ABSTRACT. This paper first identifies briefly several interpretations of the nature of the general order of eternal objects in the Primordial Nature of God (PNG). W.A. Christian describes the timeless ordering in terms of a "general scheme of relatedness," or "matrix," or "reservoir of potentiality." Others, like Hartshorne, introduce the "continuum" concept. Unfortunately, none of the above terms has strict technical or categorial meaning in Whitehead's metaphysics. I try to remedy this defect by utilizing the Whitesheadian notions of abstractive hierarchies and contrast. My interpretation supports the idea that there is one fixed and necessary order of eternal objects in PNG.

W.A. Christian asks the question, "Is there one ideal order of possibilities?"1 The following text is crucial for grounding his answer: "There is not just one ideal 'order' which all actual entities should attain and fail to attain. In each case there is an ideal peculiar to each particular actual entity . . . ." (PR 128) Most commentators would agree with Christian's interpretation of the second sentence. God is the means of arranging all eternal objects in a definite way relative to each particular instance of becoming. The arrangement is not arbitrary or riddled with ambiguity. Perhaps we could say hypothetical necessity is involved. If such and such a situation arises, then such and such an arrangement is necessarily available. Thus God solves all indeterminations. And yet there are still indeterminations awaiting the decisions of creative entities.
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That is, the ideal peculiar to each particular actual entity is realized in God as a possibility. But it is up to each actual entity to fill in the real details of its ideal pattern, or work out its own individual particularity. A particular actual entity "is finally responsible for the decisions by which any lure for feeling is admitted to efficacy. The freedom inherent in the universe is constituted by this element of self-causation" (PR 135).

There is less agreement among commentators concerning the nature of the general order of eternal objects which is somehow presupposed by the multiplicity of orderings of eternal objects relative to each individual actual occasion. Christian refers to the former as the "timeless ordering of eternal objects in PNG" (IWM 271, 270). Primarily because of the first sentence above ("There is not just one ideal 'order' which all actual entities should attain and fail to attain"), Christian concludes, "there is not one fixed and necessary order of eternal objects" (IWM 273), in the sense of a "teleological arrangement of eternal objects into a single hierarchy" (IWM 274). Rather, PNG "orders eternal objects in the sense, and only in the sense, that in God's envisagement eternal objects are together (IWM 274). Which is to say, there is a general scheme of relatedness of eternal objects, or equivalently, all relations are possible (IWM 274). He also refers to PNG as "a matrix for those orderings effected by particular actual occasions in the course of nature" (IWM 274), and "the reservoir of potentiality" (IWM 274 from MT 128).

What strikes this reader is the absence of technical or categorial terms to characterize PNG (for example, scheme, matrix, reservoir). Other commentators have introduced the idea of a continuum. Hartshorne would prefer to conceive possibility as a "continuum beyond all multitude of distinct items," except perhaps for some set of metaphysical variables or dimensions. Lewis Ford improves on the continuum theory by clarifying the distinctions between definiteness and determinateness, and the subjective and objective aspects of PNG. At the other end of the spectrum, John Cobb claims that "the eternal ordering of the eternal objects is not one simple order but an indefinite variety of orders... Thus, the one [but 'complex,' I presume he means] primordial ordering of eternal objects is relevant to every actual entity with perfect specificity." But again we see non-technical terms applied to PNG: continuum and indefinite variety.

In the remainder of this paper I wish to explore briefly the alternative interpretation of the timeless order which Christian dismisses. I believe a plausible case can be made for the idea of "one fixed and necessary order of eternal objects," which falls somewhere in the gaps between the theories of the above commentators but closest to Cobb. My position, however, shares in the defect common to these
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theories, namely, lack of explicit texts to identify order with scheme, matrix, continuum, indefinite variety of orders, including my own offering, abstractive hierarchy and contrast. One main advantage to my approach is its greater reliance on Whitehead's own categorial concepts and terms to explain PNG, and its greater utilization of chapter 10 of SMW, which I believe is critical for understanding Whitehead's mature thought on eternal objects.

In chapter 10 of SMW, Whitehead first outlined the doctrine of abstractive hierarchies. Christian attacks the idea that hierarchy has any application to PNG taken as a whole. "In the divine vision there is no dominant or all-inclusive eternal object to which God subordinates all others. It follows that there is no one fixed order of possibilities in relation to which the ordering of all actualities could be determined" (IWM 277). Christian identifies necessary order with a complex eternal object which would include all other eternal objects (IWM 272). In terms of Chapter 10, this object would have to be the most complex eternal object, which might serve as the vertex of the abstractive hierarchy including all other eternal objects as its components. Such a complex eternal object could account for one fixed and necessary order among all eternal objects. Christian cites a key text in his attack on this thesis. "Eternal objects, as in God's primordial nature, constitute the Platonic world of ideas. There is not, however, one entity which is merely the class of all eternal objects. For if we conceive any class of eternal objects, there are additional eternal objects which presuppose that class but do not belong to it" (PR 73). Christian implies that if "entity" in the second sentence refers to PNG, and "class" refers to the most complex eternal object, then Whitehead is clearly rejecting the reality of such an object.

But the text is open to another interpretation. For one thing, the last sentence might refer to limitations in our knowledge rather than to an ontological commitment of Whitehead's. Whitehead describes mental functioning as 'abrupt' (SMW 246-7). That is, "The things apprehended as mental are always subject to the condition that we come to a stop when we attempt to explore ever higher grades of complexity in their realized relationships" (SMW 247). When we conceive a class, for example, "there is a limitation which breaks off the finite concept from the higher grades of ilimitable complexity" (SMW 247). In other words, there will always be eternal objects which fall outside our limited concepts. This is not sufficient to settle the issue at hand. No human concept can be all-comprehensive. But there is still room for asserting the reality of such comprehensiveness and connecting it with PNG.

I would agree that PNG is not accurately described as "one entity which is merely the class of all eternal ob-
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jects." In this context, Whitehead distinguishes between a class and a multiplicity. He implies that a class has "unity derivative merely from its various components" (PR 73). It is something intrinsic to the entities involved. This does not apply to PNG. According to Whitehead, eternal objects are unified by reason of God's conceptual valuation. Apart from God's feelings there is complete disjunction. That is, there is no unity to be derived from eternal objects considered in themselves.

Elsewhere, Whitehead identifies "class" with a "mere multiplicity." "The essence of a class is that it assigns no diversity of function to the members of its extension. The members of a class are diverse members in virtue of mere logical disjunction. The 'class,' thus appealed to, is a mere multiplicity" (PR 348). Here class signifies a "merely mathematical conception of order" (PR 137). But PNG must involve a real mental unity, and that eliminates the notion of a "mere collective disjunction of component elements" (PR 349).

Whitehead, therefore, must deny that either meaning of class has application to PNG. So we are still left with the problem of determining how "eternal objects, as in God's primordial nature, constitute the Platonic world of ideas" (PR 73).

Whitehead seems to make clear that PNG consists of conceptual feelings with all the eternal objects as objective data. And since there is a "unity of conceptual operations" (PR 522) perhaps we can speak of objective datum. Then we might infer that all the eternal objects constitute a "contrast." This could be the complex objective datum of God's conceptual feeling.

Contrast remedies the defects of a class. It even satisfies a categorial obligation. "The category of objective diversity expresses the inexorable condition--that a complex unity must provide for each of its components a real diversity of status, with a reality which bears the same sense as its own reality and is peculiar to itself. In other words, a real unity cannot provide sham diversities of status for its diverse components" (PR 348). Such a theory seems to provide an effective answer to Christian's objection: "If, in the primordial nature of God, there were some eternal object which included all others and thus defined an ideal order of possibilities, then this eternal object would have been created by God. . . . This peculiar eternal object would have come into existence only by virtue of God's primordial vision. But this is impossible. 'He does not create eternal objects; for his nature requires them in the same degree that they require him'" (IWM 273).

In one sense contrast escapes the classification of eternal object because it constitutes a different existen-
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...tial type. "There are an endless number of categories of existence, since the synthesis of entities into a contrast in general produces a new existential type" (Category of explanation xvii, PR 36). On my interpretation, God's conceptual feeling is creative of the primordial contrast. Strictly speaking, therefore, God does not create a "new" eternal object. We could say that in the divine vision there is a dominant or all-inclusive contrast to which God subordinates all eternal objects.

In another sense, contrast includes the intelligibility of a complex eternal object. Contrast could signify real but mental synthesis in PNG. As real, it involves the togetherness of the eternal objects. That could be interpreted to mean that in the concrete, God's conceptual valuation consists of subordinating the multiplicity of eternal objects to one dominant eternal object. In the abstract, that one eternal object could be conceived of as a complex relation or abstract contrast with all other eternal objects as possible relata. It would be more accurate to say that dominance as well as complexity are the function of God's feeling. But when we abstract from the feeling, the abstract contrast may be conceived of as the vertex of an abstractive hierarchy with all other eternal objects as its components. This last point requires a more adequate defense than is possible here, perhaps along the lines of clarifying how the individual and relational essence function in a contrast.

I would conclude that the idea of abstractive hierarchy and contrast offer us a plausible account of the ultimate meaning of order in PNG. Contrast could serve as an adequate principle of unity, dominance, all-inclusiveness, and coordination of relevance. This seems to demand the stronger sense of realm, as Christian puts it. It follows that there is "one fixed order of possibilities in relation to which the ordering of all actualities could be determined." Indeed, PNG is as it were "a heavenly city, an ideal cosmos conceptually realized in the mind of God, which the earthly city, the totality of temporal events, approximates" (IWM 273). When we try to abstract from the concrete reality of the interweaving of PNG and the consequent nature, and abstract from God's focusing through propositions of a relevant ideal unique to a particular situation, we are dealing with PNG as relatively static, fixed for eternity, and timeless. So any description of the ultimate order in PNG relies not on a real distinction but only a distinction of reason between PNG itself and the complete actual entity, God. Still, the analogy is appropriate as long as we remember that there is room in such a heavenly city for all possible epochs, that the city as a whole and simultaneously is not realizable, that the parts of the city or ideals envisioned by God do not afford God a preview of the unique individual actual entities which efficiently bring the ideals to life. Whitehead's God knows the ideal unique to
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each new becoming, but cannot predict the novel entity which actually emerges. This provides ample room for novelty and surprise in Whitehead's universe, even for God. At the same time, on my interpretation, Whitehead seems to provide for a basic orderliness and stability reminiscent of the scholastic concepts of natural law and divine omniscience. "This ideal realization of potentials in a primordial actual entity constitute the metaphysical stability whereby the actual process exemplifies general principles of metaphysics, and attains the ends proper to specific types of emergent order" (PR 64)

FOOTNOTES


2. It could be objected that Christian ignores the context in which Whitehead makes this point. Whitehead seems to be contrasting his own view of a dominant ideal peculiar to each actual entity with the Aristotelian notion of substantial form as both efficient and final cause (PR 128-9). The substantial form, human nature for example, is common to all individuals. Because of this, the species in a sense is more real than the various individuals which illustrate the species form. For Whitehead, each actual entity is a species unto itself, analogous to an angel, for example, in the system of Aquinas. Whitehead's ideal pattern peculiar to each individual is comparable to the idea of a particular angel in the mind of God. This, of course, still allows for some evolution in perfection within the specific-individual. No angel, as no actual entity, can ever exhaust its ideal potential. "Thus the notion of 'order' is bound up with the nature of an actual entity as involving the attainment which is specific satisfaction. The satisfaction is the attainment of something individual to the entity in question" (PR 129). "It is to be noted that every actual entity, including God, is something individual for its own sake; and thereby transcends the rest of the universe" (PR 135). I would argue that Christian has not established the relevancy of the above text to his discussion of PNG. This is critical since Christian, in effect, has to explain away the literal meaning of the following passages. Whitehead speaks of order in the singular: "the eternal order which is the final absolute wisdom (PR 527), "the basic character of the World of Value is its timeless coordination of the infinitude of possibility for realization" (IMM 695-6), "the unity of ideal inherent in the universe" (MT 39), "an order in the relevance of eternal objects to the process of creation" (PR 522), "the ultimate, basic adjustment of the togetherness of eternal objects on which creative order depends" (PR 48).


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6. See SMW 242-44. Christian does not explicitly make the connection between complex eternal object and abstractive hierarchies.

7. This seems to be the point Victor Lowe makes in response to some critics who find PNG to be "an impossible notion, because the collection of all eternal objects, including all value-possibilities, is an infinitude incapable of being well-ordered . . . It seems to me inevitable that we should be unable at present to conceive the unity and order of this totality, in any sense of order that would be acceptable to our best mathematical minds. I do not see that this is any more fatal than the difficulty we have in conceiving any other aspect of God." (Understanding Whitehead [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1962], pp. 107-8). In another place, Lowe disagrees specifically with Christian's rejection of necessary order, but does not explain why (p. 101).

8. This distinction occurs in the paragraph beginning with the sentence just quoted (PR 73).

9. "What are ordinarily termed 'relations' are abstractions from contrasts" (PR 349).