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The ontology of dynamic reality

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All modern philosophy hinges round the difficulty of describing the world in terms of subject and predicate, substance and quality, particular and universal. The result always does violence to that immediate experience which we express in our actions, our hopes, our sympathies, our purposes, and which we enjoy in spite of our lack of phrases for its verbal analysis.¹

Ontology as a branch of philosophy is the science of what exists, of the types and structures of objects, properties, events, processes, and relationships in each area of reality. Sometimes “ontology” is used in a broader sense, to mean the study of what might exist. At the same time, the concept of “Metaphysics” is then used to examine which of the various alternative possible ontologies corresponds to reality.²

Modern reality is fundamentally interconnected and complex. It changes so rapidly that traditional ways of thinking, which anchor their thought in the unchanging and stable, have completely failed. There are claims that reason, logic, and language, if observed closely enough and for long enough, are as

¹ A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, ed. by D.R. Griffin and D.W. Sherburne, New York 1978, p. 49–50.

² R. Ingarden, *Time and Modes of Being*, transl. by H.R. Michejda, Springfield, Ill., 1964.

changeable and therefore ultimately unreliable as a person's feelings, and experiences. What exists is change, evolution, and difference, but no stable certainty. The close connection between thinking and being has determined philosophy from the very beginning. Subsequently, epistemology and ontology are fundamentally intertwined.

Nowhere is this close connection more evident than in the matter of realism. A dynamic, creative, and, therefore, processual understanding of reality can only emerge from a certain epistemological position; namely, when a study begins with a clarified form of experience. Phenomenology can also lead to a dynamic understanding of how reality exists. Martin Heidegger has already prepared the way for a fruitful combination of ontological and phenomenological studies in *Being and Time*. Alfred North Whitehead, on the other hand, developed process thinking as an attempt to explain and integrate mathematical, physical, and empirical aspects. As it assumes that reality is fundamentally temporal and therefore changeable or processual, speculation is combined with phenomenology to comprehend dynamic realism. Thus, speculative philosophy and phenomenology are appropriate tools for studying dynamic reality.

The processual understanding of reality was developed by thinkers such as Henri Bergson in *The Creative Mind* and Alfred North Whitehead in *Process and Reality*. One can simply agree that those aspects of experience that show the world as changing and evolving are at least as fundamental as those elements that show stability. Human existence is formed by the connections between consciousness, its intentional nature, its focus on the world, and our ontological, physical, and biological existence. Experience is a characteristic of dynamic reality. In this article, I want to explore the ontology of dynamic reality with the help of studying the relationship between static and dynamic descriptions of reality. I will start with a historical introduction to the problem. Then, I will show how Locke's ontology of substance is ultimately a transformation into Whitehead's metaphysics of *Process and Reality*.

1. Historical introduction to the problem

For centuries, most ontological systems were based on the assumption that the paradigmatic type of being is the being of things. However, there was an equally strong tendency to view reality as an interconnected flow. Such a processual reconstruction of the meaning of "being" has its paradigmatic form in organic life, embodied in plants, animals, and humans, or nature as

a whole. Therefore, dynamic ontologies of this type can generally be called ontologies of φύσις (nature). Both of these ontological positions have their roots in the pre-Socratics. The first type of ontology is widely known in Parmenides. He is considered to be the father of the metaphysics of “being”. The second type of ontology, the ontology of φύσις, goes back to the thoughts of Heraclitus. He is often considered to be a paradigmatic flow thinker.

The general understanding of the thoughts of Heraclitus and Parmenides that we have today is largely mediated through the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and their commentators. Both Plato and Aristotle sought a way to reconcile Parmenides and Heraclitus, to reconcile the concept of “being” with the concept of “becoming” or “flowing”. Both agreed that change is happening, but it is not the underlying reality that is changing. Rather, it is the basic and necessary elements of reality that are the cause of all existence. These are unchanged, only the appearance and unnecessary elements change. This is exactly the answer given in the early dialogues of Plato and the early writings of Aristotle. Even after the distinction between the essential and the accidental was introduced to solve the problem of change, the problem of the formation of entities remained: if the essential aspects of reality are unchangeable, then where do they come from and how do they arise? Therefore, even after this difference, both Plato and Aristotle continued to struggle to create a unified theory that would reconcile the static and dynamic aspects of reality. While Plato began to talk about the movement and interconnection of ideas only in his late philosophy, Aristotle questioned and revised the status of change in his philosophy repeatedly throughout his work.

Aristotle began as a very static thinker in his *Categories*,³ where the question of becoming was not even asked and change was mentioned only as one of the Categories. Later, in *Metaphysics*, the question of change became the central issue, as in the Physics movement it is called the most fundamental property of existence. Then, in *On Generation and Corruption* (319b–320a)⁴ Aristotle developed a type of dynamic ontology.

In the *Categories*, Aristotle attempted to explain reality by examining how we use predicates in language.⁵ This method seems strange, but this impression can be corrected if we consider that, for Aristotle, words refer to

³ Aristotle, *Categories and De Interpretatione*, transl. with notes by J.L. Ackrill, Oxford 1963.

⁴ *The works of Aristotle translated into English*, vol. II: *Physica; De Caelo; De Generatione at Corruptione*, by O.I.L. Stocks and H.H. Joachim, New York 1930.

⁵ M. Baumer, “Chasing Aristotle’s Categories Down the Tree of Grammar”, *Journal of Philosophical Research*, vol. XIII, 1993, p. 341–449; A. Trendelenburg, *Geschichte der Kategorienlehre: zwei Abhandlungen*, Berlin 1846.

concepts, and concepts naturally mean or designate objects in the world. The first encounter with οὐσία occurs when Aristotle explores predication. The categorical position is the theoretical guideline of this study. This is the type of judgment that is usually made when dealing with reality. In its most basic form, this proposition asserts something either necessary or simply common to the individual (subject/substrate). The general element is usually called an “accident” and the individual is called “ousia” on the conceptual level or “hypokeimenon” (on the level of language and/or the ontological level).

With regard to the basis of existence in reality, this correspondence between language, concept, and reality is assumed rather than argued for. Aristotle states directly that if these ousiai did not exist, then nothing would exist: “μὴ οὐσῶν οὖν τῶν πρῶτων οὐσῶν ἀδύνατον τῶν ἄλλων τι εἶναι”.⁶ In some places in metaphysics, it even sounds as if in the analytical definition the concept (ousia) and the essential properties of its real equivalent (hypokeimenon) are formally identical.⁷

The problem is that grammatical-logical operations (such as the distinction between essential and accidental properties), which work fine with concepts and predicates, cannot be applied indiscriminately to reality. In the realm of concepts and language, there is no problem in distinguishing a substance with its essential properties from accidental properties. In reality, it is impossible to distinguish a “tode ti” from its properties, as can be done in the realm of language, where all one has to do is separate the subjects from the predicates to make a clear distinction. There is a vast ontological difference between material entities and the concepts that refer to them. Therefore, what can be said about “ousia” or hypokeimenon cannot simply be applied indiscriminately to “tode ti”.

This ontological distinction between ontological theory and concrete ontic reality is often forgotten or ignored in ontological research. Thus, the distinction between “ousia” (essential) and properties (incidental) is not derived from concrete reality itself, but instead from the way we talk and think about reality. However, this is the basic division that underlies all of Aristotle’s other ontological studies. Categories are interpreted as a logical or ontological work, there can be no doubt that they explore the way to talk about being. And this research is the basis from which all further metaphysical and physical research departs. The distinction between the essential and the accidental, between the

⁶ Aristotle, *Categories...*, op. cit., 2b5.

⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, A revised text with introduction and commentary by W.D. Ross, Oxford 1924, 1030a 6 ff, p. 310.

unchanging and the changing, is derived from the analysis of language and logic. For Aristotle, this will be the basis of all further ontological research.

At the dawn of philosophy, the question of “static being” and “becoming” or “flow” was central to philosophy and remained open for a long time. Nonetheless, if we look at philosophy in the Middle Ages and what happened after that period, it seems that this question has completely lost its philosophical significance. Today, the situation has changed. The bright times of classical “being” as the basis of ontology are long gone. Ontologies that are based on static existence seem unable to cope with the changes and developments brought about by modernity. Therefore, there is a need for a new type of ontology, as Nikolai Hartmann says: “But it is here that the roads of the old and the new ontology part. Just as in regard to the problem of being it is today no longer a question of substantial forms and the teleological determination of actual processes by these forms, so also the problem at issue is no longer that of a post factum justification of a priori principles”.⁸

Hartman believes that this new kind of ontology cannot be based on *a priori* principles and cannot deal with teleology or substantial forms. What then should it be based on? Hartman answers that this new kind of ontology must be based on our experience of reality. This experience should be understood not as the experience of the abstract or absolute, but as the experience of the concrete and individual. Our philosophy can only be based on the experience of a changing and concrete reality. Therefore, Hartmann continues: „The Categories with which the new ontology deals are won neither by a definition of the universal nor through derivation from a formal table of judgments. They are rather gleaned step by step from an observation of existing realities. And since, of course, this method of their discovery does not allow for an absolute criterion of truth, here no more than in any other field of knowledge, it must be added that the procedure of finding and rechecking is a laborious and cumbersome one. Under the limited conditions of human research, it requires manifold detours, demands constant corrections, and, like all genuine scholarly work, never comes to an end. (...)”

From this alone, it follows that the principles of being cannot be a priori principles of our intellect, that they, as a matter of fact, are just as indifferent to the dividing line between the knowable and the unknowable as the being whose principles they are”.⁹

⁸ N. Hartmann, *New ways of Ontology*, Routledge 2017, p. 13–14.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

This new type of ontology of the concrete must be an ontological system of the sensible and, therefore, constantly changing. The usual substantialist paradigm is replaced by a processual one: “things” are not “out there” waiting to be “discovered”, they arise. In the words of William James: “What really exists is not what is made, but what is in the process of being made. Once created, they are dead, and an infinite number of alternative conceptual decompositions can be used to define them”.¹⁰ Whitehead, who was fully aware of the epistemological implications of Einstein’s theories of relativity, understood very well that perceived (sensually represented) events are always, by definition, past events.

If we go further and ask about the conditions of the possibility of direct experience of the World and its conscious „judgment”, we will have to implement the help of metaphysics to outline how Whitehead’s Ontology provides the necessary common platform between “subjects” and “objects”. There is no way to break into a philosophical system. Putting oneself in unison with an author requires the inner activation of his algorithm, which allows its categories to freely mobilize their meaning. This is especially true in the case of Whitehead, who attempted an ontological revolution that has been presented as a “process philosophy”.

One of the main achievements of Whitehead’s thought process is the destruction of the old concept of substance and its replacement with the concept of societies of “events of experience”, that is, fleeting nodes of interconnection. How he did this will be shown below.

In this section, historical aspects of the emergence of two types of ontologies were examined. The first is based on static concepts, such as substance. The second is based on the concept of flow, which features constant change as the basis of being. I attempted to show the ontology of dynamic reality as a process of becoming. As was said earlier, a dynamic, creative, and, therefore, procedural understanding of reality can only arise from a certain epistemological position, namely when the study begins with a clarified form of experience. Experience is a central concept in Whitehead’s metaphysics: “the philosophy of organism (...) is a doctrine of experience prehending actualities”.¹¹

Next, the transformation of Locke’s ontology (which represented the old ontology of substance) into Whitehead’s metaphysics of process and reality will be considered.

¹⁰ W. James, *Essays in radical empiricism* (posthumously published by R.B. Perry), New York 1912, p. 160.

¹¹ A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, op. cit., p. 74.

2. From John Locke's ontology to Whitehead's naturalistic ontology

John Locke, who presented his basic epistemological theory in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, was transformed into a metaphysician by Whitehead in his work *Process and Reality*.

The immediate connection between Whitehead and Locke was the latter's presentation of the concept of "power". To come to terms with the concept of "power" that provides the missing link between Locke and Whitehead, the following questions must be asked:

- (a) What was the significance of the concept of "power" for Locke and Whitehead?
- (b) What is the precise status of "power" in Locke's *Essay*?
- (c) How did Whitehead transform Locke's concept of "power"?

It can be said that the reason Whitehead turned to Locke was precisely because Locke's *Essay* embodied the teachings and ideas of the "mechanistic worldview" in the English-speaking camp. It was Whitehead's assessment of Locke that allowed him to see that Locke had presented "speculative points" that had not yet been explored. After all, it was precisely "speculative moments" (such as the concept of "power") that helped Whitehead displace the original problem of the "bifurcation of nature". This was the quintessential problem that Whitehead had had in mind since the early twenties, and which he, in a strange detour through Berkeley and ultimately through Locke, set out to come to terms with in *Process and Reality*.

Thus, following Whitehead's approach, need to bridge the gap between the epistemological understanding of reality and the ontological one. This approach is based on an understanding of the experience gained. In understanding the very definition of experience, Whitehead relies on Locke's *Essay*. Thus, the main focus in this section is devoted to an analysis of the transformation of Locke's concept of "power" into Whitehead's concept of "change".

Locke provides a significant definition of power in the *Essay*: "The power of Perception is that which we call the Understanding".¹² Essentially, this means that the *Essay* explores the origin and extent of the power of human perception and can be understood as a critique of that power of perception or understanding. Unfortunately, Locke's method of description proves insufficient to carry out this proposed criticism.

¹² J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Pennsylvania State University 1999, p. 221.

Whitehead's interest centred on the nature of the very constitution of the faculty of perception. Consideration of the phenomenon of power leads directly to a region beyond the limits of immediate sensory data. If we remained at the level of mere description, we would not have the necessary leverage to adequately solve the problem confronting us. Whitehead transformed the problem of the effects of power from an epistemological issue to an ontological one in the form of the origin of the constitution of the power of perception.

Locke understood power in terms of thinking, volition, or will. These powers turn out to be the great principles of action of the mind or faculties of the mind. We must remind ourselves, however, that thinking, like perception, is a faculty of understanding.¹³ It seems that Locke was close to one of Whitehead's ideas on this point: perception turns out to be a way of thinking. Whitehead's analysis was carried out from the point of view of contrast, differentiation, and distinction of the act of perception itself. This act of perception is also an example of a process occurring in a higher organism.

Essentially, Locke believes that force resides within the body. For example: "the Power to produce any Idea in our Mind, I call Quality of the Subject wherein that power is".¹⁴ The very concept of power creates the feeling of the simple idea of power – to use Lockean language. Thus, the very production of power gives power, and ultimately the idea of it. In other words, "power" comprehends its own power in many forms.

Locke thinks in terms of "the power we can consider is in reference to the changes of perceivable Ideas".¹⁵ This is seen from the point of view of the subject in the act of perception. However, the so-called "changes," in Whitehead's terminology, are to be sought in the relations of powers themselves, and not in "perceived ideas". These "changes of perceived ideas" belong to the realm of causes and effects. Therefore, they should be considered as a logic of relations.

Locke believes that power has a dual nature: one that is passive and active. For example, the sun has an active power to whiten wax, and wax has a passive power to whiten: the change in colour from yellow to white is important evidence of some change taking place. However, the question of the origin of this very force, that which is causing such a change, allowing the yellowness of the wax to be destroyed, is not a matter for Locke, as he puts it.¹⁶ Whitehead's ontology begins precisely from the point where Locke sets the boundaries of his research.

¹³ Ibidem, II, VI, II, p. 113 and II, XXI, V, p. 221.

¹⁴ Ibidem, II, VIII, VIII, p. 119.

¹⁵ Ibidem, II, XXI, I, p. 218.

¹⁶ Ibidem, II, XXI, I, p. 218.

Locke recognizes that power involves the idea of a relationship. However, as in the next statement, he seems strangely concerned about the nature of this relationship. “For our Ideas of Extension, Duration, and Number, do they not all contain in them a secret relation of the Parts?”¹⁷ The “secret relation of parts” itself is precisely what interests Whitehead.

The Essay raises another question. “For who is it that sees not, that Powers belong only to Agents, and are Attributes only of Substances, and not Powers themselves?”¹⁸ Here, we have an example of Whitehead’s critique of Locke, which happens while still presupposing a subject-predicate ontological basis for his theory of knowledge. Whitehead’s answer to this question is clear: why not consider the power itself? And this is exactly what we find in his Theory of Prehension, where the powers are analysed in terms of prehensions.

Elsewhere, Locke himself almost gave Whitehead’s answer, as can be seen in the following statement. “But it is the Mind that acts and manifests these Powers (for example, real singing, real dancing, real thinking); it is the Person who performs the Action, it is the Agent who has the power or is able to perform the action”.

This statement seems quite contradictory. On the one hand, Locke identifies power with substance (e.g., mind, person, or agent); on the other hand, he defines authority through relationships. In Whitehead’s view, real singing, real dancing, and real thinking are real as examples of modes of power. Different ways of singing, dancing, or thinking are relationships expressed in special forms of energy.

Whitehead observed in the first paragraph of his *Preface to Process and Reality*¹⁹ that Locke’s *Essay* “most fully anticipated the main position of the philosophy of organism”.²⁰ We can change this statement to the following: Locke almost always, especially when considering the problem of power, anticipates Whitehead, but Locke does not see the consequences of his own insights. A typical example of this is the following statement. “What moves the mind, in every particular instance, to determine its general power of directing, to this or that particular Motion or Rest? And to this I answer. The motive, for continuing in the same State or Action, is only the present satisfaction in it; The motive to change, is always some uneasiness: nothing setting us upon the change of State, or upon any new Action, but some uneasiness”.²¹

¹⁷ Ibidem, II, XXI, III, p. 219.

¹⁸ Ibidem, II, XXI, XVI, p. 226.

¹⁹ A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, op. cit., p. xi.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. xi.

²¹ J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, op. cit., II, XXI, 29, p. 234.

The passages “only the present satisfaction in it” and “some uneasiness” seem to fit exactly the Whiteheadian concept “lure of feeling” and its satisfaction in a certain subjective form. Feeling as a vector-character knows no “uneasiness” – direction and intensity in the form of force take on a certain form of feeling, awaiting fulfillment in terms of satisfaction. From a descriptive point of view, Locke gives us Whitehead’s answer to his question, but in the second part, with regards to the motive for change, he fails. It is here, from Whitehead’s point of view, that leverage is found and applied in terms of the vectorial characteristic of feeling.

It seems clear that, for Locke, power is inherent in material things. These, in turn, have the power of producing in us ideas of primary qualities, such as shape, size, extension, or solidity. They can also make ideas of secondary qualities, such as colors, sounds, and smells. In short: power causes changes to take place in material things. However, in Locke’s descriptive epistemology, matter, motion, space, and time remain separate entities embedded in a mechanistic universe. An investigation into the origin of force would be metaphysics. This move was made by Whitehead. Exploring the specific relationship between power and substance was the first step Whitehead took to transform Locke’s concerns on this issue.

An interesting aspect of one of the forms of functioning of Whitehead’s ontological principle is the transformation of Locke’s idea of “power” into the corresponding context of organic doctrine. The following quote confirms this:

“The ‘ontological principle’ broadens and extends a general principle laid down by John Locke in his *Essay*,²² when he asserts that “power” is “a great part of our complex ideas of substances”. The notion of ‘substance’ is transformed into that of ‘actual entity’; and the notion of ‘power’ is transformed into the principle that the reasons for things are always to be found in the composite nature of definite actual entities.²³

This quote can be supplemented with the following: “the notion of ‘power’ is making a principal ingredient in that of actual entity (substance). In this latter notion, Locke adumbrates both the ontological principle, and also the principle that the power’ of one actual entity on the other is simply how the former is objectified in the constitution of the other. Thus the problem of perception and the problem of power are one and the same, at least so far as perception is reduced to mere prehension of actual entities”.²⁴

²² Ibidem, II, XXIII, 7.

²³ A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 18f.

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 58.

Another quote from Locke's *Essay* reveals the concept of power in light of the corpuscular theory: "Nor are we to wonder, that Powers make a great part of our complex Ideas of Substances; since their secondary Qualities are those, which in most of them serve principally to distinguish Substances one from another, and commonly make a considerable part of the complex Idea of the several sorts of them. For our Senses failing us, in the discovery of the Bulk, Texture, and Figure of the minute parts of Bodies, on which their real Constitution and Differences depend, we are fain to make use of their secondary Qualities, as the characteristic Notes and Marks, whereby to frame Ideas of them in our Minds, and distinguish them one from another. All which secondary Qualities, as has been shown, are nothing but bare Powers. For the Color and Taste of Opium, are, as well as its soporific or anodyne Virtues, mere Powers depending on its primary Qualities, whereby it is fitted to produce different Operations, on different parts of our Bodies".²⁵

Locke diligently tried to reveal the problem of the concept of power, but the direct question of what exactly power means caused Locke to answer (as in the case of the concept of "substratum") "I know not what." These unresolved problems were clearly recognized by Whitehead, who tried to solve them with his own line of thought. Whitehead admired Locke's description of "power" but intended to transform the concept itself and elevate it to an ontological platform. "Force" was interpreted as a means, as a process, and as a source of vital nature. Whitehead, of course, thought in terms of thermodynamics, metabolism, and vectors. Thus, "force" is translated and transformed into the terms of modern physics and modern biology.

What is valuable about Whitehead's systematization is that it preserves and deepens James's core „radical empiricist" claim that all reality is experiential. According to Whitehead, the concept of experience becomes an ontological concept that is inherent in all events, be they "psychological," "biological," "chemical," or "physical." The keynote of this new stage is *process*, and formulating an ontology of process requires a radical rethinking of the concept of *essence*. The question about the meaning of the word „essence" is not a simple play on words on Whitehead's part. The bulk of his philosophy of the organism is devoted to a general clarification of the status of the real entity. The positive doctrine of Process and Reality, Whitehead argues, is "concerned with the becoming, being, and interrelatedness of "actual entities." "Actual entities" – also called "real events" – are the ultimate real things that the world is made of.

²⁵ J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, op. cit., II, XXIII, 8, p. 285.

By rethinking the basic concept of “essence,” Whitehead abandons the position that some things in the universe are fundamental and static entities, while other things (that are not entities in this sense) may instead have the quality of being. Whitehead, on the contrary, adheres to the idea that all real things are in *process*. This includes those things that our limited intellect inadequately perceives as static entities. Seemingly solid and static objects – such as mountains – are actually involved in geological processes, such as plate tectonics and erosion. Any failure to understand this is a result of the relatively short duration of the individual’s sensory and cognitive functions acting without assistance. To better understand Whitehead’s actual concept of event/entity, it is necessary to understand that it is an atomic concept.

Having been a renowned mathematician and theoretical physicist before beginning his career as a philosopher, Whitehead was more aware than most of the fact that during his lifetime „the stable foundations of physics (...) had disintegrated.” Relativity and quantum theory effectively rendered the “old foundations (...) incomprehensible,” and a key aspect of these old foundations was the idea of irreducible material atoms, whose endurance in a “mere arrangement” in space supposedly provided the basic building blocks of the Universe. Such atoms could serve as the basis for all physical processes, but would not be processes in themselves. Within a relatively short period of time, this „mechanical” concept of a passive substratum of independent particles of matter gave way to the concept of matter as a modification of energy: pure activity.

The fundamental concepts are activity and process. In limited regions, there are practically no independent activities. These passive geometric relationships between substrates passively occupying areas have faded from view. Nature is a theater of interconnected actions. All things change, including activities and their relationships. For this new concept, the concept of space with its passive, systematic, geometric relationships is completely inappropriate. Thus, it discarded space and matter and replaced the study of internal relations with a complex state of activity. This complex state – in a sense – represents unity. There is a whole universe of physical action that extends to the most distant star cluster.

Whitehead was keenly aware of the need for an alternative atomic concept that could replace the now-obsolete concept of matter. In 1920, he formulated the problem as follows: “If we want to look for matter anywhere, I must find it in events. Which in a sense are the highest substance of nature”²⁶ Seven

²⁶ A.N. Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature*, New York 2007.

years later, in *Process and Reality*, his terminology shifted from events to real events/entities, the latter being defined as a limiting type of event (with only one participant).

This method of thinking radically changes the basic ways in which we think. The idea of the fundamental material atom supported a bifurcated concept of the Universe. Within this, matters of experience were associated with a high level of human subjectivity. They were kept separate from the objective concept of nature, as the concept of experience had no influence purchase (“superficial” empiricism) over the gross material external environment. Whitehead’s atomic idea of a real entity is, in contrast, modeled on the image of a primordial organism undergoing experience. Thus, Whitehead understands the kinds of real natural events considered in physics to be events or incidents that “entertain” and “constitute” a locus of energy.

As a systematic metaphysician, Whitehead aimed for a general ontological description which, without denying important differences, would apply to all real events at all times, from the events that constitute the electron to those that constitute the unified world cellular organism. This task requires a radical relational approach and a rethinking of the old bifurcated subject-object dualism. Importantly, however, it does not require its abandonment. On the contrary, the actual concept of essence multiplies the subject/object dualism and distributes it throughout nature, reconceptualized as a continuous process of expansion (as the new micro-experience builds on the expressions of a previous micro-experience). It is important, therefore, that the subject/object relation is no longer understood in epistemological terms as a conscious „knower” representing the objective „known”, but rather in ontological terms as the creative activity (on the part of such an event) giving actual form to the data that constitutes the inherited universe of that event. Every instance of reality is a process by which the „subject” gives form or pattern to the objects involved in his momentary sphere of activity.

Whitehead speaks of this activity of realization in terms of a complex of apprehensions by which, when these apprehensions are “positive” (i.e., when data is taken into the constitution of a subject in the process of formation), chance senses these objects and composes them into a configuration. Alternatively, incompatible aspects of the data are negatively perceived or excluded from being updated. Thus, the “experience” enacted here is not a “representational” matter, which would be as if the apprehension were some kind of stage play about a reality happening somewhere else. Rather, experience is an activity of realization through which the “potentiality” immanent in

objects is “actualized” in the form of real co-creative becoming concretized. Subjectivity is not a representative “picture” of the “real world”, but the very formation of objectivity.

Whitehead’s idea of a real event in which the action of mentality causes the “flow of energy” to be diverted suggests a more active and additive (constructive) force operating alongside this „subtractive” process, as does (more specifically) his idea of food as theft. His analysis of increasingly complex phases of accretion that combines operative contrasts between successive and simultaneous “mental,” “physical,” and “hybrid” apprehensions transformation into cumulatively intense and complex experiential events. As Whitehead says: “The process of accretion may be divided into an initial stage of many senses and a succession of subsequent phases of more complex senses integrating earlier simpler senses.”

What is “experience”?

In a striking passage from *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect*²⁷, Whitehead describes the word “experience” as “one of the most deceptive in philosophy” and proceeds to analyze it in three modes, “each of which contributes its share of components to our individual development”, “at one specific moment in human experience,” and “Causal efficacy and presentational immediacy are modes of perception, and symbolic reference is a mode of “conceptual analysis.” Presentational immediacy is equivalent to James’s understanding as it relates to sensory perception. It is the appearance of the external world, objectified through the senses, as a constitutive aspect of our experience. It is mediated by such qualities as color, sound, taste, and smell, and is included in the system of spatial connections (spatial expansion). This system of spatial extension has an impartial feel: it “presents” to us the immediacy of the external world. Thus, presentational immediacy is characterized by the effect of externality and spatiality.

Classic “surface” empiricism is based on the assumption that immediacy of representation is the only modality of perception. For Hume, causation is a secondary issue derived from conceptual thought. For Whitehead, it is primary and primitive and represents the basic form of perception: causal efficiency.

There is no direct perceptual experience of causal efficacy, since causality is derived from conceptual thinking and the “illusory projection outward of the phenomena of our own consciousness.” What enters into our new experience – without the sensory pathway – is our state of experience from the

²⁷ A.N. Whitehead, *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect*, revised edition, Fordham University Press, 1985.

immediate past, about a quarter of a second ago. Causal efficacy is “the hand of the established past in shaping the present.” The template product of previous experience (its expression) provides most of the “data” perceived during the next, already actualizing the event of experience. The two perceptual sources of experience, in this case, are thus the causal efficacy of the immediately preceding state of mind and the modifications produced in the new state by the experience of bodily functions associated with sensory perceptions of the immediacy of representation. Causal efficiency is burdened with a sense of its being derived from the past and its relevance for the future (its emphasis is temporal. Conversely, presentational immediacy is a complex and superficial product that stops at the “show” of the externally projected modern world of the present. (his accent is spatial). Causal efficacy arises from the vaguely felt “beyond” that shapes us, while presentational immediacy projects the clarity of an external phenomenon arising from within.

How is the concept of experience related to the concept of power?

Causal efficacy is essentially a reformulation of Spinoza’s concept of power as the power to affect and be affected, or, to use Locke’s definition, as a dual relation: „namely, as being able to effect or obtain any change: one may be called ‘active’ and the other ‘active’ “passive”. According to Whitehead, “the problem of perception and the problem of power are one and the same”.

Abstracted as two modes of pure perception, neither the power of causal efficacy nor the perception of the immediacy of representation is subject to error. The key question now concerns real events, the unity of which leads to a synthesis of the two modes in such a way that the vague, effectively colored, and temporal objectification of causal effectiveness are combined and contrasted with the spatial externalities of presentational immediacy in a single, complex experience. This is symbolic of the components of causal effectiveness (the energetic force acting on me and which I influence). It is the most fundamental form of symbolism, defined as the act of mistaking something (the symbol) for something else (the meaning). Sensory data is “taken” to be a causally efficient entity. “Thus, colored figures appear to be symbols of some other elements of our experience, and when we see colored figures, we adapt our actions to these other elements. This symbolism of our feelings towards the bodies symbolized is often erroneous (...) [but] it is the most natural and widespread of all symbolic modes.” For Whitehead, propositional experience arises precisely from the difference (contrast) arising between these two types of perceptual experience.

The result is an ontology of the process of “deep empiricism.” The self-founding multiple universe eventually gives rise to many different levels of order that together form a mosaic of unity. Experience and expression are central to this unity, although, according to Whitehead, they should not be confused with the higher-level human consciousness. Human experience and expression, although dominated by abstract means of discursive communication, are (in some sense) an extension of non-human modes.

Locke’s descriptive epistemology was not sufficient to develop an ontological perspective of the world. However, his efforts gave Whitehead clues and new ideas to re-evaluate the inventory of the “repository of knowledge”. This led to Whitehead’s examination of the claims of the apparently rigorous empiricism.

Whitehead believed that in order to transform Locke’s descriptive epistemology into full-fledged metaphysics, its shortcomings must be translated into a positive platform. Thus, it was necessary to develop a different method and construct a new categorical scheme to cope with the negative questions of the Essay. Whitehead’s response to this challenge was clear: he would introduce the speculative method formulated by the Speculative Scheme²⁸ and apply it to Locke’s concept of “power”. Whitehead saw that Locke came close to some of the aspects considered by the philosophy of organism, but the latter did not see the consequences of his own research. The following excerpt from the PR makes this clear: “But his Essay, however, does contain a line of thought which can be developed into a metaphysic. In the first place, he distinctly holds that ideas of particular existents – for example, the child’s idea of its mother – constitute the fundamental data which the mental functioning welds into a unity by a determinate process of absorption, including comparison, emphasis, and abstraction”. Accordingly: “He also holds that ‘powers’ are to be ascribed to particular existents whereby the constitutions of other particulars are conditioned. Correlatively, he holds that the constitutions of particular existents must be described so as to exhibit their ‘capacities’ for being conditioned by such ‘powers’ in other particulars.”²⁹

This provides sufficient evidence that Whitehead worked to translate Locke’s concepts into the language of organismic philosophy. For example, “the child’s idea of his mother” as “unity through a certain process of absorption” is typical “Whiteheadian language”. The possibility of “power” is then introduced: Whitehead relates the terms “power”, “special existence”, “constitution” and “state” to each other. The relations between the “powers”, the “constitution of

²⁸ Idem, *Process and Reality*, op. cit., p. 3–17.

²⁹ J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, op. cit., II, VI, 2, p. 146.

particular existing beings”, and the “conditions” under which that constitution develops are discussed, while the various elements constitute the formal structure of the constitution concerned, they exhibit qualities which, in turn, demonstrate the structure of their source – real entities.

Locke seems content with a simple overview of the “Powers of our own Reason”³⁰, whereas Whitehead’s interest lies in the very constitution of these powers and how they constitute the mind. Power and Reason seem to be separate categories, but are somehow connected in Locke’s understanding of matter – in Whitehead’s metaphysics, they relate to each other. Locke thinks in terms of the ability to “see what Things they were adapted to”,³¹ i.e. force, intelligence, and events are separate points for the author of the *Essay* – for Whitehead, the correlation again is each term denoting a phase of the fusion process.

Locke’s main criticism can be formulated as follows: How is change possible? The assumption that the internal relations of the parts make up the whole does not provide us with a satisfactory springboard for introducing the idea of change. Thus, Whitehead makes this clear: “Every actual entity is what it is, and has its definite status in the universe, determined by its internal objects in the evolving universe of actual things”.³²

Two points are important in this statement: the philosophy of the organism speaks in terms of “internal relations with other actual entities” and attributes “change” to the “evolving universe of actual things”, which includes eternal objects. What is interesting about these aspects of Whitehead’s formulation is that where Whitehead speaks of “internal relations”, Locke usually describes “external relations”. Thus, the philosophy of an organism consists of patterns of internal relations that constitute varieties of constitutions, which then form a thing or entity. “Change” turns out to be an integral element of real entities: actual entities evolve, while eternal objects participate in the universe of actualities. Importantly, though, they remain in a state of continuity. Internal relations within the world of actual entities are regulated by eternal objects that participate in or penetrate actual entities. It is for this reason that the philosophy of the organism does not need to distinguish between internal and external relations. The world is not divided into two separate parts – the world is seen as a single entirety. Locke, in recognizing the dual world of things and

³⁰ Ibidem, *Introduction*, p. 47.

³¹ Ibidem.

³² A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, op. cit., p. 59.

mind, needed a distinction between “internal” and “external”, yet Whitehead did not provide this.

The real, actual, or relevant problem arising from the discussion of relations – internal and external – is the problem of the “real internal structure of things” and the “real essence”. This is metaphysics in the making, at which point Whitehead turns Locke into a metaphysician. Descriptive epistemology turns into a philosophy of the organism.

Whitehead discovered the concept of “real internal constitution” in Locke’s *Essay*. The real importance of Locke’s study, as it concerns essences and substances, lies in Locke’s belief that the essences and substances in the world have a constitution. That is, to arrive at an adequate understanding of the world, we must study its constitution. Thus, Locke presents us with a constitutional theory of matter. However, the way he presented his doctrine is precisely where Whitehead’s criticism begins; nonetheless, Locke’s emphasis on the fact that we must look closely at the things at hand, that is, at their constitutional framework in terms of structure and function, was an achievement in itself. Locke never seems to go beyond his masterful analysis in the descriptive sense. Locke remains in the descriptive phase and thus cannot deal with the ontological stage in terms of questions such as: what is the real nature of the internal constitution of a substance or essence? And it is these questions that interest Whitehead. On this occasion, Locke speaks either of a “secret relation of the parts”,³³ or of “a special internal structure, or unknown essence of this substance”.³⁴ Ultimately, to find the composition of a thing means to discover the essence of this thing. However, this intention goes beyond descriptive epistemology.

Locke tells us plainly that an “essence” is merely an abstract idea received by the mind. Moreover, abstract ideas are merely collections of simple ideas, consequently, the essence behind which the abstract idea stands is “the creation of Understanding”.³⁵ However, regarding the question of the origin of the “real essence” of things, Locke remains silent. Each individual idea is a separate entity; however, what is the difference between a separate entity and a true entity? This question clearly shows the limitations of Locke’s descriptive method: true essence cannot be discovered by mere description.

³³ J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, op. cit., II, XXI, 3, p. 234.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, II, XXIII, 3, p. 29.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, III, III, 12, p. 414 and 13–14, p. 415.

Special attention should be paid to the paragraphs of *Real and Nominal Essence*,³⁶ since they are almost entirely quoted by Whitehead in *Process and Reality*.

What exactly does Locke say about essence?

“(…) the real internal, but generally (in substances) unknown constitution of things, whereon their discoverable qualities depend, may be called their essence.

(…) It is true, there is ordinarily supposed a real constitution of the sorts of things; and it is past doubt there must be some real constitution, on which any collection of simple ideas co-existing must depend”.³⁷

Whitehead takes Locke’s idea of the real internal structure of natural things and turns the whole problem into an ontological question: how does this internal structure work? Whitehead looks for the design’s essence.

Locke’s statement on the collection of coexisting, simple ideas provides some insight: they must have a real structure or pattern in order to manifest themselves.

Locke continues with the following line: “For this is the real constitution of his insensible parts, on which depend all those properties of colour, weight, fusibility, immobility, etc. which are to be found in him. What kind of constitution we don’t know; and therefore, having no special idea, do not have a name that would be its sign”.³⁸ Locke points out that what we call “essence” is usually a naming of abstract ideas; they are all unborn and imperishable, which cannot be said of the real constitution of things, which begin and pass away with them. All existing things, except their Creator, are subject to change; especially those things with which we are familiar and which we have classified into groups under different names or signs. Thus, what was grass today will become sheep’s meat tomorrow; and within a few days after this, it becomes a part of Man: in all these and other, similar changes it is obvious that their real essence, i.e., that constitution on which the properties of these several things has depended, is destroyed and perishes along with them. However, if essences are taken to be ideas fixed in the mind, with names attached to them, they are supposed to remain immutably the same, whatever changes the individual substances may undergo.³⁹

Thus, abstract ideas, as immutable entities, have only relations with the sounds of signs and remain true. They are unborn, incorruptible, and

³⁶ Ibidem, 15, p. 417.

³⁷ Ibidem, 15, p. 402

³⁸ Ibidem, 18, p. 419.

³⁹ Ibidem, 19, p. 419.

unchanging. This is not the case with simple ideas or natural substances. According to Locke, "The names of simple ideas and substances, with the abstract ideas in the mind which they immediately signify, imply also some real existence from which their original specimen was derived".⁴⁰

It should now be quite clear that the original object of curiosity was the "original specimen" of "actually existing things" having a "real internal constitution" in terms of "a collection of simple ideas coexisting" and the interest for Whitehead in solving this problem. In this sense, we can say that Locke served as a blueprint for Whitehead.

Whitehead "translated" Locke essentially as follows:

"The 'organic doctrine' demands a 'real essence' in the sense of a complete analysis of the relations, and interrelations of the actual entities which are formative of the actual entity in question; furthermore, 'Thus the real essence involves, real objectification of specified actual entities'; Contrary to that idea which continues in the same paragraph, 'and an 'abstract essence' in which the specified actual entities are replaced by the notions of unspecified actual entity. Thus, the real essence involves real objectifications of specified actual entities; the abstract essence is a complex eternal object. There is nothing self-contradictory in the thought of many actual entities with the same abstract essence; but there can only be one actual entity with the same real essence. For the real essence indicates 'where' the entity is, that is to say, its status in the real world; the abstract essence omits the particularity of the status".⁴¹

This is Whitehead's solution to Locke's distinction between "real" and "nominal" essence. Whitehead intends to solve the problem in this way by transforming Locke's "real essence" into "real relations", thus giving an exhaustive analysis of real entities or mere ideas (using Locke's language). On the other hand, Whitehead transforms "nominal essence" or complex ideas into abstract essence or eternal objects. Thus, the transformation of the linguistic-gnoseological level of analysis into the ontological level was carried out. Whitehead was trying to solve a specific problem inherent in both those "real" and "nominal" beings called "Entities". In essence, Locke posed the problem of the relations between sensory objects, that is, the area beyond direct sensory experience which is covered by the intellect.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, III, IV, 2, p. 421.

⁴¹ A.N. Whitehead, *Process Reality*, op. cit., p. 60.

Conclusion

At the conceptual level, the basis of reality is usually called ούσια (substance). Its equivalent in predication, and at the theoretical-ontological level, is mainly called the subject/substrate (ὑποκείμενον – that which is the basis). The corresponding entities that actually exist in reality, such as “this horse” or “these people,” are usually called τόδε τι (*hoc aliquid*). The Categories do not clearly differentiate between these elements. This is not surprising, since Aristotle has a strong tendency to equate these elements in certain respects. One example of the strong connections between different levels is *hypokeimenon*, which, depending on the context, should be interpreted as either a subject or a substrate. Likewise, ούσια can be understood as either a concept, *tode ti*, or *hypokeimenon*.

The main attention in the Categories is paid to *ousii*, as the basic components of reality, which carry random properties that are simply assumed. Wolfgang Rainer Mann describes this fact in his *Discovery of Things*⁴² with the following words: “The categories are strikingly free from arguments aimed at establishing or justifying this distinction (between things and properties. There are no arguments at all in favour of the distinction between *ousia* and properties.

“Tode ti” is defined as this horse, this person, this ball, or our experience. This obviously demonstrates a focus on the phenomenon and the concrete. Yet, it is not talking about “tode ti”, but rather about *ousia*, which tried to understand itself within the Categories. What can be seen if they look at how Aristotle derives the concept *ousia*, (which lies at the heart of the inquiry and is supposed to mean “tode ti”) this horse, that man, or this ball? He begins his research with language, or more precisely, with predication. He looks at how to talk about things. As a result of this research, he concludes that, when expressed, always express some general property of some specific entity. From this, Aristotle concludes that there are two general types of words: some denote individual entities, and others denote general properties. Since words refer to or denote reality, there must be at least two equivalent types of existing entities: the specific entity – type of existence and the general property – type of existence. Moreover, a concrete entity must be independent of general properties, not only because of the structure of predication but also because concreteness can be preserved by changing its properties.

The concrete entity is then called *ousia* and is considered to be equivalent to “tode ti”. The qualities of “ousia”, which we know about through the study of

⁴² W.-R. Mann, *The Discovery of Things*, Princeton University Press, 2000.

predication, are considered to be the properties of “tode ti”. This approach to understanding the concept of “ousia” in the Categories is deeply conceptual, and not at all phenomenological or empirical. “Ousia”, as an independent basis for predicates, does not actually cover “tode ti”, which is the concrete singular of our experience. This refers to an abstraction based on the way we talk about “tode ti”; this is the concept of “tode ti” τὸδε τι, but not “tode ti” itself.

In dynamic reality, there is an attempt to listen to reality rather than categorize it. For this reason, one should try to form their thoughts according to the structure of reality, rather than reconstruct reality according to the way one thinks and speaks. This basic structure of reality, concrete interconnection (i.e. internal relations), and change are central to “thinking about φυσικς” and dynamic ontologies in general, rather than the abstract structures of language or logic that are central to analytical thinking and substance ontologies. Therefore, if the main difference between the ontologies of substance and the ontology of φυσικς is rooted in the object of their study, and there is a necessary correspondence between that object and how language is used to express that object, there must be a way to reconcile the two views.

Thus, dynamic ontologies are rooted in the empirical or phenomenological study of singular and concrete reality. Ontological concepts differ depending on the object of study: if we study concepts, we gain a more static view of the world, if we study a concrete reality, we find a more dynamic view of the world.

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Summary

Ontology of dynamic reality

The article presents a vision of the ontology of dynamic reality. Changes in the approach from Aristotle to Alfred North Whitehead are analysed. It is shown how Whitehead's ontology of change emerged from John Locke's ontology of substance.

Streszczenie

Ontologia dynamicznej rzeczywistości

W artykule przedstawiona została wizja ontologii dynamicznej rzeczywistości. Przeanalizowane zostały zmiany podejścia od Arystotelesa do Alfreda Northa Whiteheada. Zostało pokazane, jak z ontologii substancji Johna Locke'a wythoniła się ontologia zmian Whiteheada.