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FAITH4ALL

Inclusive Times

Latest Edition:
Process Theology
Principles Parallel
Life with a Disability

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How Process Theology Principles Parallel Life with a Disability

Process Theology is an outgrowth of a philosophy originally developed by [Alfred North Whitehead](#), a mathematics, logic, and philosophy professor who taught at Trinity College of Cambridge University and Harvard University. The basis of this philosophy is that events - not objects - form the fundamental elements of reality. Whitehead's process philosophy argues that "there is urgency in coming to see the world as a web of interrelated processes of which we are integral parts, so that all of our choices and actions have consequences for the world around us."¹ For this reason, this sort of philosophy is considered relational, as opposed to the more traditional philosophy which takes objects as fundamental elements of reality.

The parallels that I see between process theology and living with a disability stem from the problem of [theodicy](#), which I believe may trouble other people living with a disability. I consider that the only logical and satisfying solution to the

"problem" of theodicy is through an understanding of God that is grounded in process thinking.

Process theology can be understood to "solve" the problem of theodicy by relieving God of responsibility for evil actions of people and unfortunate natural occurrences as it rejects the concept of divine omnipotence. For process theologians, God can't do everything and, in fact, God's actions are not through the unilateral control of anything!

According to many process theologians, "actuality as such is partially self-creative, future events are not yet determinate, so that even perfect knowledge cannot know the future and God does not control the world"². Instead, the God of process theology functions as a lure or divine *Eros*, directing, guiding, or goading, all actuality toward novelty: "[t]he Primordial Nature of God is the goad toward novelty in the universe"³.

¹ [C. Robert Mesle](#), *Process-Relational Philosophy: An Introduction to Alfred North Whitehead* (West Conshohocken: Templeton Foundation Press, 2009), 9.

² John B. Cobb and David R. Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*. (Westminster Press, 1976), 52-53.

³ Alfred N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (The Macmillan Company, 1929), 135.

Aside from relieving God of the responsibility for the many destructive occurrences in this universe, the parallel between this 'goad toward novelty' and recovery from or living with a disability is what cements the connection between process theology and disability for me.

A fundamental supposition of process theology is that every interaction in the universe can have a variety of outcomes and the existence of life-affirming and life-extending outcomes is allowed for and can be chosen because of God. The divine goad toward novelty and life-affirming choices - as posited by process theology - can be understood as paralleling living with a disability because frequently considerable novelty and inventiveness is required when attempting to simply live a life in a world that is largely designed for and built by many people without consideration of those people who are differently-abled.

Although in the United States the advent of the Americans with Disabilities Act has gone a long way of relieving these problems, the acquisition of a disability often guarantees the survivor a lifetime of learning to do things differently and in

unexpected ways. It is because of the novelty used when one adapts to a disability and the life-affirming choices available to and chosen by people living with disabilities that I understand the possibility of the God of process theology to be a part of every life-affirming action taken by or for people with disabilities, whether or not this fact is acknowledged.

In addition, process theology is inherently [panentheistic](#) -- a theology which understands God or the divine *Eros* as intersecting every part of the universe and also extending beyond space and time. Thus, I understand process thinking to transcend particular religions as Alfred North Whitehead developed and understood this philosophy as an aspect of reality purely on the grounds of logic, not religion.

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Our thoughts at this time are for the survivors of the hurricanes Helene and Milton, many of whom have already or will become newly disabled by these disasters!

Future Inclusive Times Topics:

- **The Importance of Assessment**
- **Including People Who Are Deaf or Mute**



*Any questions or comments regarding this e-journal or this organization can be directed to kevin@Faith4All.org.

Helpful Links for More Information on [Process theology](#):

- The [Cobb Institute](#) is an important institution devoted to evangelizing process thinking.
- As part of my recent completion of a [Certificate in Process Thinking and Practice](#) with the Cobb Institute, I have written a 14-page research paper titled "[Process Thinking and Living with Disability](#)".
- My religious understanding has also been influenced considerably by online studies from [Tripp Fuller](#) and his organization [Homebrewed Christianity](#)
- My **new** book titled "[Still Rambling Down Life's Road... with a brain injury](#)" traces the development of my spiritual and religious understanding from before acquiring my disabilities to my present embrace of process theology.