection could lead to greater coherence for a Goddess-centered worldview. For example, Christ cites the frequent use of tarot cards and other forms of divination by practitioners of Goddess religions. She believes that divination can be used for one of two purposes: bringing intuition to the forefront or looking into the future. While Christ has no qualms about the former purpose, she does worry that the latter purpose forces those women who practice divination to accept some form of determinism. Unless the future is fixed, then one cannot read about future events through the use of tarot cards. By having philosophical conversations about divination, women can think creatively about the role that free will has in the world (Christ 11).

While Christ and many others honor the Goddess, the image of a male God has come under scrutiny. Classical theism has largely been responsible for creating the image of God as a powerful old man in the sky. Although most classical theists would admit that God transcends human sex differences, the limited image of God remains. As a classical theist, I myself have attempted to avoid the use of gendered pronouns when writing about the divine, but the

historically exclusive use of "he," "him," and "his" to describe God has constructed a rigid and long-lasting image of God as male.

As Mary Daly famously stated in *Beyond God the Father*, "[...] if God is male, then the male is God. The divine patriarch castrates women as long as he is allowed to live on in the human imagination" (19). When the prominent idea of the divine is a male one propagated by men, women are often relegated to a secondary status relative to men. The secondary status of women can easily be observed in many religious circles, where women are still prevented from assuming certain positions of religious leadership. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, maintains an all-male priesthood. The view of an unchanging, all-powerful male God extends beyond the doors of houses of worship, though; the misogyny that historically stemmed from classical theism affects the particular gender roles that society envisions for women and men.

Process philosophy allows for new ideas of God to enter society, breaking down the fear of female bodies. Whitehead, although he uses masculine pronouns when writing about God, often describes God as having traditionally feminine traits. John Cobb writes that "Whitehead's image of the divine patience and tenderness, the one who suffers with us, the one who saves us in the sense of keeping us everlastingly safe, the final unity that takes all things into itself, lean in the direction of the feminine" (134).

Hartshorne was more explicit than Whitehead about using feminine images of God. Besides employing gender-inclusive language, Hartshorne suggests that the image of a mother is more analogous to God than the image of a father (Hartshorne 60). Because of God's immanence, the divine is always near to us. A child, both within the womb and newly born, shares an intimate nearness with his or her mother, a nearness that does not exist with the father. The analogy begins to break down as the child becomes more independent and the physical

distance of mother and child increases, but referring to God as "Mother" should be a widely accepted name for the divine, especially since many already pray to God as "Father" (Hartshorne 54).

In addition to breaking down the idol of the male deity and opening the human mind to a greater variety of divine images, process philosophy also places change in a sacred context. Because the divine aims are meant to move the world to higher and higher levels of enjoyment and intensity of experience, change is not to be feared, but embraced. The process God calls upon all creatures to cooperate with the divine aims as a way of adding to the glory of God. The social changes that feminism has created and seeks to create in the future can be understood as the concretization of the divine will. While not all change is necessarily good, those who fight against social movements for the sake of maintaining the status quo can be seen as rejecting the divine aims at work in the world:

Hence, no type of social order is to be maintained if it no longer tends to maximize the enjoyment of the members of the society. Also, it is impossible for any form of social order to continue indefinitely to be instrumentally good. God, far from being the Sanctioner of the Status Quo, is the source of some of the chaos in the world. (Cobb 60)

While social upheaval may lead to some discord in the world, the process God intends for change to occur so that harmony might be achieved. The process God, who works only through persuasive power and never through coercion, can serve as a model for the ways in which patriarchal, hierarchical institutions might be restructured.

Environmentalism

Beyond the sphere of human relations, there is much discord in the world. As people continue to ravage the earth for resources, species continue to become extinct and climate change threatens to further upset planetary ecosystems. According to process philosophers, such as John Cobb, the lack of care for the environment stems from a philosophical focus on independence rather than interdependence. He cites Leibniz and Descartes as promoting independence as a central feature of reality. Leibniz's monads have no real relations to other monads, except the divine monad. Descartes, through his definition of substance as that which does not rely on anything but itself for existence, raised independence to a divine level. Although Descartes identified God, finite minds, and finite bodies as substances, only God is truly independent. Both finite minds and finite bodies rely on God for their existence. Other than their reliance on God, though, the two lower substances were "as self-sufficient as God" (Cobb 21). The independence of beings draws attention away from the ecological realities of creaturely dependence.

In addition to the philosophical focus on independence, apathy toward environmental issues can also be attributed to the classical theistic idea of a realm of being and a realm of becoming. Beginning with Plato, classical theists viewed the realm of being as perfect and immutable. The realm of becoming, on the other hand, is imperfect and constantly changing (Ogden 179). Since our planet is part of the realm of becoming, one might decide that it is not worth much effort to save. The truly important realm is the realm of being, and it is there that many classical theists have turned their attention. Because of the imperfection of the realm of becoming, the planet may be seen as merely a conglomeration of resources for humans who are ascending to the realm of being.

Process philosophy, however, seems to correct the attitudes that contribute to environmental apathy. The panentheistic God is not above or beyond the Earth's environment,

but is deeply related to and affected by it. In fact, the connection between God and the world raises the world to a level of heightened importance:

Because nature and history are nothing less than the body of God himself, everything that happens has both a reality and an importance which are in the strictest sense infinite. The ultimate end of all our actions is not ourselves or our fellow creatures, but the everlasting life of the One to whom no thing is merely indifferent because each thing is known and valued forever for exactly what it is."
(Ogden 186)

Any work that humans might undertake to preserve and repair the environment directly impact the divine. Therefore, those who tackle issues like climate change or monoculture are providing service to God.

Besides highlighting why theists should be more serious about understanding and benefiting the ecosystems of the world, process philosophy also highlights the intrinsic value of other creatures. Intrinsic value stems from the ability of creatures to enjoy existence. Once we recognize that creatures other than humans can enjoy experience, then we must show respect for those forms of life (Cobb 77).

As an ornithologist, Hartshorne was particularly interested in whether birds enjoyed singing. He understood that birdsong helped birds with matters of mating and claiming territory, but he believed that birds sang for more than practical purposes. He noted that even when birds had mates and territory, they continued to sing. Also, their songs were far more intricate than one might suppose birdsong would need to be if it only existed as a means of survival (Christ 119). If birds can derive enjoyment from singing, then humans who also enjoy music and other art forms must honor the existence of birds.

Even plants deserve some level of respect. Although plants do not have complex ways of enjoying the world, the individual cells that make up plants can be said to enjoy the basic experience of existing. The panpsychism of process thought points to enjoyment as a result of the concrescence of all occasions of experience. When considering plants, one must also pay attention to their instrumental value as well. Plants play crucial roles in ecosystems, supporting much more complex creatures that depend on them for sustenance. Even if one denies that plants enjoy existence on a cellular level, one must admit that particular animals do enjoy them (Cobb 78-79).

Process thought draws us out of ourselves and wakens us to the interconnectedness of all reality. The anthropocentrism that was fostered by notions of independence and the realm of being must be deconstructed and replaced by a respect for all life. For those already involved in environmentalism, the process concepts of panentheism and panpsychism can be encouraging. In any work that we do, we want to feel that we are making a real difference (Ogden 180). Since God takes all experiences into Godself and all of reality has at least some basic potential for enjoyment, even small actions like recycling cardboard packaging rather than throwing it in the trash have an immediate and lasting impact.

Part III

Defense of Classical Divine Omnipotence

As seen by the above applications of process theology, the concept of the process God seems like a promising way for human beings to better understand their relationship with God, one another, and the rest of the world. At this point in the paper, I do want to draw attention to some problems with the process concept of God. There are various philosophical concerns one may

raise that put into question whether such a view of God meets the needs of robust religious faith. Despite the positive effects of belief in a process God, there is the issue of accepting a virtually impotent deity as an object of worship. Using ideas about God that were largely developed by medieval thinkers, I will now argue that the classical God ultimately serves as a greater source of peace and justice in the world than the process God and is thus more worthy of worship.

According to Hartshorne, a deity who is worthy of worship "must excell [sic] any conceivable being other than itself; it must be unsurpassable *by another*, exalted beyond all possible rivals" (Hartshorne 8-9). In the following pages, I intend to show that a God with classical divine attributes is superior to the process God, making the classical God the proper object of worship.

Because I only have the space to defend one of the classical divine attributes in depth, I have chosen to defend divine omnipotence because the power of God is an issue that is mentioned often by process thinkers. The rejection of any semblance of coercive power in the divine, as well as the assertion that a God with all power necessarily implies a complete lack of power in any creatures, has greatly limited the idea of divine power. As mentioned in Part I, the only power of the process God is persuasive. The omnipotence of the classical God is viewed as tyrannical, while the persuasive power of the process God allows for creaturely freedom and upholds divine goodness (Hartshorne 14).

Incidentally, if one accepts that classical theism provides a more religiously adequate concept of the divine than process theism, then the divine simplicity that is a feature of the classical God necessarily brings together divine omnipotence with all the other classical divine attributes, such as omniscience and immutability. Divine simplicity defines God as having no parts. The divine attributes, then, cannot truly be separated from each other. While a

philosopher may focus his or her attention on omniscience, God's knowledge cannot be removed from divine power or goodness. In his book on medieval philosophers, Joseph W. Koterski, S.J. explains that although "each of the divine attributes that are named separately are distinct from one another in meaning, each one must also be thought to express the whole of God, even if the precise manner of their unity as attributes of the one God transcends our imagination" (54).

Before I begin my defense of divine omnipotence, I will explain what it is, and just as importantly, what it is not. Simply stated, omnipotence is the state of having all power, the ability to do all things. The ability of God to do all things, though, does not include the ability to sin or to be acted upon. Any act of sin is, according to Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica*, a falling short of what might have been a perfect action. Since perfection is a necessary part of the divine nature, God cannot do that which is imperfect (Aquinas I, 3, ad. 2). Also, God does not have passive power, or the ability to be acted upon. That which has passive power is deficient or imperfect in some way since it requires some outside force to act upon it. Since passive power implies imperfection of some sort, it can have no place in God (Aquinas I, 3, co.).

Divine omnipotence points to God's perfection and self-sufficiency. For this reason, a deity with omnipotence seems to be a suitable object of worship. The process God, who has limited power, fails to be a suitable object of worship because such a God can be surpassed by both the classical God and even human beings. The classical God can offer promises of justice and an ultimate victory over evil, promises which the process God cannot make. The classical God's self-sufficiency prevents God from using creatures for God's own benefit, unlike the process God. The classical God, as well as humans, can surpass the process God through their use of both coercive and persuasive power.

We have a desire for a God who upholds justice, but the process God does not seem capable of ensuring justice. The lack of coercive power in the process God means that God cannot have any direct control in the world. The indirect influence of persuasion is available to the divine, but such persuasion may always be rejected by individuals.

The classical God, though, does not seem to bring more justice to the world than the process God. The classical God has the ability to directly control events but does not seem to intervene even in cases of great injustice, such as the Holocaust. The classical God can, however, promise justice in the afterlife. A child who is born into extreme poverty and then dies at a young age from a painful disease can find solace in the hope of an immortal existence with a God who has power over death. While the idea of a heavenly afterlife is largely a matter of faith, some kind of life-after-death reality seems necessary if theists are to maintain that God truly loves even those who experience little more than pain and suffering in this world. While the classical God maintains the ability to intercede for the suffering child due to divine omnipotence, the process God does not have such an ability.

In a process worldview, the same child can have no hope for everlasting happiness. At best, she can trust that God has prehended and will retain the relatively few good moments of her life and suffers along with her in her present moments of pain (Christ 138). A process afterlife is a cheap version of what the classical God can offer. Process theism offers no ultimate justice after death, even for those who experience little joy in life. The starving, sick child and the racist, sexist, greedy business owner who enjoys a life of luxury share the same fate: personal non-existence after death. While process theists believe that the process God's everlasting treasuring of all the good we feel and create in the world should be enough, not all theists, myself included,

are satisfied with so little. What is missing is an intense union with God that is only possible beyond this mortal life (Clarke).

The classical God can ensure justice for all, if only in the afterlife, as a way of guaranteeing a final victory over evil. As Immanuel Kant has argued in *The Critique of Practical Reason*, there must be a highest good that entails both morality and happiness if we are to understand this world as good and constantly strive to do our duty. If the good suffer while the evil prosper, then there needs to be some way of ultimately rewarding the good and restoring justice (Pasternack). An immortal afterlife provides the opportunity for goodness to eventually triumph.

As mentioned above, the process God is unable to stop or rectify the evils of this world. All the process God can do for the world is to send out divine aims and trust that they will have a good influence, while the world must hope that individuals will cooperate with those divine aims (Ford 298). On an internal level, the process God can apprehend the suffering caused by evil and bring harmony to the discord through divine creativity. The harmony that is created can be likened to the sense of beauty and catharsis brought about by watching a tragedy (Ford 300). The problem with the harmony created by the process God, though, is that the evil has not truly been eradicated, only internally processed in an aesthetically pleasing manner.

Although the process God seems entirely ineffective beyond the point of human death, process theists do point out that the process God brings a greater richness to life than the classical God. The relationality of the process God, in particular, is an appealing feature because it can be used to make sense of the service that humans provide to the divine. Since God can surpass some previous state of Godself by apprehending the goodness in the world created by people, human beings can recognize their work in the world as benefiting the inner life of God

(Hartshorne 7-10). The all-powerful and absolutely perfect God of classical theism, on the other hand, does not need any service from anyone for divine greatness. Hartshorne questions how a classical concept of the divine can be reconciled with the sense of value that we attach to serving God (Hartshorne 8).

I think that serving God does not need to imply some need in God that is being addressed by humans. Instead, I imagine that humans serving God is somewhat like students serving a teacher. Students do not answer questions on tests, write papers, or present projects because the teacher does not have the answers herself or is unable to produce her own academic work. The students serve the teacher because service to her ultimately serves them. As they do the work that the teacher assigns, the students become more educated and may even realize their ability for greater work in the future. If the teacher is understood as analogous to God in this instance, then human service to God is for the betterment of the humans who choose to serve. The process God may inspire humans to provide service for the purpose of ensuring some future state of divine greatness, but the classical God, who has no need for anything, selflessly inspires people to serve so that they might grow in goodness and holiness. In the case of human service to the divine, the classical God is more loving than the process God.

Although the classical God does appear to be more just and loving than the process God, there remains the issue of coercive power. A God with omnipotence would have coercive power, which is one of the main reasons that process theists so adamantly argue for the view of a limited God. If the classical God has coercive power, then can that God be loving? Even if one argues that coercive power does not entirely negate divine love, can one still maintain that a God who works through coercive power surpasses a God who works only through persuasive power in terms of love?

In order to avoid the negative connotations of the word "coercive" in my argument, I will depend on the more neutral language used by Ford and Christ. In place of "coercive power," I will use "direct influence" or "power over," and in place of persuasive power, I will use "indirect influence" or "power with" (Ford 288, Christ 93).

If God cannot have direct influence over the world and be loving, then direct influence would need to be, always and everywhere, an evil form of power. Direct influence, however, can be quite good. Suppose that a child is eating a large bowl of ice cream for dinner. Her parent, seeing the ice cream, tells her that she should eat healthier foods in order to prevent a stomach ache and grow up stronger. The child refuses to be persuaded by the parent's speech and continues to eat the ice cream. Realizing that the child is not obeying the parent takes the bowl and tells her that she must first eat some grilled chicken and vegetables before finishing the ice cream. The taking away of the bowl is a direct action and a demonstration of the parent's power over the child. The use of such power, however, is for the good of the child. Even though the child may consider the parent a tyrant, the good of proper nutrition has been secured by direct influence on the situation. If there can be goodness derived from direct influence on a human level, then God, who greatly surpasses humans, should be able to have direct influence over creatures.

In classical theism, God uses direct influence in order to create and sustain beings. As the source of being, the concept of God helps to explain the existence of contingent beings. Divine omnipotence, which includes direct influence, can make a world out of nothing and keep the world from reverting back into nothingness (Koterski 116).

Process theism, because of its rejection of creation *ex nihilo*, cannot offer a clear explanation of the origin of the world. Since the process God does not create from nothing and

does not have direct influence over beings, then the process God is not the source of being.

What, then, is the source of being of any of the occasions of experience in a process worldview?

The lack of an omnipotent God requires present occasions of experience to rely on their predecessors for their existence. The predecessors, in turn, must depend on their predecessors for existence. Such a pattern must continue *ad infinitum* since God cannot be relied upon as a first cause (Clarke). The only way that the process God can be said to create with limited divine power is through persuading occasions of experience to take on greater levels of complexity.

The power of the process God can be helpful in understanding evolution, but persuasive power cannot explain the origin of the occasions of experience that first formed protons and electrons (Cobb 66-67). The lack of a divine source of being prevents process theists from praising God alone for the world as we know it. At every step along the way, the process God needed to depend on the cooperation of occasions of experience and could do nothing apart from them.

The process God's lack of direct influence over the world does not only lead to a lack of intelligibility when trying to understanding the existence of beings; it also makes the creation of the world as we know it into little more than an avoidance of evil on God's part. In process theology, there are two main kinds of evil: discord and triviality. Discord is what is usually thought of when considering evil: destruction, disease, violence, etc. Triviality is that which decreases the intensity of an occasion of experience (Cobb 70). For example, if divine aims were sent out to a student to encourage her to become a professional writer but she only ever wrote in her diary, then she would be guilty of triviality.

Before the beginning of the world as we know it, the random occasions of experience presented a predicament to the process God. Either God could allow occasions of experience to continue on without encouraging greater complexity (and thus be guilty of triviality), or God

could encourage the development of complexity (and thus be partly responsible for the discord that would follow from more complex beings). The process God's decision to avoid triviality and opt for the possibility of discord makes the world, or at least its earliest stages, a mere avoidance of one kind of evil (Cobb 75).

In classical theism, the world is not the result of God's choice between an imminent evil and a possible one. Instead, the world is a free gift:

Medieval philosophers regularly hold that it is an entirely free act by which God brings the whole universe, including all matter, into existence by his own choice. God is not compelled or constrained by anything outside his own nature. Further, God's action in creation is gratuitous. God's nature is in no way incomplete or in need of anything that he creates for his own completion or perfection. (Koterski 44)

Rather than looming evil being the impetus for creation (as it is in process theism), divine love becomes the source of all that is.

By looking at life after death, our service to the divine in this life, and the creation of the world, the classical God seems to surpass the process God in displaying greater love. By having omnipotence, the classical God is able to show love for the world in a way that is entirely selfless. Unlike the process God who constantly depends on a relationship with the world for divine greatness, the classical God establishes and maintains a relationship with the world solely for the sake of the world.

Conclusion

The selflessness that is present in the classical God is possible largely because of divine omnipotence. Part of the appeal of the process God is the lack of divine coercive power, but

even the direct influence of the classical God that is used in the world demonstrates the way in which a God who has classical divine attributes is ultimately more worthy of worship. Since the classical God creates the world *ex nihilo*, the direct divine influence on the world is the power that sustains the very being of creatures. The process God does not and cannot sustain the existence of beings in any direct way. If one accepts that God's omnipotence is linked to God's love, and is not opposed to it, then other links to classical divine attributes can just as easily be made. By acting as the first cause of a creature's being, while remaining distinct from creation, for example, God is shown to have not only the classical divine attribute of transcendence, but also immanence (Koterski 39-40).

Despite the superiority of the comparative power and goodness of the classical God, its advocates must still try to address the topics where a process conception is clearly helpful. In Part II of this paper, process thought was presented as helpful in solving issues like understanding mysticism, achieving gender equality, and protecting the environment. According to process thinkers, such issues arose from the inadequacies of classical theism. I do not think that classical theism is entirely innocent of the allegations that process theists lodge against it, but I think that problems like apathy to climate change can be corrected by a proper understanding of classical theism. A radically different concept of the divine is not necessary in order to bring about answers to the problems discussed in Part II.

First of all, the distinction that Dombrowski makes between classical mystical experiences and process mystical experiences is too simplistic. Rather than thinking of classical mysticism as unmediated while process mysticism is mediated, I think that classical mysticism can occur through both mediated and unmediated ways, just as we experience people in ways that are both direct and indirect. All that Dombrowski claims about experiencing the process

God through the natural world can be said about experiences of the classical God. The classical divine attribute of immanence means that God is very near to all creatures; otherwise, those creatures would cease to exist. With a classical model of the relationship between God and the world, unmediated mystical experiences can be understood as emanating from the depths of a person's being, in which God dwells; mediated mystical experiences can be understood as God working directly through a worldly medium.

I wonder why all mystical experiences of God must be intelligible, though. If God is supposedly so far beyond humans, according to both classical and process theists, then it makes sense that we are unable to provide neat and tidy explanations of God's action in our lives. I would not expect a dog to fully understand all of my actions. If I admit that some lack of complete understanding exists in terms of the relationship between a dog and a human, and if the greatness of God far exceeds the greatness of humans relative to dogs, then the more intelligible response to mystical experiences is that not all mechanisms of mysticism are going to make sense to us.

The wonder that arises from an understanding of the greatness of the classical God allows us to accept that we will never fully comprehend all mystical experiences, but a sense of wonder could be seen as a kind of virtue. And, returning to a topic discussed earlier, it can also be part of the solution to gender inequality. In the midst of an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God, men can recognize their smallness in the world. Historically, many men have recognized themselves as powerful agents, while assigning women a secondary role in humankind. Such an injustice stems from a distortion of the classical theism that should properly inspire humility and a sense of grateful dependence in all human beings. While the process God is powerless to directly act on humans or bring about some final justice, the classical God has the ability to

ensure that right relationships will eventually overcome relationships founded on notions of gender inequality. Those who work for gender equality in this world can understand themselves as being co-workers with the divine, but those who perpetuate injustice in the world, if they are aware of the power of the classical God, would have to admit that their patriarchal institutions cannot last forever.

Additionally, an understanding of the classical divine attribute of transcendence should relativize the image of God as male. A truly transcendent God is neither male nor female. A God who exists beyond a world in which sex and gender are daily realities is a God who cannot properly be spoken of with either exclusively male or exclusively female analogies. Such a realization frees classical theists to embrace multiple images of the divine as the best way of comprehending the incomprehensible greatness of the divine. Images of the Divine Masculine and the Divine Feminine should be placed alongside one another as a way of pointing toward the reality of God. The lack of embodiment of the divine in classical theism prevents one particular sex from serving as the best or most appropriate image of God.

In addition to addressing the hope for gender equality in our world, classical theism can also serve to inspire care for the environment. Since the classical God is understood as having created all things *ex nihilo*, then all creatures have the same origin and can be said to have some degree of kinship with one another. Humans have often seen themselves as the pinnacle of creation, or sometimes even so high above other creatures that humans do not even consider themselves as part of creation. The created world is then limited to the woods, the meadows, the oceans, and the sky above. The human-made structures in which we live and work and play seem to demarcate the division between the natural world and the human world, severing our connection with the rest of creation. The kinship that humans share with stars and foxes and

roses, though, can never truly be severed in a classical theistic understanding of the world. Even if we surround ourselves with human-made structures to such an extent that we never look up at the sky in which the stars shine or walk on the earth upon which foxes tread or smell the sweet air that emanates from roses, our connection to the rest of creation would remain intact insofar as all creation shares the same divine creator and sustainer. An understanding of our kinship with creation and the wonder that is derived from recognizing the planet as God's beloved creation can be the basis of greater care for the environment.

These suggestions of ways that classical theism can contribute to issues of the intelligibility of mysticism, gender equality, and environmentalism are admittedly programmatic and brief. If the classical concept of God is truly a religiously adequate way of describing the divine, then the next step for theists should be the application of ideas about the classical divine attributes to real-world problems. Thoughts about the attributes of God should not end in classrooms and houses of worship; they should extend into the rest of the world, tending to the wounds that process theists have valiantly tried to heal. If those who support a classical view of God as being the most loving and worthy of worship do not act to bring about real change in the world, though, then all the arguments against a competing view of God will matter very little. Philosophy and theology do not happen in a vacuum. In the end, the truest testament to the religious adequacy of the classical concept of God is the love and hope that such a God can inspire in the world.

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