

WHITEHEAD'S INTERPRETATION OF PLATO'S «RECEPTACLE» AND THE PARALLELS WITH THE CONCEPT OF «ETERNAL OBJECTS»

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Alfred North Whitehead, the English mathematician, physicist, and philosopher (with a pronounced crossover into sociology), can be considered one of the eminent modern scholars who in the late 1920s and early 1930s, in the spirit of his process ontology, conducted a fundamental study on the philosophical meaning of Plato's concept of the «receptacle» (*hypodoché*)¹. Whitehead was of the opinion that our reactions to impulses from the external world are primarily of an emotional nature². He started out from the method of mathematical generalisation, and on the basis of previous logical-philosophical investigations of mathematical relations³ he believed that on the precondition of a primordial emotional relationality to the world it is possible to present a clearly precise description of «personal unity», and therefore methodologically to arrive at «the doctrine of the unity of nature, and of the unity of each human life», expressing through its structural character the «general principle» that determines the constitution of the whole of our reality. He conceives this personal unity, which he sought from the perspective of the functionality of his metaphysical system, as a «receptacle» or, in other words, the «foster-mother» of the origin of all experienced events⁴.

In Whitehead's distinctive version, the originally Platonic concept of *hypodoché* represents a «locus» (the term he uses is *chora* – following Plato's model) or a kind of «natural matrix», in which there takes place a contact between subject and object⁵. Nevertheless, the *chora* itself, despite its specific interactive nature, remains unchanged⁶. In this sense it is a kind of general functional constant that as a whole is constituting itself continuously in a creative process of events⁷, as it possesses in itself a basic potential – it is a sphere of givens that contains all the relations of realising individuals⁸. Its metaphysical dimension resides in the creative dynamic interplay between what is actual and what is potential, that is, between what has already happened and

¹ The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments on the original version of this text. This paper is based on the study of the same name published in Czech at the end of 2017. See J. Svoboda, *Whitehead's Interpretation of Plato's "Receptacle" and the Parallels with the Concept of "Eternal Objects"*, «Studia philosophica», 64 (2), 2017, pp. 21-42.

² A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, The Free Press, New York 1967, p. 176.

³ A. N. Whitehead (1861-1947), together with (his former pupil) the English logician and philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) was the co-author of the essential work in the field of the philosophy of mathematics and mathematical logic *Principia Mathematica*, Vols. I-III, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1910-1913.

⁴ See A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, p. 187.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 186-187.

⁷ «The creativity is the actualization of potentiality, and the process of actualization is an occasion of experiencing. This viewed in conjunction they carry the creativity which drives the world. The process of creation is the form of unity of the Universe» (*ibidem*, p. 179).

⁸ Cf. J. Klose, *Alfred North Whitehead's Receptacle*, in *Beyond Metaphysics? Explorations in Alfred North Whitehead's Late Thought*, Ronald Faber, Brian Henning, and Clinton Combs (eds.), Rodopi, New York 2010, pp. 162-163.

what is yet to happen⁹ – i.e. within a further context primarily with his work *Process and Reality*¹⁰ – a «temporal» (actual) and «eternal» reality forms. In this sense, the *chora* can be regarded as a metaphysical *space* in which there occurs a process of «decisions» and qualitative «limitation»¹¹, by which it is then possible for a new event to be realised¹². Generally it can be said, therefore, that the *chora* denotes something that has an exceptional capacity to unify the diversity of actual events, and in the spirit of its typical manner of being to confer (in an ontological sense) comprehensibility upon these fundamental actual individual entities.

If the *chora* is the medium by which various actual events are united and that because of this functional capacity renders individual entities intelligible against the backdrop of the processuality of events, then Whitehead clearly introduced this Platonic concept in order to underscore the constant need for further clarification that our actions are guided by. Plato thereby exercised a distinctive influence on Whitehead by opening up new horizons of inspiration in seeking viable paths by which to rationally understand our concrete reality – through a consequent type of *moderate realism* that in a qualitative sense closely connects us with living, functioning reality, which is the space of application for our everyday active social operation and creative behaviour.

As the title of this paper essentially suggests, its aim is not to present a faithful interpretation of this fundamental but «obscure and difficult» concept from Plato¹³, a kind of Platonic *mens auctoris*. If Plato and Whitehead both consider the *chora* a principle feature of their metaphysical systems, then for the purposes of a possible fundamental comparison of the differences of both conceptions, we shall nonetheless first of all briefly outline its original conception as Plato presents it especially in the later dialogue *Timaeus*¹⁴.

1. Plato's concept of *hypodoché*

One of the pivotal goals of philosophical investigation in ancient Greece was to reach a cognizance of the true essence of things, i.e. an understanding of

⁹ «This general principle [...] can be conceived as the doctrine of the immanence of the past energizing in the present» (A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, p. 188).

¹⁰ A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, Macmillan Company, New York 1929 (and in the same year in Cambridge University Press). The basis of Whitehead's fundamental philosophical work is the «Gifford Lectures», which were given in 1927-1928 at the University of Edinburgh. In 1978 the American publisher Free Press published a «corrected edition» of Whitehead's philosophical work. Under the scholarly guidance of the editors David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburn, several errors from both of the previous editions, i.e. in the British and American versions, were rectified, and at the same time this corrected edition was furnished with a comprehensive glossary.

¹¹ A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, The Free Press, New York 1967, p. 174.

¹² «Unlike Plato, for whom order and reason reside in the ideal form, Whitehead believes it is in the *chora* that decisions are made and values are selected» (E. Mingarelli, *Chora and Identity: Whitehead's Re-Appropriation of Plato's Receptacle*, «Process Studies», 44, 1, 2015, pp. 96 ff. Cf. also R. Faber, *Surrationality and Chaosmos: For a More Deleuzian Whitehead (with a Butlerian Intervention)*, in *The Secrets of Becoming. Negotiating Whitehead, Deleuze, and Butler*, Roland Faber and Andrea M. Stephenson (eds.), Fordham University Press, New York 2011, p. 173.

¹³ A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, p. 150.

¹⁴ Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, translated into English with an introduction and notes on the text by A. E. Taylor, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London 1929.

such a reality that is permanent, immutable, and eternal. This vision was based on an «intuitive» conviction, or more precisely on the «view» that beyond all the infinite mutability of events there is concealed an original unifying principle, by which it is possible to substantiate the order, harmony, beauty, and exceptional character of the visible world that surrounds us. Plato was convinced that we can arrive at the «nature of each thing as it is in itself» only by the route of consistently applying the method of fundamental inquiry (or perhaps rather «questioning»), i.e. by a *dialectic* which «demands an account of the essence» of each individual entity¹⁵. Through active critical discussion, which presupposes a bilateral interest of philosophical partners in the clarification of a given problem, the dialectical method «forces the mind to look upwards», to a cognizance of «what eternally exists» as an agency «to draw the soul towards truth»¹⁶ – leading the inquirer to the very essence of all that is constantly and continually becoming within time.

In addition to the unchangeable pattern or type, which can be comprehended by means of reason, and its visible imitations, in one of his last works Plato differentiates a «third term»¹⁷, which he refers to as the «receptacle» (*hypodoché*) – this is a «kind of foster-mother»: literally the «wet nurse» (*tithéné*) of all that has become¹⁸. According to Plato, this is distinguished precisely by the fact that this third term that cannot be equated with either being or becoming is a

natural matrix for all things [...], which receives all bodies [...] never departs from its own quality. (For it is always receiving all things and has never anywhere a shape in any way like any of the things that enter it [...]) [...] it is a somewhat invisible and formless, all-receptive and partaking of the intelligible in a manner most puzzling and hard to grasp¹⁹.

¹⁵ Plato, *Resp.* 533b-534b, (*The Republic of Plato*, translated with an introduction and notes by Francis Macdonald Cornford, Oxford University Press, London 1941, pp. 253-255.)

¹⁶ Id., *Resp.* 527b-529b. (ivi, pp. 244-247.)

¹⁷ Id., *Tim.* 48e.

¹⁸ Id., *Tim.* 49a. Here we note that Plato chooses the expression «wet nurse» in order to emphasise the Greek term *paideia*, meaning «nurture», since «a wet nurse means one who nurtures but does not give birth to the child, who rears the children of a different mother». Here Plato wishes to intimate that origin or «becoming» is dependent (in addition to ideas and their imitations) also upon something else which is just as fundamental, and which it is necessary for us take into account within our context. Cf. K. L. Lee, *Platons Raumbegriff. Studien zur Methaphysik und Naturphilosophie im "Thimaios"*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg 2001, pp. 126-127.

¹⁹ Plato, *Tim.* 50b-51b. Let us however add that Plato's God (*Démiurgos*) does not create from nothing (in the sense of *creatio ex nihilo*). It is the organiser or architect, who has merely diversified the individual elements and ordered under the influence of ideas. Even if *hypodoché* is originally entirely indefinite, the functioning of ideas within it gives birth to a kind of course of events, in which its (internal) *concretisation* and *differentiation* takes place. In connection with the above-intimated functional connectedness of *tithéné*, it is possible to state in general terms that it is precisely thanks to this specific character, which is essentially intrinsic to *tithéné*, that *hypodoché*, in a kind of peculiar indefinite manner, provides the spatial-temporal world with its essential (simple) possibility of its formability. In this sense then, *tithéné* according to Plato becomes «liquefied», «inflamed» and receives further shapes of earth and air (Id., *Tim.* 52d), and in fact contributes to their becoming through rocking, vibration and trembling (Id., *Tim.*

This «pre-cosmic» (*präkosmisch*)²⁰ and thus primordial location or space, i.e. the *chora*²¹ (as Plato called this third term or *genus (triton allo genos)* and as it is usually referred to in the literature) – the specific nature of which has the effect of suppressing every undesirable scientific tendency of modernity, leading to the substitution of this fundamental concept with the meaning of the word ‘space’, in which sensory objects appear²² – has the capacity to «receive all kinds in itself»²³ and at the same time is the «mother and receptacle of creation visible and sensible generally»²⁴. It is «that in which becoming occurs» (*to en hōi gegnetai*)²⁵, and in the sense of «fertile» soil²⁶ is not a «voided» space, so to speak²⁷, it is a potential precondition of a kind of course of events that is difficult to specify in detail²⁸. From the perspective of this peculiar and indefinite «all-receptive» potentiality, which is essentially intrinsic to the *chora*, in relation to the sensory world it reveals itself as a kind of as yet «unfilled» location (in pure possibility), which in its own manner or particular style confers reality upon the ephemeral phenomena of this visible world.

Although the *chora* in itself is permanent, in its manifestations it stylises itself as a mere, if nonetheless necessary (continually changing in meaning) potential «this or that or thus»²⁹, and as a result it can never be, in itself (through

52e-53a), so that every element has occupied its position even before the becoming of the universe. Incidentally, the origin of fundamental triangular surfaces and their combinations also precedes the origin of substances-elements within this peculiar «receiver», as can be surmised from passages from *Id.*, *Tim.* 53c - 57d. Cf. D. Machovec, *K filozofické interpretaci Platónovy teorie vzniku světa v dialogu Timaios (48E až 58C) (On the Philosophical Interpretation of Plato's Theory of the World in the Dialogue of Timaeus (48E to 58C))*, in *Sborník prací Filozofické fakulty brněnské univerzity*, E 33, Masaryk University, Brno 1970, pp. 36-37, p. 35.

²⁰ F. Karfik, *Die Beseelung des Kosmos. Untersuchung zur Kosmologie, Seelenlehre und Theologie in Platons Phaidon und Timaios*, K. G. Saur, München – Leipzig 2004, p. 152 ff. Also cf. W. Scheffel, *Aspekte der platonischen Kosmologie. Untersuchungen zum Dialog "Timaios"*, E. J. Brill, Leiden 1976, p. 55 ff.

²¹ Kyung Jik Lee in his investigation of Plato's concept of the *chora* comes to the conclusion that it is not identical to the Aristotelian concept of primary substance, nor to the concept of geometric space. Rather, according to Lee, it incorporates both of these concepts. Cf. K. J. Lee, *Platons Raumbegriff. Studien zur Methaphysik und Naturphilosophie im "Timaios"*, p. 151. Dušan Machovec states that this fundamental concept of Plato shares with Aristotle's primary substance «only the fact that nothing precedes them, otherwise nothing». See D. Machovec, *K filozofické interpretaci Platónovy teorie vzniku světa v dialogu Timaios*, p. 35.

²² K. J. Lee, *Platons Raumbegriff. Studien zur Methaphysik und Naturphilosophie im "Timaios"*, p. 126 ff.

²³ Plato, *Tim.* 50e.

²⁴ *Id.*, *Tim.* 50d-51a.

²⁵ *Id.*, *Tim.* 50c-d. (Cf. Platon, *Timaios, Kritias, Philebos*, in *Werke*, Band 7, bearbeitet von Klaus Widdra. Griechischer Text von Albert Rivaud und Auguste Diès. Deutsche Übersetzung von Hieronymus Müller und Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft Darmstadt, Darmstadt 1990).

²⁶ Dušan Machovec speaks of *tithéné* as a «variable» of *hypodoché*. See D. Machovec, *On the Philosophical Interpretation of Plato's Theory of the World in the Dialogue of Timaeus (48E to 58C)*, p. 36.

²⁷ Alfred North Whitehead locates a fundamental semantic similarity between Plato's receptacle, Lucretius's void and Leibniz's God. He adds: «Also in his general scholium, Newton definitely connects the Lucretian Void with the Leibnizian God. For he calls Empty space the «sensorium» of God» (A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, c d., p. 138).

²⁸ Cf. Plato, *Tim.* 52d-53c.

²⁹ *Id.*, *Tim.* 50e.

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its nature), essentially substituted with the concept of form or quality³⁰. It is neither earth, nor water, nor air, but a «genus»³¹ that cannot be grasped by the senses, and simultaneously a (formless) universal receptacle: functionally afterwards (with reference to the sensorily perceptible world): the «mother» of a child-offspring, literally of a «descendant» (*ekgonos*)³². As a specific way of being of its type, it is not possible to grasp this «eternal and indestructible» residual «X» (this general «variable») by means of sensory perception: according to Plato, «it is itself apprehended without sensation, by a sort of bastard inference, and so hard to believe in. 'Tis with reference to it, in fact, we dream with our eyes open»³³.

This universal «receptacle» as a receiver of forms or ideas (in its universality and necessary openness) cannot, due to its variable nature, be conceived as a kind of definitive attribute. Through its particular property the *chora* rather points to a certain «exceptional» correlation,³⁴ and it is only in relation to this indefinite (residual) variability that individual things become «visible».³⁵ In this sense it is pure receptiveness – pure relationality – which is to say that it is a part of the cosmos whose specific manner of «self-showing» appears as a continuum³⁶ in an «impermanent trace»³⁷. As a universal and necessary condition it has the power of «quality» (*dynamis*)³⁸ and «nature»³⁹, and is therefore simultaneously an «invisible and formless» kind of agency in

³⁰ Cf. F. Karfik, *Die Beseelung des Kosmos. Untersuchung zur Kosmologie, Seelenlehre und Theologie in Platons Phaidon und Timaios*, pp. 154-155. Cf. also K. J. Lee, *Platons Raumbegriff. Studien zur Metaphysik und Naturphilosophie im "Timaios"*, p. 142 ff.

³¹ Cf. Plato, *Tim.*, 48e «*triton allo genos*» (cf. Platon, *Timaios, Kritias, Philebos*, in *Werke*, Band 7.)

³² Id., *Tim.* 50d.

³³ Id., *Tim.* 52b.

³⁴ In contrast with the view that the *chora* is characterised by its logical ambiguity, in the words of Jacques Derrida «alternating between the logic of exclusion and that of participation» – (J. Derrida, *On the name*, Thomas Dutoit (ed.), translated by David Wood, John P. Leavey and Ian Mcleod, Stanford University Press, Stanford p. 89), which is incidentally the consequence of an undesirable «discursive autarky» (*Outi Pasanen*) into which the intrinsic interpretation of this fundamental concept of Plato's especially descends, the American philosopher John Sallis understands the *chora* as an «index of a certain *differentiation*». From the indefinite characteristic of «*ail y a khôra*» – (Derrida), Sallis transfers emphasis onto its concrete, thus definite manifestation itself: «*the chôra*». As the starting point of his contemplations he selects the passage *Tim.* 52b («we look at it as in a dream»), in which Plato conceives the substantial essence of the *chora* as «dreaming». However, according to Sallis the dream is not merely «mistaking an image for its original» (Plato, *Resp.* 476c), but reveals precisely «that» which is the very cause of the dream. It therefore reveals a certain (relational) correlation between the *chora* and its manifestation – «appearing» (*phainesthai*) (Id., *Tim.* 50c) – thus it shows itself as a certain peculiar type of a specific episodic process of the actualising of the *chora*, which Sallis terms «*chorology*». As intimated by the passages Id., *Tim.* 51b and subsequently Id., *Tim.* 52d – 52e, according to John Sallis this concerns «the self-showing moving», which allows us to trace the *chora*, or more precisely the «manner» of its «exceptional» contribution, to the primordial formation of reality. In this sense it is then possible to speak of a kind of primordial *ichnography* of «the almost paradoxical structure of this self-showing» of reality. Cf. N. Isar, *Chôra: Tracing the Presence*, «*Review of European Studies*», 1, 1, 2009, pp. 39-42.

³⁵ Plato, *Tim.* 30a.

³⁶ Cf. A. E. Taylor, *A Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1928, p. 344.

³⁷ N. Isar, *Chôra: Tracing the Presence*, p. 40.

³⁸ On the issue of «*dynamis* and the individual being», cf. G. Prauss, *Platon und der logische Eleatismus*, Walter de Gruyter & Co, Berlin 1966, pp. 77-86.

³⁹ Plato, *Tim.* 49a.

nature; even if it can therefore not be perceived by any of the senses and in fact cannot even be clearly thought⁴⁰, it is nevertheless something natural, thus real. In its mutability and impermanence the *chora* is related to the «naturalness» of the world of the senses, just as the «pre-cosmic» space is a place where – like in a «mirror»⁴¹ – there occurs a «qualitative» reflection of real things (ideas) as images (sensibles).

In sum, beyond all the mutability of phenomena it is necessary to presuppose the intermediary reality of the «permanent» unifying principle, which as a medium between being and becoming cannot be identified either with the divine, or with the human spirit, or with ideas. The *chora*, being formless, can receive any form, and if it is similarly endowed with a real capacity to vary endlessly, from the perspective of its («eternal») potency, it fundamentally itself defies all spatial-temporal determination; its “pre-cosmic” nature only in principle indicates a certain entirely specific, though nonetheless indefinite relational connection with regard to this determination. It reveals itself as an influence of necessity (expressing itself rather through resistance to the rational order) – and therefore as a certain *possibility* via which divine intelligence is manifested in its effective organisation of the world⁴².

2. Whitehead's specific interpretation

A. N. Whitehead approaches the *chora* from a different point of view. Several years of examining pure mathematical relationships brought him to the conclusion that the method of mathematical generalisation in his words was able to «divest the problem of details irrelevant to the solution»⁴³.

In an essential connection with this initial hypothesis, Whitehead equally necessarily understood that the «natural» structure of our experience cannot be contemplated separately from our feelings (and passions). He clearly states: «The basis of experience is emotional»⁴⁴. Stated more generally, the basic fact is the rise of an affective tone originating from things whose relevance is given»⁴⁵. Assuming the reality of this primary emotional (subject) relation to the world – ideas in many respects indisputably inspired by David Hume⁴⁶ – Whitehead simultaneously gained the conviction that it was possible to present a «general description of this general unity», i.e. such an all-embracing

⁴⁰ Plato, *Tim.* 51a-b, also cf. 52b.

⁴¹ Cf. E. Mingarelli, *Chora and Identity: Whitehead's Re-Appropriation of Plato's Receptacle*, p. 85.

⁴² *Tim.* 53b.

⁴³ A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, p. 187.

⁴⁴ Since, as Whitehead adds elsewhere in the cited book «A *sort* of feeling [...] is a recurrence which belongs decidedly to the mental side of things» (ivi, p. 39).

⁴⁵ Immediately in the very introduction to *Adventures of Ideas* we learn: «Knowledge is always accompanied with accessories of emotion and purpose» (ivi, p. 176, see also p. 4).

⁴⁶ Though naturally with the proverbial critical statement that «Hume's flux of impressions and of reactions to impressions, each impression a distinct, self-sufficient existence, was very different to the Platonic soul». Whitehead even speaks of «Hume's mental atomism» in epistemology. He states: «Hume enunciates the doctrine that the ultimate elements, subjectively given in the activity of knowing, are the impressions of sensations, showering through the stream of experience, associated as memories, provocative of emotions and reflections, and expectations. But for Hume, each impression is a distinct existence arising in soul from unknown causes» (ivi, p. 29; see also p. 125 and 132).

description that is divested of the «minor details of humanity»,⁴⁷ with the same apodictic evidence as upon a consistent application of the method of mathematical generalisation⁴⁸. He therefore believed that it was possible to grasp in its generality this purely emotional realm (pertaining to, and therefore immanently relative to, the subject) – to grasp its concrete goal-oriented manifestations – precisely in relation to the direct processuality of events, and to express its sense as a whole just as apodictically «evident» as when we express for example a geometric sentence, which tells us that the sum of the internal angles of every triangle is *necessarily* equal to a straight angle, i.e. an angle with the size of 180 degree⁴⁹.

In the engaging book *Adventures of Ideas* (published 1933), Whitehead in his own words presents («with the slightest of changes») a passage from Plato's *Timaeus*⁵⁰, and in the terminological spirit of his processual philosophy intentionally supplements it with terms such as «personal unity», «events», «experience», and «personal identity». I quote:

In addition to the notions of the welter of events and of the forms which they illustrate, we require a third term, personal unity. It is a perplexed and obscure concept. We must conceive it [as - J.S.] the receptacle, the foster-mother as I might say, of the becoming of our

⁴⁷ Ivi, p. 187. The Czech philosopher and aesthetician Mirko Novák (understanding the primary «feeling of living being» not as a mere summation of life experiences but as a «dynamic whole constantly directed toward the goals of life, the attainment of which is essential to it») speaks in this sense of a «unified living totality, aware of the duration of its own life». He understands this assertion as a «developing *system of reactions*», which «*functionally changes*», and states: «as soon as Man turns his term-forming process to the contents of his own inner self, of whose swirling around a single vital axis he is capable of realising and experiencing in time (i.e. if the linkage of an internal agency with an external one takes place), he exhausts the complete but entirely subjective and private certainties and evidence that can be expressed by the equation: I who think = I who am. He thereby arrives at his own self as the fundamental source of all certainty and knowledge, believing entirely clearly to distinguish all that is not this self: *he arrives at the axiom of the noetic subject*». If Novák speaks of the non-historicity of values (as against their historical uniqueness and unrepeatability), he then emphasises: «The non-historicity of values is therefore not their a-historicity, but rather merely a latent historicity, not revealed in terms of age». See M. Novák, *Hodnoty a dějiny (Values and history)*, Vydavatelstvo Družstevní práce, Praha 1947, pp. 35-36, 83, 92, 122.

⁴⁸ Whitehead states: «Wisdom is proportional to the width of the evidence made effective in the final self-determination». A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, p. 47, see also p. 187.

⁴⁹ However, according to Whitehead, in the time of democracy it is not possible to understand philosophy merely as an aggregate of noble sentiments: «Philosophy is not mere collection of noble sentiments. A deluge of such sentiments does more harm than good. Philosophy is at once general and concrete, critical and appreciative of direct intuition. It is not – or, should not be – a ferocious debate between irritable professors. It is a survey of possibilities and their comparison with actualities. In philosophy, the fact, the theory, the alternatives, and the ideal, are weighed together. Its gifts are insight and foresight, and a sense of the worth of life, in short, that sense of importance which nerves all civilized effort. Mankind can flourish in the lower stages of life with merely barbaric fleshes of thought. But when civilization culminates, the absence of a coordinating philosophy of life, spread throughout the community, spells decadence, boredom, and slackening of effort» (ivi, p. 98).

⁵⁰ In the footnote he adds: «I have used A. E. Taylor's translation, with compression and changes of phrase» (Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, translated by A. E. Taylor, Methuen & Co., London 1929. Cf. Whitehead, A. N., *Adventures of Ideas*, p. 187 (footnote 1).

occasions of experience. It is there as a natural matrix for all transitions of life and is changed and variously figured by the things that enter it; so that it differs in its character at different times. Since it receives all manner of experiences into its own unity, it must itself be bare of all forms. We shall not be far wrong if we describe it as invisible, formless, and all-receptive. It is a locus which persists and provides an emplacement for all occasions of experience. That which happens in it is conditioned by the compulsion of its own past, and by the persuasion of its immanent ideals⁵¹.

As here also – from the above paraphrasing of Whitehead, essentially extensifying the sense of this originally Platonic concept – it becomes clear to the reader that this does not concern a description of Plato's vision of the soul, but rather «the imposition of unity upon the events of Nature». Whitehead, for whom the concept of «events» explains the dynamic character of the universe (its processuality), and who understands the universe as a network or structure of events within which every individual being is functionally linked with other events, then in the conclusion of this same paragraph of chapter XI of the book (bearing the apposite title «Objects and Subjects») states in connection with the text of Plato's *Timaeus*: «These events are together by reason of their community of locus [chóra - J. S], and they obtain their actuality by reason of emplacement within this community»⁵².

It is precisely within this totally (and hierarchically) inseparable social-structural context, according to Whitehead, that we can arrive at «the doctrine of the unity of nature, and of the unity of each human life?, or, in the words of Mirko Novák, «at the primary feeling of living beings»⁵³. Only this kind of genuinely living and self-forming unity can in this specific way lead us to the desired «knowledge of a special strand of unity within the general unity of nature» – «It is a locus within the whole, marked out by its own peculiarities, but otherwise exhibiting the general principle which guides the constitution of the whole»⁵⁴.

Whitehead therefore seeks a universal unifying principle, which he philosophically conceives as a primary structure of experience, in which the relationship between object and subject takes place. The location, perhaps better expressed as the permanently living arena, of this fundamental and permanent unipolar contact then in its functional originality does not represent a mere «empty» (developmental) possibility, potentiality purged of all subjective manifestations (with which, as a methodological prerequisite, traditional logic in particular operates), but manifests itself rather as a kind of «enlivening» manner of being or functioning, thanks to which and within which there purposefully takes place an original, meaningful formation of «eternal» (i.e. in not occurring in the objective world) and «temporal» actual reality. As a result of such a systematic creative enlivening process objective reality becomes comprehensible to the subject, not only within the framework of a consistent

⁵¹ Ivi, p. 187.

⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁵³ M. Novák, *Hodnoty a dějiny (Values and history)*, pp. 83, 120, 140.

⁵⁴ A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, pp. 187-188.

application of mathematical-causal relationships. It should be comprehensible – and within this essential context *above all* – so to speak within the «limits and possibilities» of the experiencing subject, i.e. precisely on the basis of the comprehensibility of the subject's own continuous experiencing. A. N. Whitehead presents such an interpretation in his fundamental philosophical work *Process and Reality* (published 1929), when he speaks of «eternal objects»⁵⁵.

3. Parallels with concept of «eternal objects»

«Eternal objects» are a concept that Whitehead introduces in order to refer, within the framework of his metaphysical system, to the necessary manner of existence (thus «arising») of pure possibilities in reality. He conceives them as a principle of formation of «actual entities» or «actual occasions», thus as a principle that confers a certain shape or comprehensible form upon these actualities of reality. Eternal objects neither originate nor cease to exist. They are eternal because, despite the vicissitudes of individual events, they remain unchanged – they persist in time (*endurance*). From the perspective of their temporal constancy they form the original model structures of the universe. In this fundamental sense they represent reality, which is of key importance for an understanding not only of the functionality of Whitehead's metaphysical conception, but also of the actual goal of his metaphysics: «The endeavour to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted»⁵⁶.

Whitehead starts out from the general presupposition of a dynamic conception of reality, from its goal-orientation, which he understands as a creative process of becoming, a continual development towards something new. All is therefore subordinate to the general principle of creativity. However, creativity in itself contributes nothing: «it is actual» only on the basis of its fragmentary manifestations, otherwise it loses its actuality. And it is only in this constantly self-actualising sense, as a generally presupposed «ultimate» principle, that it becomes a prerequisite for the cementing of plurality into a singular entity.

The singular is therefore constituted as a new element upon a background of a plurality of entities. The new element or entity always somehow alters the overall «multiplicity», and at the same time, through this change, a new entity is produced, which stimulates a process of further unifying of plurality and subsequently the becoming of a new entity. In other words, the becoming of a new entity essentially generates a unifying of plurality. In contrast with the original plurality, there is always the potentiality of a new plurality, which precisely through its multiplication by a new entity –

⁵⁵ A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality. An Essay in Cosmology. (Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of Edinburgh During the Session 1927-28)*, D. R. Griffin and D. W. Sherburne (eds.), The Free Press, New York 1985, pp. 362-363. See also D. W. Sherburne, *A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1966, pp. 20-25. Also see V. M. Root, *Eternal Objects, Attributes, and Relations in Whitehead's Philosophy*, «Philosophy and Phenomenological Research», 14, 2, 1953-1954, pp. 196-204. Also P. Kecskemeti, *Whitehead und der Aufstand gegen die Metaphysik*, «Amerikanische Rundschau», 13, 4, 1948, pp. 40-50.

⁵⁶ Specifically, with a fundamental emphasis on the necessary and permanent need for their practical «realisation»: «To acquire a coherent system of practicable ideas» (A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, p. 14. See also A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 3).

under these new conditions – becomes actual. It therefore in a certain manner latently consists in the «retentional»⁵⁷ basis of all actualities, or more precisely: in its manner of being a pure potentiality becomes present, which acts (within the framework of new definitions of actuality) – *conditionally*.

Therefore, nothing exists other than the process of becoming and expiring, wherein that which is a mere potentiality becomes actual and is again integrated, together with other events, for a new event. Nothing exists beyond that which is actualised. The question therefore concerns the means by which the process of becoming or the formation of a new actuality takes place in principle. In order to illuminate this ontological problem to the necessary degree, at least in a basic outline, it shall be necessary briefly to demarcate the path of the original process of becoming of actuality from mere potentiality. For a better orientation within this entire complex issue, here at this point we intentionally anticipate that the sought after fundamental starting point of the process of «becoming» of comprehensibility of reality is integrally linked in Whitehead's work with the concept of «concrecence»,⁵⁸ thus a «coalescence», and therefore – in the etymological sense of the word – this always concerns a certain «concretising», which takes place by means of a «coalescence» of eternal objects and actual events or a complex of actual events.

As stated above, Whitehead refers to the individual realisations (he also speaks of «final facts») of the most general metaphysical principle of creativity as actual entities or actual events. These constitute the fundamental unit of the process of events, and they exist so to speak as creativity *in singulo*. It is not possible to go beyond these events, they are complex and mutually interdependent elements of our experience. They occupy a spatial-temporal location, they have an actual existence, they are singular and mutually connected by internal relationships which can be considered a natural part of their manner of being⁵⁹. And they differ from Leibniz's monads – which are «windowless» – precisely in the fact that they are permanently temporally variable.

According to Whitehead, two principles relate to them. The first is incorporated within the «ontological principle» and essentially states: the only reason is events; to seek a reason means to seek an event⁶⁰. The second principle dictates that each entity must be somehow experienced and felt⁶¹ (note, this primarily concerns a reception of contact between all events, not exclusively an «experience» of communicating forms of living beings, beings

⁵⁷ Id., *Adventures of Ideas*, p. 150.

⁵⁸ Cf. Id., *Process and Reality*, pp. 358-359.

⁵⁹ If we presuppose «the essential interdependence of things», according to Whitehead «it is evident that the doctrine involves the negation of «absolute being»». One of the fundamental consequences of this approach to reality is that «the scientists are seeking for explanations of and not merely for simplified descriptions of their observations» (A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, p. 113, see also p. 128).

⁶⁰ A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 18.

⁶¹ Martin Jordan considers Whitehead's events to be «experiences of feeling». He speaks of a dual possible manner of sensation of things: «The Whiteheadian occasions [...] are experiences of feeling. In all feelings there are things felt and things which feel. The «things felt» are the objects for the occasion, the «things which feel» the subject» (M. Jordan, *New Shapes of Reality. Aspects of A. N. Whitehead's Philosophy*, G. Allen and Unwin, London 1968, p. 54).

endowed with consciousness)⁶². It is in this second ultimate condition that the core of Whitehead's conception of the principle of relativity consists: only that which is somehow experienced is real. Therefore, only that which in some sense exists has its reason in how it is experienced – or in other words in the manner of its experiencing⁶³.

If only that which can be «somehow» experienced is real, then, according to Whitehead, this in its consequence means that every actual event (as creativity «above all») manifests its «bipolar» character, thus that it is necessary to differentiate between its two corresponding poles, one *mental* and the other *physical*⁶⁴. And from this fundamental discovery there ensues for Whitehead the no less consequential assertion that all real events in the world generally have their spiritual aspect, which is different from this experiencing. Each event therefore follows a definite purpose, it is in its essence teleologically directed. This spiritual aspect or, in other words, this spiritual or conceptual pole is then this intrinsic primordial naturalness, which contains the inexhaustible source of all forms – thus all eternal individual beings – that constitute this world⁶⁵.

Thanks to the presence of the spiritual dimension in every element of nature, it is then possible to speak of an intrinsic value of every actual entity, which always, in connection with the creativity of progressive events, follows a definite purpose, independent of human will (teleology). The physical pole is determined by the acting cause (i.e. within the limits of causal relationships), the spiritual by the inner teleological cause. The greater the complexity of actual events, the proportionally greater is the actual or concrete meaning of the teleological cause, which is incidentally confirmed not only by the overall complexity of social structures, but also by their potential susceptibility to various, often unforeseeable changes – for example, their ever more intensive tendency to significantly «hybridise»⁶⁶.

⁶² We ordinarily link the concept of «experience» with consciousness. This is not what Whitehead is concerned with. In his philosophical system a definite object such as a table is composed of «experience», just as a person or a star is. If we imagine, for example, a certain person observing a stone, then both, namely the person and the stone, must be viewed within a single framework, and in a certain sense form a «real event», precisely speaking: their relationship is at least a potential unity. According to Whitehead it would be possible to separate one from the other by means of a clear theoretical construction. The person «grasps» the stone in the same manner that the stone «grasps» a certain person – even if with a different intensity. The intensity of experience is then determined by the history of the person (and the stone). If this person is a sculptor, he or she will see in the stone a different dimension than might be seen for example by a bricklayer or a baker. To this extent the prehistory of the person and the prehistory of the stone pertain to the whole procedural context of «experience». Experience in fact sets out the entire structure - so to speak it constitutes itself. In addition to this, it is linked in a complex sense with other «events» which have led to it and thanks to which its future shall be influenced.

⁶³ Cf. *ivi*, pp. 166-167.

⁶⁴ A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 239.

⁶⁵ It is precisely in this fundamental (strict) teleological sense that reality can receive its subjective form. And Whitehead states: «A prehension, however, acquires subjective form, and this subjective form is only rendered fully determinate by integration with conceptual prehensions belonging to the mental pole of *res vera*» (*ivi*, p. 69).

⁶⁶ On hybrid forms originating within an environment of dynamic global interactions see, e.g., M. Kreuzzieger, *Globalization, hybrid growth and critical transculturalism*, in J. Svoboda, O. Štěch

An actual entity, therefore, generally follows a definite purpose. This spiritual direction or structural need creates a potentiality of a future relationship, to which the becoming of a new actual event is directed. Whitehead refers to this concrete potentiality, which is a necessary condition of further integration that all actual individual beings implicitly carry within themselves and to whose origin every new event is directed, as a «*subjective aim*»⁶⁷. Every actual entity thereby simultaneously becomes a unique reality in the sense of a new possibility of an actual experienced realisation, which Whitehead claims is itself driven, thanks to a systematic endeavour to aim somewhere, by a compulsive natural desire, thus by an internal reason, which – unlike the unilaterally rational character of an external cause – furthermore so to speak «yearningly» (or perhaps in a Platonic sense *erotically*) urges (Whitehead speaks of *desire*, and elsewhere refers to the *lure of feelings*) to be realised, in order to arrive at its optimal fulfilment.

Whitehead refers to the very constitution of an actual event or its grouping (*nexus*) as «prehension»,⁶⁸ thus as «grasping» («empowering»)⁶⁹, which arises as a natural (vital) compulsive need or yearning to «drive» to something new (*creative urge*). Actual events are concretised if through their natural urgency they have attained successful fulfilment in their optimum (*satisfaction*)⁷⁰. Therefore, Whitehead's primary intention, as already intimated above, is to

(eds.), *Interkulturní vojna a mír (Intercultural war and peace)*, Filosofia, Praha 2012, pp. 137-143. Multiplications of hybrids within the context of modernisation are dealt with in Bruno Latour's book *We Have Never Been Modern*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1993.

⁶⁷ A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 19.

⁶⁸ It is not irrelevant within this context to recall that in the 1960s the term «prehension» was used by the Czech philosopher and sociologist J. L. Fischer in his work *Składebná filosofie, strukturalismus a dialektika (Compositional philosophy, structuralism and dialectics)* – even if without any reference to the work of A. N. Whitehead. Fischer differentiates (“entirely in congruence with the traditional conception”) three levels of our cognitive faculties: prehensive (perception), reprehensive (imagination), and comprehensive (intellectual or reflected). The configuration of the prehensive, thus the sensory faculty of this prehensive level, is specific in that it is determined by «contradictory tendencies». This means that individual sensory acts are characterised not only by their objective intention (focus on the intended object). This objective intention is nevertheless at the same time anchored in our existential sphere, in our sphere of interest (in our existential needs and possibilities). Via the relevant receptors, only those of substantive differences are signalled, which have an existential impact for our organism, and at the same time in a manner which signals this impact emotionally. The sensory faculty of individual organisms is then the result of a «dialectical clash of two tendencies», or in other words a leveling thereof. From this Fischer extrapolates that although «the real corresponds to every pre-hended sensory difference and not vice versa, the degree of «objective» diversity of reality is greater – even much greater – than that which we are aware of». The fact that our reality is pre-hended means that it is perceived in terms of its qualitative diversity and not recognised in the actual sense. To know «anything», according to Fischer, means to «constrict» these qualitative diversities by means of some kind of relationship, to incorporate them into some kind of correlation. «The rational is therefore only a relationship and reality only to the extent that we have succeeded in relationising it, in introducing it into various numerous relationships» (J. L. Fischer, *Compositional philosophy, structuralism and dialectics*, «Filosofický časopis», 17, 1, 2013, pp. 21-22).

⁶⁹ Whitehead sometimes uses the term «*ingression*». A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 23 ff. Cf. also M. Andrlé, *Whiteheadova filosofie přírody. (Se zvláštním zřetelem k londýnskému období.) (Whitehead's Philosophy of Nature. (With particular regard to the London period))*, nakl. P. Mervart, Červený Kostelec 2010, p. 135 ff.

⁷⁰ A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 83 ff.

show that prehension (grasping) does not mean to perceive, but essentially that the relationship generally originates within the process (the *concrete fact of relatedness*)⁷¹.

Every process of transition from a certain actual plurality to a final unity is primarily a process of concretisation. In this sense Whitehead speaks of a *concrecence*, thus of a *coalescence* of the eternal object with the actual event. Even if the sphere of these potentialities is unlimited, they enter into reality only in the conditioned form of characteristic *features* of actual events⁷². (Red as such does not exist in objective reality without the existence of *something* that is red; its possible existence is potential, i.e. conceivable in pure possibility, only until the time that it is linked with an actual event).

Therefore, for example, red in itself is not an actual entity in the sense of any empirical occurrence: it is a pure possibility in the sense of a feature of a certain situation. If a relationship is realised between both – e.g. «a red flower» – Whitehead then speaks of a coalescence of an eternal object and an actual entity. Through this connection, the situation becomes comprehensible to us. Eternal reality as initial possibility not subject to change then represents a general feature of reality, enabling its comprehension. Although it is a feature of reality, which does not exist from the perspective of empirical occurrence, it *arises* on the basis of a coherent series of events as a feature of a situation delineating an individual event from the perspective of its meaning.

This goal-oriented, meaning-ful relational delineation of actual individual beings, from the observer's perspective, appears as their objectifying form. However, at the same time the subject itself is constituted through the reality of eternal entities (a flower is significant to me in that it is red). The colour red as a pure possibility therefore establishes a relationship between the seen object and the seeing subject, who meaningfully grasps a certain object and thereby receives it, so to speak, as his or her own. From this fundamental perspective it is then possible to speak of the internal connection between an eternal object and an actual individual being as a «subjective form» of manifestation. Whitehead clearly states «There is a concrecence of the initial data into the objective datum, made possible by the elimination, and effected by the subjective form»⁷³. The subjective form is in fact a way in which the subject «purposefully» grasps (prehends) a certain object or fact. Whitehead in

⁷¹ Whitehead adds: «Our consciousness does not initiate our models of functioning. We awake to find ourselves engaged in process, immersed in satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and actively modifying, either by intensification, or by attenuation, or by the introduction of novel purposes» (Id., *Adventures of Ideas*, p. 46. See also Id., *Process and Reality*, p. 22.

⁷² In connection with the «power» of these potential idealities Whitehead comments: «The power of an ideal consists in this. When we examine the general world of occurrent fact, we find that its general character, practically inescapable, is neutral in respect to the realisation of intrinsic value. The electromagnetic occasions and the electromagnetic law, the molecular occasions and the molecular law, are all alike neutral. They condition the sort of values which are possible, but they do not determine the specialities of value. When we examine the specializations of societies which determine values with some particularity, such specializations as societies of men, forests, deserts, prairies, icefields, we find, within limits, plasticity. The story of Plato's idea is the story of its energizing within a local plastic environment. It has a creative power, making possible its own approach to realization» (Id., *Adventures of Ideas*, p. 42. Cf. also pp. 92-93).

⁷³ A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 221.

this sense speaks of «*private matters of fact*»⁷⁴, which meaningfully specify concrete individual beings or entities.

Naturally, this is not to say, for example, that the concepts of «red» or a «right angle» cannot be perceived in their generality, without us thinking of a concrete object. In connection with the above possibility of a manner of grasping reality in a subjective form, eternal objects, according to Whitehead, have one *general* and one *specific* aspect. Without a relationship to concrete entities they are «*general public facts of the world*»⁷⁵ – they are «particular», and in their differentiation from other eternal objects they create a certain contrast⁷⁶; as Whitehead mentions elsewhere in the same book, they are «*forms of definiteness*»⁷⁷. From the perspective of their immediate concretisation in a definite, actual entity, however, they become a certain quality, or, more precisely, a characteristic of meaningful delimitation. Whitehead adds that the connections of eternal objects are «public», though it is possible to *experience* this connection only «privately»⁷⁸.

Eternal objects as concrete «relational» experiences, through their permanent subject relatedness, meaningfully present experienced reality, and it is therefore possible to understand their relational «subjective form», in correlation with the necessity of their processuality, as a permanently implemented, or more precisely constituting personal unity. As «public facts of the world», eternal objects appear as mere a-subjective general entities. As a result it is impossible not to notice the conspicuous similarity of their objective form of manifestation – which «forms of definiteness» at the same time essentially take on – with the Platonic concept of ideas, which in the Middle Ages became one of the cornerstones of the dispute concerning the universal. However, even their further connotations of its meaning, whether the concept of the universal is interpreted within the traditional limits of moderate realism, conceptualism, or nominalism, fail to appreciate Whitehead's fundamental concept in its generality.

The dissimilarity of these objective forms of «eternal objects» to the concept of the «universal» consists in a thorough understanding of the relationality of Whitehead's fundamental concept: «An actual entity cannot be described, even inadequately, by universals; because other actual entities do enter into the description of any one actual entity»⁷⁹. From this essential standpoint, Whitehead intentionally speaks of *envisagement* (of the «envisagement of the realm of all eternal objects», and thus of a manner of «*Wesensschau* – the envisagement of essence»)⁸⁰ as opposed to every tendency toward generalising abstraction or to any abstract formation, by which it is impossible to cover the generality of the given situation without limitation⁸¹.

⁷⁴ Cf. *ivi*, p. 22.

⁷⁵ *Ivi*, p. 290.

⁷⁶ *Ivi*, p. 48.

⁷⁷ *Ivi*, p. 158.

⁷⁸ *Ivi*, pp. 289-290.

⁷⁹ *Ivi*, p. 48.

⁸⁰ A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, p. 105. Cf. also *id.*, *Adventures of Ideas*, p. 68.

⁸¹ Cf. E. Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*. Bd. II/2: *Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*, 6, Max Niemeyer Verlag, Tübingen 1968, p. 162. Cf. also I. Blecha, *Proměny*

Eternal objects are unthinkable and therefore «do not become» in their temporal originality without a relationship to their realisations⁸². They have a «relational essence» and as a result cannot be thought of separately in a primarily dynamic-functional sense⁸³. Whitehead concludes: «No reason, internal to history, can be assigned why that flux of forms, rather than another flux, should have been illustrated»⁸⁴. According to the ontological principle it applies that: «Everything must be somewhere; and here “somewhere” means “some actual entity”»⁸⁵.

4. Conclusions and epistemological conjunctions: «eternal objects» and General Systems Theory

From the above observations it is apparent that both Plato and Whitehead introduced the concept of the *chora* into the discussion because they wanted to offer a more conceptually concrete explanation for the process whereby actual existing individual entities participate in eternal patterns or ideas. The intention of both these thinkers was thus to engage in a further fundamental reflection on the relationship between being and becoming, or, more precisely, to try to offer an overall conception of reality that would allow these essential concepts to be viewed in a closer and more complexly clear functional relationship to each other.

In Plato's conception the *chora* represents a kind of specific, residual substructure – more of a material nature – that has the exceptional capacity to act as a medium between the eternal world of ideas and their copies. Because Plato does not consider these pale copies to be a part of the eternal world of ideas, an intermediary space is required for them, and it is the *chora*, as a specific form of pure relationality, that is to provide them with this. In the *chora* ideas only leave an imprint of themselves, and they are nursed there until the time of their realisation in the in the ever changing sensorily perceptible world. Plato's *chora* is thus a place in which a specific creative relational process occurs from which sensory qualities acquire new characteristics. As mere reflections of real things (ideas) these characteristic qualities do not exist in their own right, and because they are ephemeral and constantly mutable they cannot be regarded as real ontological substances.

For Whitehead, however, the *chora* is not by nature this kind of residual material substructure. In the light of his processual philosophy Whitehead's *chora* must necessarily be regarded more as a kind of «all-receptive» invariant, which derives its existence and functional independence from the natural creativity of events. Only on the assumption of the original and permanent effectivity of events, which is at the same time «through and through

fenomenologie. Úvod do Husserlovy fenomenologie (Changes of phenomenology. Introduction to Husserl's phenomenology), Triton, Praha 2007, p. 151 ff.

⁸² Whitehead clearly states: «The relationship is not a universal. It is a concrete fact with the same concreteness as the relata. [...] We have to discover a doctrine of nature which express the concrete relatedness of physical functionalities and mental functioning, of the past with the present, and also expresses the concrete composition of physical realities which are individually diverse» (A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, p. 157).

⁸³ A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, p. 160.

⁸⁴ A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 46.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*.

togetherness»⁸⁶, can the *chora* be regarded as the metaphysical space of this endless structural connectedness between actual entities as the basic ontological building blocks of reality. If the *chora* is in its creative processional sense relationality per se, then within the *chora*, as a functional structural unity, the relationship between pure potentialities and their actual entities is formed *directly*, and thus the goal-oriented relationship itself is merely a medium between them. Through the goal-oriented focus of every such – more or less complex – immanent relationship on fulfilling its purpose, its meaning is constituted by the concrete creative act of realisation.

The term «eternal objects» is therefore intended to designate something which confers comprehensibility upon an experienced reality. It must have the capacity to meaningfully delineate an experience of an event (e.g. red) in such a manner that the context of the event is comprehensible within the framework of continuous experience. At the same time it must be such a reality which we encounter within the framework of general experience⁸⁷. Within our interpretative context there indeed arises a further, no less fundamental philosophical question, which we could essentially formulate as follows: what do we see in our direct, essentially constituting view, what in this is not an individual being, but despite this is distinguished by the necessity of its internal structure, i.e. what in experience corresponds to the above-outlined fundamental description of the term «eternal objects», which thanks to its relational character are «prehensively» presented (concretised) by subjective forms in individual intended objects? Therefore, the fundamental question is: what in ordinary experience corresponds in principle to the pure potentialities, which, owing to their relational «choric» nature, as suggested above, are rendered permanently present as generally intelligible functional wholes of our reality.

One possible answer to this fundamental question is offered by the systems theory of Ludwig von Bertalanffy⁸⁸. In *Modern Theories of Development* (1928), Bertalanffy wrote:

Mechanism [...] provides us with no grasp of the specific characteristic of organisms, of the organization of organic process among one another, of organic “wholeness”, of the problem of the origin of organic “teleology”, or of the historical character of organisms [...]. We must therefore try to establish a new standpoint which – as opposed to mechanism – take account of organic wholeness, but [...] treats it in a manner which admits of scientific investigation⁸⁹.

⁸⁶ A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, p. 174.

⁸⁷ «It is the task of philosophy to work at the concordance of ideas conceived as illustrated in the concrete facts of the real world. It seeks those generalities which characterize the complete reality of fact, and apart from which any fact must sink into an abstraction. [...] Also the sciences should find their principles in the concrete facts which a philosophic system presents» (A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, p. 146).

⁸⁸ L. Bertalanffy, *General Systems Theory*, George Braziller, New York 1968.

⁸⁹ L. Bertalanffy, *Modern Theories of Development*, 1928, reprint, Harper & Row, New York 1962. Cf. D. Polkinghorne, *Methodology for the Human Science: Systems of inquiry*, Suny Press, New York 1983, p. 143.

Systems theory (or General Systems Theory) examines the functioning of general systems by describing the model manners of their organisation, i.e. their structures. It therefore seeks to identify the primary model structures that constitute these systems as wholes. The system thus functions independently of its parts, just as the structure of a certain melody is independent of particular tones or the geometric configuration of a triangle is independent of the fact that it is made up of straight lines. The formation of the whole⁹⁰ must therefore have a different manner of organisation, i.e. structure, than the mere sum of its individual parts. Unlike such closed systems with impermeable boundaries, Bertalanffy examines open systems, which are capable of admitting stimuli into their environment. He discovers that it is not the initial conditions of living systems that are the sole determining factor of their final state, but by independent structures of the system's organisation as such. These independent structures manifest different behaviour in a different way: despite admitting chance stimuli into their environment these systems arrive at the same locations (states) irrespective of the different initial conditions they set out from and in different manners. He refers to the attainment of these final states as «*equifinal behaviour*», and according to Bertalanffy these systems have «goals of their own», thus through their behaviour they follow a certain purpose⁹¹.

As Jan Kamarýt notes:

General Systems Theory is a particular interdisciplinary branch of knowledge, attempting a systematic construction of a model and applicable theory and meta-theory of systems. [...] It performs a classification and analysis of systems of various types. [...] Von Bertalanffy devotes special attention to the behaviour of *open systems*. His initial hypothesis is the observation that living organisms are typical open systems, which continuously exchange material, energy and information elements with their environment. As a consequence of this they are internally in a state of peculiar stationary dynamic balance, or approach the attainment thereof, and in this case they have specific traits of organised and integrated systems. With the aid of this model, substantial progress has been made in understanding the integral functioning of the organism, its origin and development, its internal structures and its connections with the environment⁹².

The sought conjunction between systems theory and the relational conception of Whitehead's eternal entities is genetically contained precisely

⁹⁰ «The idea behind general systems theory is that there is a general ideal form which is isomorphic to all systems. This general form is the object of inquiry, and the level of inquiry is the properties of systems, not specific system themselves» (D. Polkinghorne, *Methodology for the Human Science: Systems of inquiry*, p. 143).

⁹¹ D. Polkinghorne, *Methodology for the Human Science: Systems of inquiry*, p. 146. Cf. also L. Bertalanffy, *General Systems Theory as Integrating Factor in Contemporary Science*, in *Akten des XIV. Internationalen Kongresses für Philosophie, Wien: 2.-9. September 1968*. Band II, Herder, Wien 1968, pp. 335-340.

⁹² J. Kamarýt, *Klasifikace a význam systémových teorií (Classification and importance of systems theories)*, «Filosofický časopis», 18, 1, 1969, pp. 56-60, p. 58.

within Bertalanffy's specific noetic approach to the conception of reality. *General Systems Theory* does not engage in an empirical investigation of individual entities. It is a science of the entities of wholes. Like the theory of emergent or «creative» (Julian Huxley) development⁹³, it is based on a philosophically realist position. In the foundation of its essential starting points it strictly rejects the use of any hypothetical terms, which «merely defer the mystery», and offers an explanation of creative development from the «thing itself»⁹⁴.

However, systems theory does not satisfy itself merely with the assertion that these wholes «emerge», that they somehow «surface» from the depths of development. «From where these new wholes originate, we do not know», states Mirko Novák⁹⁵. Systems theory turns its attention to living, functioning reality, to the reality that is the space of application of our everyday, active social operation and creative behaviour. In the spirit of its functionalism, it points to the fact that the behaviour of an individual becomes comprehensible only within the framework of relationships (interactions), thus within the procedural contexts which originate within a certain functioning system as a whole⁹⁶. And it is these unique actual wholes⁹⁷ – not excepting social wholes or *nikas* – that systems theory in principle qualitatively conceives of as *functions*, which, as might reasonably be expected, are more or less responsibly and thus freely adopted by individuals according to their own natural orientation and general experience, either volitionally or emotionally, as their own intrinsic asubjective reality, and therefore as their «surroundings». From the perspective of their natural procedural essence they are *necessarily* able to subjectively perceive them

⁹³ In the 1930s the theory of emergent development was defended by the Czech philosopher Josef Tvrđý (following primarily from the positivist tradition of Czech philosophy). Tvrđý defines the origin of the term emergence as follows: «The term 'emergent' (newly surfacing) originates from a situation in which, in development, at each new degree new attributes emerge, which differentiate phenomena that have attained a higher degree of development from elements by means of an analysis of discovered phenomena, which are composed and which pertain to a lower level of development. These attributes are therefore not a mere resultant element, since they are something *entirely new*, as if *suddenly emerging*. However, the newness of the quality does not see the emergent development only upon the origin of life, like the vitalists, but already in "dead" matter, e.g. upon the origin of chemical compounds formed by chemical synthesis». It is precisely these manifestations of *discontinuity*, always bringing something new, that point not only to the fact that in every physical and organic formation there is a certain psychological correlate (C. L. Morgan), but that they form their own development, and as such are a document of emergence. See J. Tvrđý, *Nová filosofie. Analýza dnešní filosofické situace (A new philosophy. Analysis of the current philosophical situation)*, nakl. Volné myšlenky, Praha 1932, p. 100 ff.

⁹⁴ In this it differs from vitalism, contemplating a hidden life force. Cf. *ivi*, p. 99.

⁹⁵ See M. Novák, *Hodnoty a dějiny (Values and history)*, p. 105.

⁹⁶ «As regards "functionalism", this has frequently been considered – in the last 20 years – the "most widespread" alternative to any delineated dualism» (M. Dokulil, *Problém "mysli a těla" (The "mind" and "body" problem)*, «Filosofický časopis», 48, 1, 2000, p. 568 ff.

⁹⁷ These units (e.g. family, state, forest, sea etc.) are referred to by ecologists using the term *nika*. Kohák explains this as follows: «Not individuals, but the structure of the whole defines roles into which beings are born and which then define their life's task and course. Functions, tasks, niches – or, using a word popularized in Amerika by the British ecological classic, Charles Elton, in the 1920s, *nikas* – are what is primary, shaping individual beings, not the other way» (E. Kohák, *The Green Halo. A Bird's-Eye View of Ecological Ethics*, with a foreword by Holmes Rolston, Open Court, Chicago and La Salle 2000, p. 91.

as comprehensible⁹⁸. Furthermore, with the qualitative possibility of comprehending also the social dimension of experienced reality in fundamental correlations in terms of values, a path emerges⁹⁹ which, in the typical manner of a dynamic conception of reality, does not lead to the often condemned creation of an undesirable dividing line between «*Geisteswissenschaften*» and the natural sciences¹⁰⁰.

As appositely noted in this urgent critical respect by the contemporary influential American sociobiologist Edward O. Wilson:

To grasp the present human condition it is necessary to add the biological evolution of species and the circumstances that led to its prehistory. This task of understanding humanity is too important and too daunting to leave exclusively to the humanities. Their many branches, from philosophy to law to history and the creative arts, have described the particularities of human nature back and forth in endless permutations, albeit laced with genius and in exquisite detail. But they have not explained why we possess our special nature and not some other, out of a vast number of conceivable natures. In that sense, the humanities have not achieved nor will they ever achieve a full understanding of the meaning of our species' existence¹⁰¹.

⁹⁸ As Whitehead generally states: «We can only understand a society by knowing what of people undertook what sort of functions in that society» (A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, p. 78, see also p. 140).

⁹⁹ Otakar A. Funda states: «To the question of what is reality and the relations corresponding to its situation, there is no static answer. It is necessary to configure this answer continually, patiently, rationally and exactly, and to correct it continually precisely in relation toward the relations of the addressed problem». Funda conceives reality in its wholeness as a «complexity of the complementarity of components in correlations, continuity and contexts» (O. A. Funda, *Znavená Evropa umírá. [Tired Europe is dying]*, Karolinum, Praha 2002, p. 114 and also O. A. Funda, *Když se rákos chvěje nad hladinou. Fragmenty – texty. (When the reed trembles above the surface. Fragments – texts)*, Karolinum, Praha 2009, p. 111.

¹⁰⁰ O. A. Funda, *Racionalita versus transcendence. Spor Hanse Alberta s moderními teologi (Rationality versus transcendence. Hans Albert's controversy with modern theologians)*, Filosofia, Praha 2013, p. 16. Also, O. A. Funda, *Když se rákos chvěje nad hladinou. Fragmenty – texty. (When the reed trembles above the surface. Fragments – texts)*, p. 136.

¹⁰¹ E. O. Wilson, *The Meaning of Human Existence*, Liveright Publishing Corporation, New York and London, 2014, p. 17. Cf. also J. Svoboda Sr. J. Svoboda, *The Platonic Receptacle (Hypodoché), Whitehead's Philosophy, and Genome Evolution*, «Viruses», 9, 381, 2017. The article can be found at the following link: <https://www.mdpi.com/1999-4915/9/12/381>.