

for the Marjorie Suchocki volume,
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Eschatology as Metaphysics Under the Guise of Hope

Philip Clayton

It is not typical to do constructive metaphysics under the guise of hope. In fact, I am not sure that it is possible. It may be that the only rational response to questions of immortality and eschatology is *hope without metaphysics*, that is, a subjective longing coupled with agnosticism or skepticism about all extant metaphysical proposals on the topic. For those not willing to engage in the suspension of belief, the concept of hope must serve, I suggest, as the lens through which all constructive metaphysical work on is focused.

This axiom gives rise to two theses, which serve as the (sometimes silent) background for the following exploration. First, in eschatology, more than perhaps any other field, the insight of Kant and German Idealists is correct. Knowledge claims cannot be advanced apart from a consideration of the *status* of those claims: are they known? how are they known? how well are they known? Where faith outruns knowledge, the mere having of the faith does not itself serve as a reason to think that the resulting beliefs are true. This principle holds in particular for resurrection claims both past and future: “If ... historical study declares itself unable to establish what ‘really’ happened on Easter, then all the more, faith is not able to do so; for faith cannot ascertain anything certain about events of the past that would perhaps be inaccessible to the historian.”¹

This position stems from the epistemological principle that conviction, no matter how passionate, is not sufficient for knowledge. The degree of probability of any prediction is only as high as the strength of the analogy between previous events and the one now being predicted. In the case of an idealized physical system (say, one functioning under ideal Newtonian connections) the analogy between past cases and the present case is nearly perfect. Hence the probability of the same outcome in the future is very high — as empirical experiments in fact reveal. Unfortunately, the question about the end of this entire cosmic epoch lies at precisely the opposite end of the epistemic continuum. We have never experienced the end of a universe and

have no analogies to guide us. The same holds true for the question, “What happens after my death?” Thus the epistemic strength of our predictions on these subjects is much lower than in most other areas — no matter how passionately one may believe in, or long for, one or another sort of post-mortem state. Of course, the uncertainty of our knowledge does not dampen the degree of our hope; indeed, the passion of hope may even be increased by unknowing! Thus statements about immortality and the eschaton belong more naturally under the heading of hope than under the heading of knowledge. (One might then ask, Under what conditions is hope justified?)

Second, I have just argued that eschatological statements cannot be *more than* statements of hope. It is equally true that they cannot be *less than* statements of hope — at least not if they are to be religiously significant. A scientist might study various possible outcomes of the physical cosmos and assess the likelihood of each possible outcome. The fact that she finds some of the outcomes more attractive and others less attractive is completely irrelevant to her assessment of them *qua* scientific hypotheses. But in matters of religion things are otherwise. Here it matters greatly that the religious narrative or worldview endorsed by the believer makes the universe meaningful for her. A religious tradition or belief that does not establish a context of meaning for believers has ceased to be religiously effective. What then are the conditions under which talk of the eschaton can still meet the condition of hope? A believer can hope for an (eschatological) outcome only to the extent that she can relate it to her own self-conception, the values that she holds, and the projects with which she is concerned.

This very concern has often been raised in the context of debates about process eschatology. One wants to know, Does Whitehead’s doctrine of objective immortality meet the hope condition? The future state in which God remembers everything that you thought or felt allows you to become data in the divine consciousness. But it is not a future state that includes the subjective or agential part of you. Is it then a future state that you can hope for?² Certainly not in the sense of hoping for a continuation of who you are as a person; Whitehead’s notion allows only for a continuation of who you *were* as a person (or better, perhaps, a person-moment). Agency is an essential condition for ongoing personhood: not just the content of your thoughts or actions, but your ability to think the thoughts or perform the actions, would have to be preserved. Indeed, the moment of agency is just as crucial in the creative synthesis of an actual occasion as it is in everyday understandings of personhood. Subjective immortality, it seems, but not objective immortality, meets this condition.

We first examine traditional eschatology before turning to Marjorie Suchocki's eschatology and defense of subjective immortality. I focus in particular on the work of Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann, since their "theologies of the future" are primarily responsible for the renaissance of eschatology in the second half of the 20th century.

Traditional Christian eschatology

The Greek adjective *eschaton* means last or final. The noun *to eschaton* thus came to mean the end of this age, and hence of the entire history of the cosmos. As the divinely appointed end, *to eschaton* also conveyed the sense of completion or fulfillment, the telos of history. One cannot overemphasize the importance of this completion within Christian theology. As Wolfhart Pannenberg writes, "The future of God's kingdom for whose coming Christians pray in the words of Jesus (Matt. 6:10) is the epitome of Christian hope. All else that is related to it, including the resurrection of the dead and the last judgment, is a consequence of God's own coming to consummate his rule over his creation."³

Many early theologians had limited the significance of the eschaton to the belief in the second coming of Christ and the establishment of the kingdom of God. This interpretation tended to place the focus on the final judgment, at which wrongdoing would be punished and good rewarded. The result was a heavy emphasis on the justice of God and God's role as judge.⁴ But in 20th-century theology the doctrine of eschatology came to take on a more significant role than it had played in earlier periods of systematic theology. Jürgen Moltmann, arguing that Christianity understands history only "from the perspective of the future," risked the thesis early in his career that *theology just is eschatology*.⁵ Moltmann's entire ethics and politics stemmed from this awareness: "If the Christians hope for this future of God, they not only wait for it, but also look for it, love it, and strive for it. The eschatological will lead to decisions that are live options in the present. The decision for the goal determines the means and ways that lead to the goal" (p. 46). Hence all of theology, and all of the Christian life, stem from one's belief in the eschaton. Without this culmination, all Christian belief and practice becomes futile: "If we who are in Christ have hope only in this life and that is all, then we are of all people most miserable and to be pitied" (1 Cor. 15:19).

It is true that traditional eschatology did not always express the subtlety and richness of this understanding of eschatology. As John Macquarrie writes, "Traditional eschatology seemed to understand the consummation as a kind of escape from the vicissitudes of time, from the 'change and decay' that we see all around, into a realm where nothing would be subject to change any more."⁶ The tendency toward eschatological escapism based on dichotomizing time and eternity

must be judged as a shortcoming. Yet such weaknesses in some traditional formulations are not sufficient grounds for discarding the notion of an eschaton altogether. Thus I cannot follow the recommendation of Catherine Keller that we understand the New Creation as “the renewal of *this* creation — not the deadly expectation of the end of this one. If we ruin this one, there is no Daddy to make us a new one.... The confluence of past energy and future possibility... is dis/closed only in and as ‘the love of life.’ ”⁷ The same applies to Rudolf Bultmann’s famous attempt to eliminate all future dimensions of the Christian hope, translating them into a fully “realized eschatology.” To struggle with the Christian tradition means to struggle with the dimension of futurity. Pannenberg provides a succinct summary of the challenge: “The relation between time and eternity is the crucial problem is eschatology, and its solution has implication for all parts of Christian doctrine” (p. 595).

The scientific picture is not encouraging of this cosmic hope. If eschatologists seek to ground their hope in science, they will be disappointed. John Polkinghorne summarizes the scientific position:

Our knowledge is not sufficiently accurate to enable us to be sure which tendency will ultimately win, but either way the observable universe is condemned to eventual futility. If expansion [of the universe] predominates, the galaxies will continue to move apart forever, at the same time condensing and decaying within themselves into ever-cooling low-grade radiation. If contraction predominates, the universe will eventually collapse upon itself into the fiery melting pot of the big crunch. In neither way is an obvious evolutionary fulfillment to be found.⁸

These two possibilities have been summarized as the “freeze or fry” scenario. Neither outcome seems greatly to be desired.

True, the (relatively recent) realization that the world is finite in space and time is closer to the biblical view than is the notion of an infinite, unchanging universe that dominated the medieval world-picture. Nevertheless, as Pannenberg notes, “the cosmic eschatology of the Bible that expects an imminent end to the world, even though no time table is set, is not congruent with scientific extrapolations regarding a possible end to the universe that look to a remote future” (p. 589). Kathryn Tanner draws out the consequence of this discrepancy in no uncertain terms: “the best scientific description of the day leaves little doubt that death is the end toward which our solar system and the universe as a whole are moving.”⁹

In the absence of scientific support for the Christian hope, certain conservative scholars and popular Christian writers have turned instead to a dark futurology, seeking to find confirmation for Christian eschatological claims in the evidence that the world is going to hell in a handbasket, as the prophets foretold. Many, for example, have looked for “signs of the Apocalypse,” proofs that the dire predictions in Revelation are being fulfilled. Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* both expressed and spawned a strange Christian *Schadenfreude* in the wars and environmental disasters of the late modern age.¹⁰

In marked rejection of this trend, mainline Christian theologians have argued that no such “negative apologetics” is necessary to substantiate eschatological language. The role of the future and the need for hope are well enough attested in human existential experience; their continuing role is assured through “the inner logic of the historicity of our sense of meaning” (Pannenberg, p. 590). Pannenberg’s anthropology, for example, argues that the notion of “history as a whole” — which obviously includes the idea of the end of history — is a fundamental feature of our being in the world.¹¹ Pannenberg and Rahner, among others, have appealed to Heidegger’s powerful demonstration of the centrality of “the future” for present human existence in the world (*Dasein*). Each individual’s death, for example, is for her the locus of the possibility of her becoming whole (*Ganz-sein-können*).¹²

At present, then, Christian theology finds itself drawn toward a hope that it cannot prove. The idea of a hope after death and an end that fulfills history as a whole is as intrinsic to the Christian tradition as it is foreign to project of science. Theologians can draw on numerous resources in anthropology and phenomenology in order to explain this hope and anchor it in the structures and longings of human existence. But to translate the Christian hope without remnant into human existential (or aesthetical or political) terms is to eliminate one of the most fundamental features of the tradition. We live in the tension between these competing forces. Pannenberg nicely expresses the balance which it is the theologian’s goal to achieve:

The themes of eschatology call for *anthropological* demonstration. True, anthropological argument can have only a limited function in eschatology because eschatological hope depends finally on God’s reality and power, not ours. But what has to be demonstrated anthropologically is still essential if we are to be able to hear that which is maintained and proclaimed as truly a matter of promise, and if it is to be credible as the promise of God. Thus anthropology is the soil on which we can argue for the universality of the Christian eschatological hope even if in the process we cannot offer final

proofs for the contents of this hope, the fulfilling of which is far beyond our human resources and depends on God alone (p. 542).

Eschatology exists in the dialectical tension between an awaited and hoped-for act on God's part and an active process of evaluation and *construction* on the part of human beings. To what extent this tension can be resolved within any constructive metaphysics remains to be seen.

Process, Participation, and Panentheism

For those familiar with the process tradition, this quick account of traditional Christian eschatology may seem discouraging. Are not the themes of process thought far removed from these concepts and desiderata? There are however some connections, both metaphysical and existential, between the notion of an eschaton or telos and Whitehead's experiential philosophy. Exploring these connections will allow us to evaluate to what extent Marjorie Suchocki's proposal can be linked with the theological traditions just summarized.

Perhaps the most important link lies in the notion of participation. A passing comment in Pannenberg's systematic theology suggests a strategy:

The problem of linking the thought of an end of time with that of life, including eternal life, disappears only when we consider that *God and not nothing is the end of time*. As the finite is bounded by the infinite, so are time and the temporal by eternity. The end of the temporal, of time and history in general, thus means transition to eternity. This can mean participation in God's own eternal life (pp. 593 f.).

Participation is uniquely suited to express both the subjective/transformational dimension of eschatology and its objective features (actual temporal futurity, the end of time, and the actions of God).

Mystics have explored the experiential dimension of participation in the divine, ethicists its implications for action. For her part, the metaphysician must ask about its formulation as a comprehensive systematic theory of reality. The Western tradition offers at least four major models for conceiving participation¹³ (the Eastern philosophical traditions are equally rich but require a separate presentation and analysis of their own). Foundational for all of them is Plato's concept that all finite things exist only by participating in their respective forms. The next two

both stem from (separate) syntheses of Platonic participation with Aristotle's metaphysics. Plotinus and the Neoplatonic thinkers who followed him held that all finite things emerge from the One in a process of emanation, yet continue to exist only through participation in it. Thomas Aquinas, by contrast, accepted the existence of a world outside of and distinct from God, each object a real combination of form and matter in Aristotle's sense. Yet his metaphysics of being was still built upon Platonic participation, as was his theory of the transcendentals (being, goodness, beauty, the One). Descartes argued that the existence of finite beings implies the existence of an infinite, which is logically prior and must serve as their source. Hegel then showed that it is contradictory to imagine the finite as lying outside of the infinite; the true infinite must encompass all finite things and include them within itself. Finally, Whitehead advanced a systematic metaphysics in which creative moments or actual occasions exist for themselves but come to be contained within the consequent nature of God after the completion of their creative activity.

Whitehead's exclusion of the creative moment — what modern metaphysicians have called subjectivity — from participation in the divine¹⁴ represents a major setback for the theological appropriation of his work. For this reason, some of the process thinkers who followed him have attempted to reduce the distance using a concept not found explicitly in Whitehead's work, the concept of panentheism. *Panentheism* is the thesis that all finite occasions exist within the divine, although God is also more than the finite world taken as a whole. Charles Hartshorne's reformulation of Whiteheadian philosophy in panentheistic terms opened the doors to a deeper rapprochement of Whitehead and traditional theology; and later process thinkers, including Marjorie Suchocki and Joseph Bracken, have attempted to deepen the conceptual connections. Thus, Suchocki claims, "The occasion is linked into the concrescence of God, even while remaining itself. Thus the peculiarity obtains that the occasion is *both* itself *and* God: it is apotheosized" (p. 102). Any success that one may have in addressing the dilemmas of eschatology, I suggest, will depend on one's ability to formulate an adequate Christian-process panentheism.

Suchocki's defense of subjective immortality

For those interested in the dialogue between process and traditional eschatology, the most important claim in Marjorie Suchocki's eschatological work, *The End of Evil*, is probably her affirmation of subjective immortality. Suchocki realizes that, in the dialogue between Christian theologians and Whitehead, the latter's apparent denial of the immortality of human subjectivity

has been a major stumbling block. For Whitehead, past occasions are available to the present actual occasion only as data. Likewise, the present entity's own subjectivity exists only in the creative moment of unification, the moment at which it transforms the "many" of its input into the "one" of its unique perspective on the world (PR 21). The moment this unification is completed, it passes out of existence *qua* subjective; its unique perspective persists only as data for later actual occasions. Whitehead held (or: seems generally to have held) that the same limitation applies to God's as an experiencer: even God can onlyprehend past occasions as (objective) data. Admittedly, God's prehension is unlimited, whereas ours is finite; nevertheless, since subjectivity is momentary, it cannot be preserved in God's ongoing awareness, even if all the *facts* about individuals can be. Thus Whitehead advocated objective immortality while denying subjective immortality.

In her book (pp. 90-96) Suchocki affirms the subjective immortality of each actual occasion within God. I shall not analyze in detail her arguments for the viability of this shift within an "orthodox" Whiteheadian framework; that task is attempted elsewhere in this volume. Here our concern is more with the *theological implications* of this shift. Suffice it to say that Suchocki supports her reinterpretation of Whitehead by appealing to the *perfection* and *unlimited nature* of God's prehension of past occasions: the absence of negative prehension, the perfect harmony of feeling, and the complete retention by God of all details concerning the past occasion's experience. Without arguing a position on whether this reinterpretation is compatible with the fundamental tenets of Whitehead's metaphysics (I tend to agree with Joseph Bracken that the resulting position is neo-Whiteheadian rather than orthodox Whiteheadian), I suggest we consider what is presupposed and entailed by Suchocki's attempted enhancement of Whitehead. As hinted above, participation and panentheism provide the *Leitmotive* for this analysis.

In her approach to the question of immortality, Suchocki might be said to be raising the ultimate challenge to panentheists: How seriously, how completely, how radically do you understand the inclusion of all things and all persons within God? Under this interpretation, Suchocki is really pushing the logic of locating all things, and hence all subjective agency, within the divine. The result is a more radical account of what it means to locate finite agency within the divine subject than panentheists are usually willing to admit.¹⁵ For the most natural response to her interpretation of subjective immortality is, "But there can't be real flesh-and-blood existence within God. Either a person exists in the world in the fashion with which we are familiar in everyday experience, or a person is remembered by God after she no longer exists. You can't have an existence within God which at the same time preserves what it is to exist in

the world!” Although this is an intuitively compelling response, it is not one that is open to the panentheist. Recall that panentheism is the view that all things exist within God, although God is also more than all (finite) things. That means that, for the panentheist, the normal state of existence *is* that all things have real flesh-and-blood existence, *and* that they exist at the same time within the divine. Being within God and having full earthly existence cannot, for the panentheist, be incompatible.

Of course, Suchocki construes inner-worldly temporal progression differently from the way classical Christian theology does. In traditional theology persons were understood to be substances or subjects that persisted over time, enjoying “normal” existence for their allotted three-score-and-ten. After that they either cease to exist, or exist in a state of disembodied existence, for some period of time; and then comes the resurrection and a final, eternal state. Thus for Thomas Aquinas the disembodied soul as it exists prior to the final resurrection of the body exists in only a partial, shadowy existence. On the last day, the tradition held, the soul is reunited with the body, allowing the resurrected person to enjoy a fullness of existence in the direct presence of God. By contrast, Suchocki, following Whitehead, treats the individual moment of experiencing as the fundamental unit rather than the person’s life as a whole. The moment each one of these “occasions,” or instants of experience, ceases to exist as a subjective reality, it is prehended by God in its full *objective and subjective* nature. On this view, the moment that “you” — the point-instant you — cease to exist in your earthly, finite form, you begin to exist panentheistically, that is, within God.

The strange sound of this proposal does not, I suggest, stem from its panentheistic commitment. There is nothing in and of itself strange about things existing within the divine presence; such a view merely intensifies the notion of divine immanence, which has played a role in Western theism since the Patristic period. The strangeness comes when one tries to picture the whole thing more realistically, that is, when one tries to imagine how the transition from “outside” of God to “inside” of God takes place. At one moment you exist as a flesh-and-blood being, surrounded and influenced by other solid things like sticks and snow and orange juice; and then suddenly you find yourself existing as a thought within the mind of God. Once there, you find that the feeling of “what it is like to be you” and all your particular thoughts are still intact, right down to the level of the particular pleasure you had when you swam laps in the pool this morning. At this point silly questions arise: Did God transfer the actual pool into this God-internal place? Or does God merely make it seem as though the pool is there? Are you now like the disembodied “brain in a vat” made famous by Hilary Putnam, with artificial inputs deceiving

you into thinking that you are still enjoying a full existence?¹⁶

And then suddenly one realizes how Suchocki is able to make this move “into” God without, as it were, losing anything along the way: hers is an idealist ontology, just as radically as Whitehead’s was. It’s well known that Whitehead as a panexperientialist (or what, before Griffin, we called a “panpsychist”) defends an ontology that consists solely of moments of experience. As an idealist he can say that sticks and snow and scorpions exist, and that you have flesh-and-blood existence; what this claim has to mean for him in the end, however, is that *aggregates of innumerable many moments of experience exist*, and these aggregates have the character of sticks and scorpions and the rest. Aggregates are derivative. If you recreate each of the innumerable moments of experience out of which they are composed, including their subjective aspects, then you have recreated the world as we know it. Nothing is lost.¹⁷

Is this not what Suchocki’s view of subjective immortality really amounts to? First an incredibly complex series of mental events takes place *outside* of God, although they are of course influenced by God. And then immediately afterwards (literally: at the next temporal instant) these same events are mirrored within God in so complete and accurate a form that *nothing* has been lost — so complete indeed, that we should speak of the mirrored state as the continued existence of those very subjective events who, a moment ago, existed outside of God. It is, apparently, a powerful thing to be remembered by God!

In one sense, the subjective event as it occurs and the subjective event as it is remembered are identical. In another sense, however, they are not. In this difference lies the opening for a doctrine of redemption in Suchocki’s work. Remember that persons are, for Whitehead, a series of actual occasions with a particularly close connection between the particular moments of which they are composed. In your pre-panentheistic state (if that’s the right way to characterize Suchocki’s position) you — or rather, each moment of “you” — is presented with an ordered set of initial aims, and each moment has the opportunity to respond to the divine lure in its own way. Let’s assume that, as with most of us, your individual moments do not respond in perfect accord with these initial aims. As each of your moments passes out of its creative phase and becomes data for future moments, it is recreated within God. Moment by moment you are being built up again, panentheistically, within the eternal divine memory. Yet in this memory in which you now “live and move and have your being,” there is no perishing; each of your moments continues to exist eternally *in the robust subjective sense in which it existed during the process of its concrescence*. This fact means, presumably, that the opportunity exists for “you” — the

sum total of the occasions that constitute you — to respond differently to the divine lure. In this eternal state you can understand more fully, respond more perfectly, and participate more completely in the eternal divine life in which “the many become one.” Herein lies redemption. Thus Suchocki writes

The occasion is twice-born: first through its own self-creation, and second through God’s total prehension of this self-creation. Its temporal birth is as fleeting as the concrescence that generated it; its divine birth, grounded in God’s own concrescence, is as everlasting as God. The occasion is therefore reborn to subjective immortality (p. 96).

No subjective immortality without a theory of subjectivity

The End of Evil attempts to develop an adequate theory of immortality and redemption — one sufficient to genuinely address the problem of evil — while remaining as true as possible to Whiteheadian thought. Whenever she diverges from Whitehead, Suchocki does so only to the extent necessary to achieve her goals; whenever possible, she justifies her modifications of Whitehead’s system using his own concepts and the conceptual openings they provide. Suppose we accept this methodological commitment for the moment as a given. It will still be crucial to acknowledge to what extent the results actually diverge from Whitehead and how significant these divergences are. In a sense the relationship of this chapter to Suchocki’s project is analogous to Suchocki’s relationship to Whitehead: I find openings in *her* concepts, the implications of which drive us yet another step further from *Process and Reality*. In particular, Suchocki’s notion of subjective immortality, and the modifications of process thought that it entails, introduce new concepts into the process debate. When we explore the resources that these concepts provide, we find ourselves treading on new territory.

First, I suggest that Bracken is right in noting that Suchocki has actually introduced a new level of intersubjectivity into the God-world relationship. He writes, “Whitehead conceived prehension, even divine prehension, along the lines of a subject-object relationship. What Suchocki has done is to convert divine prehension of creaturely actual occasions into a subject-subject or intersubjective relationship” (draft chapter, p. 8). As Bracken realizes, Whiteheadian occasions in the course of their own concrescence directly perceive only *objects*, viz. past occasions. Whitehead does not provide us with adequate conceptual resources for conceiving direct subject-to-subject relationships. Partly for this reason, Bracken’s own (neo-Whiteheadian)

reconceptualization of relationship in terms of interpenetrating fields represents an important advance over Whitehead's conception.¹⁸

The field concept also mitigates the negative effects of Whitehead's idealism. Contemporary physics has not yet unified the theories of electromagnetic fields, gravitational fields, and quantum fields. Nonetheless, each of these physical fields shares the property of interrelating matter and energy so that the two are no longer understood as completely discrete (even if the differences in the way they do this are highly significant). Bracken has recognized that this blurring of the old dichotomy between solid matter and ethereal energy has the potential to reduce the tension between mental subjects and physical objects that has bedeviled modern philosophy at least since Descartes. We return to the problem of the physical world, and its role in eschatology, after looking first at the theory of subjectivity.

In one of the more intriguing sections of *The End of Evil* Suchocki, having made the case for subjective immortality, begins to explore avenues that would allow for an actual occasion to experience redemption. She first considers the possibility that "each prehended immediacy, by being united with the totality of God, [might] then become as a series in its continued experience of God. This would entail that every occasion ... is ultimately destined for a continual seriality in everlastingness" (p. 102). But, she points out, expanding each actual occasion into what would then become an *infinite series* of occasions would not actually bring about redemption. One might conclude that *future* occasions were redeemed in such a view, but the actual occasion itself would be left in its initial state.

Suchocki then rightly turns to the two types of time that are implied in Whitehead's system. "Serial time marked by transition" is the dominant understanding of time in Whitehead; it is the series of moments of concrescence or creativity, each one ending and bequeathing the creative task to the next generation of occasions. But Whitehead's philosophy also implies a "genetic time of concrescence," since each of the "moments" itself includes a number of (at least conceptual) stages. Suchocki does not believe that the latter really deserves to be called time, since in processes of this sort there is no loss. Yet she does grant that it represents a unique form of process: "each datum is refined *and* modified as the concrescent process takes place, for the datum is contrasted in relation to other data, and integrated accordingly into the satisfaction" (p. 103).

By contrast, I follow McTaggart in holding that every actual process in fact implies some

notion of time. Time is just the measure or conceptualization of any given process. Clearly, the nature of time in these two major types of process will be different, and they may even be conceptually incommensurable. Still, it is sufficient to note that the process of concrescence is characterized by its own unique time. Let's call the time of concrescence *subjective time*. It would be a grave weakness if Whiteheadian process philosophy were unable to incorporate this sort of temporal process. In fact, *other* process thinkers — notably Hegel and Bergson, and above all Augustine — have developed highly sophisticated process philosophies of subjective time.

It would also be deeply troubling to exclude subjective time because, I suggest, there is no answer to the challenge of eschatology without an adequate notion of subjective time. As we saw in the section on traditional Christian eschatology, we have access to the idea of the “genuinely future” through the experience of meaning, which one can grasp by analyzing the structures of human existence in the world (Heidegger). These analyses of subjective time are not *sufficient* for an eschatology, but they are necessary components of any adequate account.¹⁹

For these reasons, I suppose, subjective time plays a much larger role in Suchocki's system than in Whitehead's. Indeed, it turns out that her notion of subjective time is extensive enough to imply a nascent theory of subjectivity. For example, Suchocki's view entails that there is reflexivity or self-awareness in the actual occasion. Her actual occasions, being apotheosized, are, as we saw, both themselves and God at the same time. Put differently, “the entity enjoys its own satisfaction *and* God's consciousness of it in the unity of God's now extremely complex subjectivity” (p. 102). Suchocki must consequently postulate a “dual consciousness” within each actual occasion: “the retained consciousness of the satisfaction, and the moving consciousness of God” (p. 103). “In apotheosis the occasion experiences itself and more than itself.” (ibid.).

This reflexivity or self-awareness was at the very least not anticipated by Whitehead, and it may well be that it is irreconcilable with his theory of actual occasions. By introducing it, Suchocki is able in principle to do greater justice to the richness of concrescence, thus addressing one of the more serious limitations of Whitehead's metaphysics. If she is successful in this task, she would be better able to describe the profound impact of God on the actual occasion. But one would only be able to determine the extent to which she is successful by providing a fuller theory of the notion of subjectivity that lies behind subjective immortality. That task has not yet been completed.

What kind of theory of subjectivity *would* be adequate for thinking these new developments? First, the ontology must include subjects who are extended over time (that is of course, subjective time). During the process of their concrescence — and remember that, on Suchocki's view, this process may be everlasting! — these extended occasions, or subjects for short, experience a dual consciousness: they are aware of their own prehension of and evaluation of data, and they are aware of God's input.

Moreover, this dual awareness continues over long stretches of (subjective) time, since only in this way can Suchocki account for redemption. According to the dynamic she describes, the subject is partially redeemed by its awareness of God's reaction to it, reforms itself in that new understanding, presents that reformed understanding to God, and is further redeemed by God's further response. One might even say that the basic structure of this subject is *self-reflexivity in community*. In a process of fundamental sociality, the subject experiences God as Other, comprehends within itself God's response to it, and then internalizes this response into itself, thereby becoming more than it was before. Readers will note a significant parallel: this process, which seems to lie at the core of Suchocki's conception, is almost indistinguishable from the process that underlies Hegel's theory of subjectivity!²⁰

Process and traditional eschatology

The proposal developed by Marjorie Suchocki seeks to make sense of the conceptual possibility of subjective immortality. Given that many metaphysical conceptions, including Whitehead's own, failed to do this, this would be no mean achievement.²¹ I have argued that the task, though intriguing, is incomplete, and that completing it requires drawing on conceptual resources that are not to be found in Whitehead.

Consider the proposal in summary. This eschatology centers on an entity capable of continued subjective existence after the moment of its earthly existence. It is able not only to be influenced by God, but also to become aware of that ongoing (eschatological) influence. It is thus capable of redemption, a fundamental Christian notion. It is likewise capable of intersubjective awareness and experience, allowing for the notion of a redeemed community (ecclesiology). Nonetheless, the entity in its post-mortem state exists in continuity with its earlier state: it is capable of retaining memories, experiences and moral attributes from its earthly existence, and it is described using the same metaphysical structure. At the same time, there is apparently no need for some of the more ambitious speculations and claims about the afterlife

that continue to compromise other works in Christian eschatology.²² And all of this takes place within (and makes crucial appeal to) the framework of panentheism, which many theologians today argue is the most adequate description of the God-world relationship.

Were one to be able to establish an adequate metaphysics of subjective immortality, two crucial tasks would still remain, both of them comparative. The first involves comparing this metaphysical system with other systems that support subjective immortality, seeking to discern which is the most plausible. If another system did a clearly *better* job of making subjective immortality plausible, one's work would be for naught; the more rational thing to do would be to endorse the more coherent conception. Conversely, if a number of metaphysical systems produce equally plausible theories of subjective immortality, a different problem arises: one begins to worry that a rational resolution among the proposals is impossible. In this case, one begins to worry that metaphysical speculation about eschatological matters is like tennis without a net: any series of shots is turns out to be adequate — one just has to make a large enough number of them. Thus the comparative task is crucial for determining the epistemic status of the outcome: should we endorse the results as true, or should we suspend belief on this topic?

A number of metaphysics support only objective immortality (including Whitehead's), or no immortality at all (most forms of naturalism and physicalism). By contrast, all systems that understand humans to have an immortal soul (Thomism, of course, but also most doctrines of reincarnation) equally support subjective immortality. Indeed, one need not be a Thomist, for one also finds coherent defenses of this notion in the context of Platonic or Neoplatonic doctrines of participation and emanation, within substance theories of the person (as in the Patristic authors), within many forms of panentheism, and within the framework of modern, Cartesian dualism.

(In fact, for *anyone* who accepts that there is an eternal God whose power is unlimited, it is always possible — and conceptually coherent — to assert that this God preserves the subjective side of each person after her death, even if no metaphysical category is employed that would otherwise guarantee such immortality. Such views are less satisfying metaphysically, of course, but they are not for that reason alone incoherent. Anyone who holds to the omnipotence of God can reasonably assert the possibility of subjective immortality, whatever the rest of her metaphysics looks like; she simply appeals to the free choice of an Agent who is able to bring anything to pass.)

Conversely, one would have to say that the metaphysically “tightest” defenses of subjective immortality are those systems that advocate a metaphysical substance that endures over time and that is in its very nature eternal. Such systems, one might say, win the battle by presupposing victory from the start. After them, the next most credible alternatives for defending immortality are those positions that begin with the idea of a subject that exists over an extended period or time. Since these positions take personhood or subjectivity as basic metaphysical categories, it is easier for them to give an account of post-mortem existence.

To the extent that a position is Whiteheadian, it interprets subjectivity primarily in terms of momentary occasions of experience and creativity. Suchocki has shown that such positions *can* be adapted to support subjective immortality. One must acknowledge at the end of the day, however, that systems based on momentary units of experience will have more work to do to get to subjective immortality than the ones just listed. (Of course, other systems face even more difficulty than process thought in getting to subjective immortality. One thinks, for example, of the attempt by Nancy Murphy and others to combine thoroughgoing physicalism with theism. Certainly this is an even more difficult task than combining process idealism with theism!) Suchocki can be more successful than Whitehead was in establishing the possibility of subjective immortality because she expands the notion of the actual occasion into the idea of a subject that is extended over time, and because she allows for direct inter-subjective causation between subjects — in short, because she has brought her Whiteheadian eschatology much closer to the major modern theories of the subject.

The second comparative task facing the theologian is to evaluate the link between a particular metaphysic (in this case, a neo-Whiteheadian ontology) and the core concepts of the Christian tradition. How close to, or how distant from, the central ideas of traditional eschatology is the thought-world that we have been exploring? In Suchocki’s conception, although there is subjective immortality, there is no concept of an actual future eschaton. History as such does not have a culmination. Instead, individual subjects undergo a process of progressive redemption; as a byproduct of that process, communities of redeemed individuals may in principle be formed.

On reflection, perhaps it is not surprising that Suchocki leaves no place for an objective eschaton as conceived in biblical eschatology: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea” (Revel. 21:1). On her view, what we call the physical world is already derivative. In one sense, on this

view there *is* no ultimately existing physical world; there are only the regular patterns inherited from past data, which form the basis for physical prehensions. The part of the world that consists of data and patterns can be retained within the mind of God and thus enjoy objective immortality — which, Suchocki would presumably argue, is all the immortality it needs. No moment of transition from this world to the next is needed since, she believes, that transition takes place continually in the consequent nature of God. Predictably, then, the only culmination or redemption it makes sense to hope for on her view is the ongoing community with God and with other persons or occasions. I believe that there are resources in process thought for doing greater justice to the inherent value of the physical and biological worlds (as in the work of Charles Birch), but those resources are not developed here.

Finally, how should the present conception be judged against the two criteria spelled out in the opening paragraphs of this chapter? Does it recognize its own epistemic limitations, and does it provide reason for hope? Little if any attention is given in *The End of Evil* to the epistemic limitations inherent in eschatological thinking. Suchocki's statements and arguments are made in the assertorical mode; one finds no hint of self-limitation or the regulative use of language. (Of course, one finds relatively few instances of such language in most metaphysical writing, so Suchocki is in good company.) Whiteheadians do emphasize the openness of all metaphysical systems, and Suchocki has been particularly outspoken in insisting on this feature as well.²³ Still, the epistemic status of eschatological language begs for more attention. How, for example, would one compare the assertions made about eschatology with assertions made within science or, for that matter, history? Concerns about the knowledge claims being raised do not admit of easy resolution.

Suchocki's system, if successful, scores better on the second criterion. A process philosophy with subjective immortality does in fact provide grounds for hope. To the extent that one experiences existence as a subject — a locus of activity, decision and valuation, including self-valuation — one inherently wishes for a continuation not just of the *memories* of one's existence but also of the principle of activity itself, since this principle is basic to our self-understanding and self-evaluation in the present. Suchocki's conception is consistent with such a hope.

Endnotes

1. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus - God and Man*, 2nd ed., trans. Lewis Wilkins and Duane Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), p. 109.
2. If a body that is not yours is subjected to torture, you imagine that that person is experiencing pain. But it is his pain rather than yours. The situation is not changed if the body looks like your body, or if it is a body that used to be yours but is no longer. If the subjective element is no longer present in the future — if one is present only as “data” — then you are yourself no longer present.
3. See Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 527. The following references in the text to Pannenberg are from the same volume.
4. One can't help but wonder how much this emphasis was motivated by the desire to see one's enemies brought down: “vengeance is Mine, saith the Lord; I will repay” (Rom. 12:19).
5. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Future of Hope: Theology as Eschatology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), e.g., p. 22. More recently see his *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).
6. John Macquarrie, “Eschatology and Time,” in Moltmann, *The Future of Hope*, p. 111.
7. Catherine Keller, “Pneumatic Nudges: The Theology of Moltmann, Feminism, and the Future,” in Miroslav Volf *et al.*, *The Future of Theology: Essays in Honor of Jürgen Moltmann* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 153.
8. John Polkinghorne, “Eschatology: Some Questions and Some Insights From Science,” in Polkinghorne and Michael Welker, eds., *The End of the World and the Ends of God: Science and Theology on Eschatology* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000) p. 31.
9. Kathryn Tanner, “Eschatology Without a Future?” in Polkinghorne and Welker, *The End of the World and the Ends of God*, p. 222.
10. Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (New York: HarperPaperbacks, [1970], 1992); see also Lindsey *The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon* (King of Prussia, PA: Westgate Press, 1980), and Lindsey, *The Road to Holocaust* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989).
11. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985).
12. See Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), esp. sections 46-53. See also Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973).

13. See Clayton, *The Problem of God in Modern Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) chap. 3.

14. It would have been possible for Whitehead to develop a stronger notion of participation even here, had he appealed to the close ontological link between God and Creativity. But in fact he failed adequately to develop this connection.

15. In particular, she has thought through the implications of a panentheistic eschatology more rigorously than most panentheists have. To be consistent, any theologian who accepts panentheism must offer a panentheistic eschatology. Note that a number of theologians who are not panentheists concerning the present do endorse panentheism as the final state of creation. That is, creation in its perfected state must be located within God and as a part of God. This position is most clear in John Polkinghorne, *The God of Hope and the End of the World* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2001). Elsewhere Polkinghorne has also attacked panentheistic theologies of the present and defended “eschatological panentheism” as the only viable option. For more detail on panentheism, see Clayton, *God and Contemporary Science* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997) and *The Problem of God in Modern Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), as well as Arthur Peacocke and Clayton, *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

16. Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), chap. 1.

17. Note how this view comes extremely close to the structure of supervenience as developed by non-reductive physicalists in the philosophy of mind in recent years. Physicalists move in exactly the opposite direction, however: complicated physical systems give rise to emergent mental properties. To say that these mental properties “supervene” on the physical systems that give rise to them is just to say that, if you recreated the physical system in identical fashion, the identical mental properties would be *ipso facto* recreated in exactly the same way. On Whitehead’s view as reconstructed by Suchocki, if you recreated all the mental events within God, you would have the same physical-seeming world that we now inhabit. Nothing would be lost. For more on supervenience theory, see Jaegwon Kim, *Supervenience and Mind: Selected Philosophical Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993) and Kim, *Supervenience* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate/Dartmouth, 2002).

18. See especially Joseph Bracken, *Society and Spirit: A Trinitarian Cosmology* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1991); *The Triune Symbol: Persons, Process and Community* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1985); *The Divine Matrix: Creativity as Link between East and West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995); and his articles “Process Philosophy and Trinitarian Theology,” Parts I and II, *Process Studies* 8/4 (1978): 217-30 and 11/2 (1981): 83-96; and “Energy-Events and Fields,” *Process Studies* 18/3 (1989): 153-65.

19. Recall the quotation from Pannenberg: “True, anthropological argument can have only a limited function in eschatology because eschatological hope depends finally on God’s reality and power, not ours. But what has to be demonstrated anthropologically is still essential if we are to be able to hear that which is maintained and proclaimed as truly a matter of promise, and if it is to be credible as the promise of God” (p. 542).

20. See, among many works on subjectivity in Hegel, Michael Theunissen, *The Other: Studies in the Social Ontology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Buber* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984); and Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975). This view is also reminiscent of the concept of the Other in Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

21. I am more struck by the overwhelming difficulty of the problem of evil, and thus more reticent to say that major progress has been accomplished in this area.

22. See John Polkinghorne, *The God of Hope* and my review in the *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 30/4 (Spring 2002), pp. 33f.

23. See Suchocki’s paper for the March, 2003, conference on Whitehead and Schleiermacher at the Center for Process Studies at Claremont, under the title “System without Certainty.”