

## Transphysical Worlds

### *About the survival of personality or consciousness after the death of the physical body*

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In his book *The Long Trajectory*,<sup>1</sup> philosopher Dr. Eric M. Weiss proposes a new metaphysical system that is transcending, yet includes scientific materialism, and which encompasses both the physical and the “transphysical” worlds. The latter are as objectively real as the physical worlds, but they operate according to laws that are different from those that govern the physical worlds.

To ground his argument, the author relies on the body of knowledge pertaining to Alfred North Whitehead’s process philosophy and combined with elements of the ontology put forth by Sri Aurobindo. Thus, before explaining the meaning of the transphysical worlds as defined by Eric M. Weiss, we need to first refer to the content and terminology of Whitehead’s process philosophy.

The notion that Dr. Eric M. Weiss situates at the core of defining the transphysical worlds is that of “actual occasions,” introduced by Whitehead and which, in its turn (i.e., the notion of actual occasions), resituates consciousness within the natural world. Whitehead’s actual occasions represent the resolution brought to the mind-body gap perpetuated by materialists, idealists, and dualists. Whitehead reconceived the mind-body relationship by implying a “conscious process,” instead of using the notion of “substance,” as used by (1) *materialists* who failed to explain the emergence of consciousness from dead matter, (2) *idealists* who struggled to argue how a world of multiple individuals emanates from an undifferentiated unity, or by (3) *dualists*, who could not reconcile interaction between two different and separate substances (mind and body).

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<sup>1</sup> *The Long Trajectory. The Metaphysics of Reincarnation and Life and Death*, Dr. Eric M. Weiss, iUniverse, Inc. Bloomington, 2012.

Consequently, Whitehead introduced the idea that the actual world is made up of “events,” and that the finest composition of existence is represented by “drops of experience.” This new concept is, furthermore, complementary to the “quanta” as defined by recent developments in physics. In a nutshell, we can describe outer objective reality in terms of causally interacting events, while inner subjective experience can be described in terms of dynamically interconnected drops of experience. This statement takes us to the definition of “actual occasions,” which, experienced from the outside, constitute objective events, while experienced from the inside, they constitute drops of experience. All of actuality is composed of a single entity, i.e., “actual occasions,” which are both subjective and objective simultaneously.

Going further, Whitehead names the subject of an experience “the mental pole” of an actual occasion, i.e., an active, purposeful, deciding awareness. Thus, every event involves a certain degree of matter and mind, while, at the same time, every event emerges into manifestation by resolving its indeterminacy inherent in the field of possibility. The factor that allows this to happen is consciousness: “the capacity to be causally affected and to respond on one hand, and the capacity to experience and to respond on the other are two sides of the same coin” (Dr. Eric M. Weiss). This process goes all the way down and up throughout existence, from subatomic particles to human beings and beyond. All entities in the universe are composed of actual occasions. Moreover, “each occasion has the consciousness needed to make itself actual.”

There is one more conceptual step until we arrive at the complete explanation provided by Dr. Eric Weiss for the transphysical worlds, namely that of grouping actual occasions into “grades,” as proposed by Whitehead. The distinction is made by using three criteria when characterizing actual occasions, i.e., feeling, imagining, and deciding. These are the ingredients that determine how a new actual occasion arises out of the diverse occasions of the past and then becomes one of those diverse occasions for future occasions. Thus, the three groups of actual occasions are the following:

- (1) *Low grade* — [no spaces around “em-dash”] inorganic events, which can feel in simplified ways, involving minimum imaginative variation, and deciding to

perpetuate the past they have experienced (i.e., without considering other possibilities);

(2) *Medium-grade* — living events, which can feel in complex ways, producing novelty when interpreting the past, and generating change (decision to perpetuate what they have imagined, in favour of just what they have received);

(3) *High-grade* — thinking events, which have rich feelings of the past, imaginative freedom, and consciously choosing from a wide variety of future alternatives.

Dr. Weiss concludes that the human personality is “a society of high-grade occasions embodied in a society of medium-grade occasions, that are, in turn, embodied in a society of low-grade, inorganic occasions.” Furthermore, we are *material* beings that are not *physical* beings (i.e., not organic, low-grade occasions), yet we are actual occasions of a higher grade. Dr. Weiss sustains his argument by exemplifying that we are actual beings, as actual as any atom anywhere in the universe, but we are nowhere in the physical world. Instead, we are inhabiting the vital and mental worlds (i.e., which I shall explain later in the essay). Physical does not equal actual, given that the actual world is both physical and transphysical. Furthermore, “no scientist has ever detected a living being per se,” but only complex systems of inorganic beings. While it is possible to locate and measure the physical atoms that compose one’s physical body, the qualities that inform the lives of living beings cannot be quantified, hence we are, in this sense, material beings that are not physical beings.

In effect, the three grades of actual occasions correspond to different types of matter, from low-grade physical matter, to higher-grade transphysical or subtle matter, the variation residing in the comparative complexity of consciousness these occasions are endowed with.

Based on the above conceptual framework and the assumptions gradually constructed, Dr. Weiss sets the scene for what he calls “transphysical” process metaphysics. According to this, the universe of the human experience consists of three domains: the physical world, the vital world, and the mental world. The last two belong to the transphysical world. The author further makes the point that the transphysical worlds already pervade our waking lives (the so-called “transphysical dimension of the waking world”), and, at the same time, clarifies the term “waking world” as the world as we experience it during our awake state of consciousness, throughout everyday life.

Nevertheless, the waking world should not be confused with the physical world, given that it is composed of actual occasions all the way down and all the way up (i.e., by contrast to the physical world, made up of exclusively low-grade actual occasions). The world that we see during our awake state of consciousness is, indeed, the physical world, yet apprehended and shaped by higher-grade actual occasions. Consequently, even if higher-grade occasions produce a causal effect in the waking world, they are transphysical because they do not inhabit the same time and space as low-grade occasions studied by physics.

Within the analysis of the transphysical worlds, a significant relevance is granted to the aspects of “intergrade” (i.e., causal interactions between high-grade and lower-grade actualities) and “intrade” (i.e., causal interactions between high-grade actualities). For example, our human existence is equally influenced by cosmic aims, as by individual aims, while we, in our turn, influence the aims of the cells in our body. Dr. Weiss states that the waking world can be viewed as a cascading hierarchy of actual occasions, and further derives a theory of embodiment, recalling the biological phenomenon of self-organization, and claiming that “personally ordered societies of higher-grade occasions become embodied in self-organizing systems of lower-grade occasions.”

The above logic leads us, at the same time, to the principle of the “autonomy” of the transphysical worlds. Dr. Weiss argues that the higher-grade occasions do not depend for their existence on lower-grade occasions, yet they are fully actual environments, existing in their own rights. The author explains that the transphysical world is a system of actual occasions of higher-grade receiving their aims from the primordial ordering factor (i.e., defined as God, by Whitehead), and providing for each other an interesting actual world for the fulfilment of their aims (i.e., experiential Creativity). These are the only two factors implied by the occurrence of a certain actual occasion, so they are valid as well for higher-grade occasions, and hence for the transphysical world. As Dr. Weiss concludes, “life and intelligence” do not depend on physical matter.

The transphysical process metaphysics outlined by Dr. Weiss has at its core the idea that living systems are the *embodiment* of actual occasions of higher grade (i.e., living systems are not self-organized). Furthermore, the aims of each component of living beings behaves in a certain way because it has been conditioned by the aim of a higher-grade occasion. This

is where Dr. Weiss integrates Sri Aurobindo's ideas with Whitehead's—by acknowledging a “top-down” process (i.e., *cascading hierarchy of actual occasions*), where lower-grades are informed by higher-grades, and higher-grades are fully actual, and ontologically prior. Thus, by observing the notion of *downward causation*, the author states that, in the case of a new “concrecence”<sup>2</sup>, higher-grade occasions have a causal effect on its aim and purpose, and the new concrecence will be attentive to “propositions”<sup>3</sup> formed by the higher-grade occasions that shape and influence it.

Consequently, the author provides a detailed description of the vital world (“life”) and of the mental world (“intelligence”), both belonging to the transphysical realm:

**(1) Vital world characteristics:**

- Perceived by us during dreams of the night, lucid dreams, OBE, and near-death experiences;
- Containing places and independent individuals, operating according to their own wills;
- More imaginative, complex, and varied in behaviour (e.g., biological cells);
- Higher-grade occasions in the vital world are involved in empathic interactions (e.g., our bodies are responsive to our feelings and thoughts);
- Vital occasions are “imaginal matter.”<sup>4</sup>

**(2) Mental world features:**

- Greater variety and complexity of the elemental occasions belonging to the mental world, than those of the vital world;
- Higher-grade mental occasions are focused on “meaning” (e.g., numinous or synchronistic events), and the pursuit of harmony and coherence;
- Mental occasions are the content of thinking.

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<sup>2</sup> Whitehead's term for the process whereby a new actual occasion arises out of the diverse occasions of the past and becomes one of those diverse occasions for future occasions.

<sup>3</sup> Propositions are efficient causes. In the process of their formation (concrecence), occasions of experience produce propositions.

<sup>4</sup> Personal note: This notion is similar to the “mundus imaginalis” defined by the French philosopher Henry Corbin, as “a world as ontologically real as the world of the senses and the world of the intellect, a world that requires a faculty of perception belonging to it, a faculty that is a cognitive function, a *noetic* value, as fully real as the faculties of sensory perception or intellectual intuition.”

These two domains of the transphysical world are integrated into the proposed new metaphysics, by stating that our physical body is the embodiment of a medium-grade vital personality, which is the embodiment of a higher-grade mental personality. Correlated with the previous argument of the autonomy of the transphysical worlds, this statement leads to the conclusion that life after death is existence in the transphysical worlds without the embodiment in the physical world. All of the above explanations represent evidence to substantiate the survival of personality after the physical death.

Since we already exist in the vital and mental worlds, our mental personality embodied in a vital body may continue its journey throughout the cosmos even in the absence of a physical body. Thus, the transphysical cosmology proposed by Dr. Weiss accounts, in a self-explanatory way, for the survival of bodily death, by accounting for a society of higher-grade occasions that remain an ongoing personality in the transphysical worlds, to which “they are native.”

As a final remark, I quote the author when throwing an anchor into a future that situates transphysical worlds at the well-deserved place within our everyday lives:

*I believe that the new mutation will take us beyond our current form of technology into something wildly more interesting and, hopefully, far less destructive: (...) **a way to access transphysical domains that opens up vast and wondrous new worlds for exploration.***