Article

“The Voice of the Universe”: Cosmic Immanence in John Elof Boodin’s Process Thought, What It Is and Why It Matters

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Abstract: For most, the way to process thought has been through mathematician-turned-philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947). However, his contemporary, Swedish–American philosopher John Elof Boodin (1869–1950), offers another path. While both clearly exposit a process-based philosophy/theology, there are important differences. The main purpose of this essay is to delineate those differences and highlight Boodin’s concept of cosmic immanence (CI) as a key feature separating him from Whitehead’s metaphysic. It is argued that CI can provide the heavy lifting for developing a coherent and satisfying process theology without the baggage attached to Whitehead’s difficult intricate interconnections and enigmatic neologisms. In other words, Boodin’s criticisms of Whitehead (of which there were several) do not amount to an abandonment of process-based thinking or even Whitehead’s larger project of developing a coherent process theology. However, the addition of a new synthesis—merging Boodin’s CI with Joseph A. Bracken’s trinitarian God/world thesis and Ludwig von Bertalanffy’s general systems theory (GST)—is necessary for completion. This new CI synthesis suggests that the same process-based destination can be arrived at by an easier and clearer route.

Keywords: John Elof Boodin; cosmic immanence; general systems theory; metaphysics; process theology; Alfred North Whitehead

1. Introduction

Most process theologians have followed a familiar historiographical pathway, from Henri Bergson to Alfred North Whitehead to Charles Hartshorne, to reach their destination, the details of which have already been ably presented (Dombrowski 2016). Once that destination is reached, there are seven general principles that most process proponents, to various degrees and in various ways, defend. They are as follows: (1) a Platonist over an Aristotelian starting point; (2) pragmatically based commitments to experience and relational empiricism; (3) a teleologically ordered world view; (4) two metaphysical ultimates—God and creativity (or alternatively, for Boodin, God and CI); (5) panentheism, i.e., the idea that God is in the world and the world is in God but is separate and distinct from it and not to be conflated with it as in pantheism; (6) God is omnipresent but neither omniscient nor omnipotent in the ordinary sense in order to honor genuine human/cosmic freedom; and (7) God is essentially relational, meaning the divine ability to affect and be affected.

Keeping these seven principles in mind, the same destination may be reached by a somewhat different path, namely, from Charles Peirce to Josiah Royce to John Elof Boodin. Peirce is not immediately associated with process thought, but his idea of ongoing spontaneity and change as opposed to absolute deterministic necessity (tychism) and truth as characterized by constant and ongoing inquiry suggests affinities with process thought. However, one might give Royce preemptive status over Peirce (Auxier 2013, pp. 40, 63). Because Boodin studied philosophy at Harvard under Royce and completed his dissertation under this “master with whom I wrestled for the salvation of my soul from 1897 to 1900” (qtd. in Nelson 1987, p. 42), it should come as little surprise that, in many important ways, Boodin always exhibited an obvious Roycean spirit that led him towards process-type...
thinking well before Whitehead. The “wrestling” to which he alluded was Boodin’s way of saying that Royce was the prophet who led him to the process promised land. Indeed, Royce’s own “wrestling” in *The Problem of Christianity* (1913) had him abandoning old, threadbare concepts of God’s omnipotence and omniscience for a more temporal process-based divine activity (Auxier 2013, p. 127). Boodin would take this Roycean inheritance, modify it, and give it more comprehensive and robust metaphysical treatment. The story of Boodin’s process theology has already been told elsewhere and need not be reiterated here (Flannery 2023a, 2023b). Suffice it to say that Boodin’s writings give clear evidence of these important process principles twenty-seven years before the Gifford Lectures that would form the basis for *Process and Reality* (Boodin 1900).

While Boodin offered a process theology from his earliest writings, how did it all work? A hint is given in his essay calling for new commitment to a teleological worldview, as follows: “An immanent form . . . leads nature onward. While the law becomes conscious at higher stages, it does not follow that it originates there. On the contrary it comes to our creative activity as a presupposition or command, as the voice of the universe” (Boodin 1913b, p. 89). This would be developed later by this poet-philosopher as the pervasive and cohesive force called CI. However, its foundation would be laid in Boodin’s epistemology, functional realism.

2. Functional Realism

Boodin presented functional realism with his presidential address to the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association at his home institution (UCLA) on 29 December 1933. Two traditional types of realism are distinguished, naïve and critical. In naïve realism, the qualities and relations of things we sense exist independently; in other words, objective nature exists directly as we perceive it. The second type is critical realism, which stands naïve realism on its head and says that the qualities and relations of things we sense come primarily from us and our perceptions and do not exist independently. Here, nature is a matter of our subjective perceptions. Naïve and critical realism “both assume that to say that substances and qualities exist independently of the environment has a meaning.” Boodin rejects both of these, regarding them as being based upon “dogmatic assumptions” which are unfounded (Boodin 1934a, p. 147). Interestingly, Roy Wood Sellars, critical realism’s greatest proponent, insists that he does not bifurcate things and environments, accepting transcendence between physical things and the mind of the knower; this idea of transcendence “distinguishes the critical realist from all other schools of philosophy” (Sellars 1922, pp. 31, 37). Because, for Sellars, there is a natural transcendence between “the object of the percipient organism” and the organism itself, there is a dualism between the knower and known but no “bifurcation” of things and environments. Sellars relies upon his own brand of materialist reductionism to escape the bifurcation charge; here it is claimed that the “Mind is not alien. It is the nervous system. And the nature known in perception is identical with the nature which is one condition of the sense-objects by means of which we know it” (Sellars 1922, p. 39).

Functional realism regards our perceptions as *functions* of objective nature and the percceiver in perceptive relation with one another. Boodin’s principal objection to naïve and critical realism is that they both assume independently existent substances—things and properties in and of themselves—bifurcating things from the environment in external relation to one another. It is a piecemeal universe. Boodin’s proposal is wholistic.1 Saying that the “mind is the nervous system” is precisely the kind of reductionism to which Boodin objects, and the assumption of a unity-of-mind-with-sense-objects is, in fact, a bifurcation of substances. Sellars is making assumptions that we shall soon see do not accord with the very science he venerates. Indeed, Sellars makes the “one condition” of our epistemology the *only* condition of our epistemology. In effect, they are externally related and establish only a rather mundane lateral transcendence than a vertical transcendence. If this is the distinguishing feature of critical realism, as Sellars suggests, it is a pretty modest, almost tautological proposition. “As opposed to the assumption of things in themselves
with properties in themselves,” explains Boodin, “functional realism holds in common with present science that the bifurcation of thing and environment is vicious, that things exist only in fields, in mutuality with other things, and they have properties only in their interrelations” (Boodin 1934a, p. 147). Using weight as an example, Newton discovered that weight is not an absolute property abstracted from its environment but is, in fact, functionally related, as matter is related to its environment. Unfortunately, Newton failed to see this, allowing for philosophy to be “haunted by the ghosts of things in themselves,” a universe of myriad substances without context, flow, pattern, or purpose. Nature is instead a “plurality of interacting systems of energy” (Boodin 1934a, p. 150).

Boodin uses the opportunity to critique Whitehead, saying that, instead of sense-quality, the mathematician-turned-philosopher focuses on feeling, sometimes using it in a psychological sense and sometimes using feeling “for our whole immediate awareness of nature. This immediate awareness is called prehension, as contrasted with apprehension” (Boodin 1934a, p. 158). In this sense, Whitehead’s prehension becomes not an emergent form of feeling but turns feeling into an efficient cause in nature; additionally, because all nature is seen by Whitehead as organic, feeling becomes the efficient cause in nature. Feeling then, for Whitehead (according to Boodin), is the expression of dynamic reality, and the philosopher of organism “is brought by his own route to the mysticism of [Francis Herbert] Bradley. Feeling, as one type of the emergent actualization of nature—the florescence of life’s activity—becomes the whole of reality.” Then, Boodin sagaciously adds, “Such ambiguity will give the philosophers much material out of which they can make a living and will no doubt be perpetuated” (Boodin 1934a, p. 158).

This raises a serious difficulty. How can our sense of experience be said to immediately take place when there is always a time differential between the perception and the thing perceived, whether in light years from a distant star or seemingly instantaneously as the perception of an object in a room? Boodin says Whitehead argues that the organism always exists in the past. This makes our consciousness of direct acquaintance of nature impossible. Must we, asks Boodin, abandon all direct experience and instinctive belief? Furthermore, how can we talk of wholeness in nature when nature is itself chopped up into divisions of time? Or is time an illusion? Do we live in a block universe where time is static and unchanging? If so, the whole process paradigm is misleading. What principle of science might suggest a way out of these dilemmas? These questions are answered by CI.

3. Cosmic Immanence and the “Rainbow Universe”

First of all, the so-called “block” universe, despite its compatibility with general relativity theory, has a serious problem insofar as thermodynamics indicates a dynamic and changing universe with a distinct temporal directionality. Modern physics reveals “an arrow of time that points from the past to the future, ruining the neat symmetry of the block universe” (Al-Khali 2020, p. 81). Whatever else may be said of general relativity theory, it has not disposed of time. Physics at least says that process thought is still very much alive and well. However, other dilemmas remain.

Boodin argues that CI “is the Hercules which can rescue direct experience from the onslaughts of epistemologists” (Boodin 1934a, p. 166). Boodin points out that the brain is more than a collection of neurons but also represents a whole unit of activity as a field, an idea that finds support in modern neuroscience with significant non-reductionist implications (Eccles 1989, p. 189; Lancaster 2011; Sheldrake 2012, pp. 262–63; Bhadra 2019; Mocombe 2021). A parallel is found in physics and was noted by Schrödinger. Here, Boodin tries to enlist the Michelson–Morley experiment on light as an example of our immediate perceptions of distant light, but this is a dated example since all that experiment achieved was to help to discredit the old æther theory. A better example is the concept in physics of entanglement, in which, in the quantum state, everything is “entangled” in the whole universe. When a quantum system is isolated from the environment, it is said to be entangled; however, when it is placed back into context with the environment, we have
decoherence. Both, of course, are closely related, and collectively they demonstrate that localization itself cannot be fully measured. Bernard d’Espagnat explains the following:

Obviously this view [of entanglement and decoherence] is quite the opposite of the classical, commonsense one that objects truly have the shapes and position we see, and that they have them “by themselves”, quite independently of the limitations of our own aptitudes, as well as of the size of the Universe or anything else. Were some simile requested, the best one would probably consist in comparing the quantum objects to rainbows. If you are driving, you see the rainbow moving. If you stop it stops. If you start again, so does the rainbow. In other words, its properties partly depend on you. Taken literally, quantum physics, when thought of as universal, imparts to all objects such a status relative to the sentient beings that we are. (d’Espagnat 2006, p. 19)

Boodin was right to call upon Schrödinger in support of CI, but not because of the Michelson–Morley experiment; instead it is entanglement, always forcefully argued by Schrödinger, that “achieves the feat of reconciling the universal character of the laws [of quantum mechanics] with a nonreductionist world view, in which our human way of conceiving things has a crucial role in determining what we finally perceive” (d’Espagnat 2006, p. 195). Again relying on physics, Boodin puts a finer point on it by saying “The duality of causal communication and CI is only another phase of the duality of particular and wave—a duality which seems to be pervasive in nature. The upshot of this discussion is that science furnishes a justification in terms of cosmic structure for our direct consciousness of reality” (Boodin 1934a, p. 167).

In addition, CI not only demonstrates cosmic wholeness but, in some senses, absolute simultaneity. Boodin correctly notes, for example, Bohr’s observation that an electron’s orbital shift is instantaneous. Boodin argues, “Science was confronted with a critical instance of absolute simultaneity in nature, and if such simultaneity can exist on a small scale, it can exist on a large scale. A new conception of the electron was called for and this resulted in the wave-mechanics of Schrödinger. As a wave an electron may be immanent in various orbits, and two or more electrons may be immanent in the same orbit, though not functioning in the same way” (Boodin 1934a, p. 165). Thus, certain cosmic properties appear to be immanent throughout in a literal sense, others in a relative sense. But the general rejection of absolute simultaneity by relativity theory poses a problem for process theists. Hartshorne’s early affirmation of cosmic simultaneity seems at first blush to be an unscientific metaphysical position. Nevertheless, his later shift away from absolute simultaneity created problems in which God’s knowledge of our being is undermined, a pervasive divine essence is called into question, the ontological argument is invalidated, and panentheism requires abandonment or at least revision. These arguments by Frederic F. Fost may be questionable. For example, whether mutual immanence and cosmic simultaneity are correlative is not necessarily a given, and the mutual immanence of what Whitehead would call “contemporary occasions” need not assume being as becoming as a requisite for divine omniscience (Reeves 1975, p. 135). These sorts of difficulties suggest that the impossibility of absolute simultaneity based upon the current understanding of relativity has invalidated process theology (Fitzgerald 1972). However, these assessments were written some fifty years ago and physics has changed. Although Einstein rejected absolute simultaneity, there is strong evidence both from metaphysics and physics of its return (Tooley 2008; Selleri 2010; Styrman 2018). In fact, it has been suggested that the discrimination of absolute synchronizations as per Einstein permits special relativity to reinstate the conservation of simultaneity without denying relativistic effects (Spavieri and Gaarder Haug 2019). Therefore, we can have both. Boodin’s commitment to absolute simultaneity in order to establish immanence on the cosmic level and the relativistic, non-reductionist “rainbow universe” seems scientifically and metaphysically tenable.

Building out his concept of CI, Boodin suggests “a cosmic formative field, immanent throughout the multiple processes of the universe—not a static field but a guiding field which takes account of the conditions of nature—temperature, density, pressure, complexity,
motion and other energy conditions” (Boodin 1943b, p. 9). This is, at its highest levels, a field of “genius” (for want of a better word). Explaining further, “The cosmos as a whole is immanent, in some respects, in its various parts and transactions. It is because the structure of the cosmos—its whole field—is immanent, spatially and temporally, and because all the processes of nature are guided by this field that there is ‘measure and number’ in nature, to use Plato’s expression” (Boodin 1943a, p. 228). This so-called “genius” (might also be called the Ought, which gives direction and unity to the interlocking parts of the dynamic cosmic whole) (Boodin 1916, pp. 356–57). This is stated again and again throughout Boodin’s career, even in papers being prepared at his death declaring that the principle of CI cannot be ignored because it makes space, time, and motion intelligible and is, therefore, an eternal universal expression of cosmic structure—the sub specie æternitatis (Boodin 1957, p. 100).

How does this relate to God? Here, two points must be made. First of all, God is transcendent and immanent. Immanence is a natural feature of pervasiveness and control; it is something beyond and above nature and its evolution. Panentheism succeeds in reconciling these two where pantheism fails. The linkage of the divine to the physical world can be seen in social institutions, aesthetics, ethical values, and even scientific hypotheses and philosophical systems, all of which are as much “immanent in the genius of nature as are the patterns of atoms, molecules and crystals or the forms of plant and animal life” (Boodin 1934b, pp. 42, 147). Although omnipresent, God is not equally effective due to the limitations of the finite. Like the dynamic nature of CI, creation is a living process. God is not a collection of parts; God exists in a primordial state of absolute perfection and works with all creatures in the context of genuine freedom. In that sense, God is transcendent. However, God’s more significant aspect for human beings is in divine immanence, “present to-and-in all finite individuals to guide, to heal, to transform into beauty, as far as the individual permits,” which can lead to salvation in order to incarnate the intention of God. We can never fully understand or appreciate this; we do better to admit our limitations in this life and simply but earnestly “pray for light. This confession does more honor to God than a pretended wisdom” (Boodin 1934b, pp. 162–63). In the second place, God’s relationship to CI must remain true to panentheism, a word not explicitly used by Boodin but nonetheless expressed by him in all his theological formulations.

In the final analysis, we can say that CI is the operative and most compelling feature of functional realism. It is a pervasive immaterial field which works by and through the “space-time pluralism of nature” but with a status independent of it—structure conditioned by empirical variables furnishing the guiding genius of the universe (Boodin 1957, p. 101). This is guiding, no doubt, toward the nature of God—of goodness, truth, and beauty. There is, on the whole, “a creative interaction of fields within a pluralistic world” fueled constructively by CI and, nevertheless, “a world of contingencies [brought about by nature itself and by creaturely freedom] where the parts may fail and often do fail of adjustment, with consequent tragedy” (Boodin 1957, p. 155). Yes, tragedy. Boodin succumbs to no Pollyannish delusions, recognizing clearly that it is the fire of tragedy that tempers the steel of progress. Why? Because “A God who does not feel pain could feel no compassion, the most precious attribute of God. Without sorrow heaven’s harmony would be flat and insipid. God is both ‘the white radiance of eternity’ and the crimson suffering of light in this temporal world. . . . We must abandon our attempts to picture God, and accept the mystery of an eternal God living the tragic life of time, just as science accepts the mystery of light as being both a particle and a wave—though it cannot picture such duality—because experience requires both” (Boodin 1934b, pp. 198–99). Paul knew that all creation was “subjected to futility” and awaited the hope of rebirth into glory with a loving God (Rom. 8:20–23). Even before giving it a name, Boodin described CI in the context of the empirical world—the world of sense—“an island floating in the larger world of spiritual forces and deriving its direction and significance from it.” CI is this principal force. We may seem to live in a world of unbridled chance and caprice a “mad dance of chance”—where God does indeed play dice—but “We are not duped when we believe that the dice of the universe are
loaded for right and reason” (Boodin 1915b, p. 76). The lead (or, better put in this case, the pure gold) in those dice is CI.

Although CI may be an immaterial force, Boodin formulates it as more than a mere abstraction. This is “the Ought” (the age-old moral and ethical imperatives given across time and space almost instinctively raised to ontological proportions). The poet–philosopher believes we rise to it in creative and appreciative beauty; we strive for it in seeking truth whether in nature’s call to the numinous or in everyday life, and the pursuit of that which is beneficial for oneself and one’s associates—goodness in all its forms—is ubiquitous. These do not arise out of blind chance but out of a broader teleological impulse. It is rather akin to what one Christian apologist has called (also capitalized to denote ontological significance) “The Moral Law” (Lewis 1952 2001, pp. 9–32 passim). The desire for these things is so omnipresent that their assumption is taken for granted, and we seem to know almost immediately when something or someone is out of sync with it. Of course, CI is more than just a moral imperative, to continue Boodin’s metaphor of CI as “the voice of the universe,” it is also (like all voices) made intelligible in words, hence John’s apt association of the Logos (Word) with Christ’s divinity (John 1:1–18). Remove CI altogether and, theologically speaking, you would have the clouding of these discernments and the introduction of chaos, surely something akin to Hell.

This alone cannot end our discussion of CI. To do so would leave out one of its most significant aspects, the context through which it touches, guides, and directs us most immediately, namely, through society and social organization. Here, it must be explained that CI surely operates on the personal level but not only at that level because the evolution of nature itself has cosmic implications for the organization of society. When individual minds are synthesized into new wholes with new properties, we have, in Boodin’s phrase, the social mind. A book by that title lays out Boodin’s social thought in detail.3

4. “No Man Liveth Unto Himself”

Boodin repeatedly uses Romans 14:7 almost as a mantra for his social theology (Boodin 1916, p. 200; 1934b, p. 221; 1939, p. 584). This broadens to include his whole metaphysical scheme, as follows: “Within the cosmic whole no part liveth nor dieth unto itself, but it lives and dies in obedience to the life and order of the whole” (Boodin 1925, p. 41). The history of Christianity has been primarily expressed socially—through the church, through the community, through commitment to the social welfare. The commandment, of which there is none higher according to Christ, to love one’s neighbor as oneself is essentially a social imperative (Matt. 22:39–40; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27). And, similarly, the commandment to love one another is at the same time a social witness to the power of the Christian message. As Christ said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34–35 [ESV]).

As strong as the social message of Christianity has been through the ages, the rise of Protestantism saw a distinctive shift in emphasis towards individualism. This, in fact, became the primary doctrine of the Lutheran and Reformed churches. It is no coincidence that this coincided with the rise of capitalism in western Europe. Today, the effects of this shift have been profound, to the point that “Too often people think about themselves as individuals—as rugged individuals, self-made people, islands in the sea. The individualism of western society has reinforced this understanding of people, distancing themselves, including Christians, from one another. Yet in the history of the world, as well as church history, individualism is relatively new; that is, the notion that people are self-reliant and that they should be free to act, regardless of collective or social relations. Scripture as well as most of church history gives a different perspective” (Thorsen 2020, p. 72). However, the Reformation changed this. And, although Max Weber’s insistence that Calvinism promoted what is commonly called “the Protestant work ethic” needs considerable revision, the best and most balanced critic admits that “The period of the capitalistic revolution roughly parallels that of the Reformation. Both came to a head in the sixteenth century, though both
were being prepared for earlier and both have been unfolding their consequences through all the centuries since. Both were manifestations of a new individualism” (Harkness 1931, p. 192). Today we are so conditioned to see our relationship with God, and even salvation itself, as an individual affair that to speak of “the social mind” and of “social immortality” as Boodin does seems strange. It is doubtful that the Christians of early Rome or even the Middle Ages would have viewed it that way. Nor should we today. “Whatever it means to reflect God’s image, it probably involves more than what people are individually. Since Scripture says that both men and women were created in the image of God, then no single individual necessarily reflects all of it” (Thorsen 2020, p. 70).

Boodin seeks to reintroduce the social perspective back into Christianity, calling so-called” rugged individualism” merely a slogan for “the exploiters of society” (Boodin 1939, p. 428). Instead we are invited—perhaps, better stated, lured—to mutual cooperation through “a genuine social unity, distinguishable from what we call the unity of individual experience, and if not more real, at least more inclusive than this. The latter may be considered from this point of view as a group of constant traits which we identify in a variety of social situations” (Boodin 1939, pp. 139–40). The social mind is really an intersection of many overlapping minds that form dynamic “centers of initiative”—the Weltgeist—of “our common impulse forward, our common faith in the future, our common willingness to risk” that can either raise us to higher standards or lower us to communal baseness and corruption; it is the “law of loyalty” that hopefully draws us to “the law of critical creativeness” (Boodin 1939, p. 189). For Boodin, creativity is, as Whitehead supposed, primordial. But it is not, as Whitehead suggested, an ultimate, a “universal of universals.” Rather, we must follow C. S. Peirce, who talked about the habits of nature. Not everything in nature demonstrates creation; a great many things are repetitious and contingent. Even much that happens in an organism is mechanical, the product of stasis (Boodin 1957, p. 8). Instead, creativity or creativeness should be thought of as more than mere novelty; it should be thought of as something that adds significant meaning and value to the world—indeed, creativity illuminates the cosmic Ought. Therefore, Boodin is dismissive of Bergson’s general concept of creativeness; nature is not “cumulatively creative,” the vast majority of inorganic nature knows no such phenomenon (Boodin 1957, p. 10). Creativity is a formative idea that seeks social expression. The importance of creativity is that we are summoned cooperatively to meet our highest needs (Boodin 1939, p. 290). Indeed “the genius of the universe works toward stimulating creators and toward dictating one route of creation.” In essence, “the relation of God to the world is a creative relation. God, present in everything and always, cooperates to create a suitable pattern as the individual responsiveness and capacity permit, even as the artist creates the pattern suitable to his medium. Here lies the significance of grace, for in creating we are more than we are and ‘are wiser than we know’” (Boodin 1934b, pp. 152, 155).

And what is true of the individual is true of the society to which they belong. How all these contrasting social interests are ultimately mediated is a question only God can answer. Indeed, “Mysticism and criticism are exclusive as attitudes but they must both be present as forms of realization of a creative personality . . . the life of reason needs its mystical moments” (Boodin 1939, p. 222). We may, therefore, leave the issue of cosmic social ordering to the mystery of God, understanding that however it is so structured it will be to favor the good, the true, and the beautiful. All else will be excluded.

There can be little doubt, however, that we are social creatures. Our lives would be a solipsistic nightmare were it not for the many social contexts in which we find ourselves. Imagine a life without them and you have a vision of Hell. Sarte’s character Garcin in the play No Exit exclaims that “hell is other people.” This is patently wrong; Hell is no other people. It is a place of zeros—zero, interaction, zero communication, zero recognition, zero interest. The torment of hell is the complete absence of our social being, the severing of our social selves. It is to be thoroughly immersed in loneliness and indifference forever (Collins 1989). Therefore, ourselves and our souls need society.
How does Boodin’s social theology deal with the soul? His answer substitutes “for the old conception of the soul as being an indivisible, localized atom, the conception of a field of energy with its vague penumbral edges or spreadings and its more or less focalized and shifting center of activity, and we shall have no intellectual obstacle to dealing with our social intuitions” (Boodin 1916, p. 197). Boodin agrees with pragmatist Addison Webster Moore that there is no completely “private consciousness,” for it arises out of a social matrix. In other words, “it must always be a function of the whole social situation of which it is born. It is never to be regarded as wholly or merely the function of an individual mind or soul or of a single organism or brain. It is always a readjustment within a social situation” (Boodin 1939, p. 138). Boodin emphasizes that the social mind is the product of creative synthesis, a point missed by many of his critics (Boodin 1939, p. 154). This creative synthesis of the individual and the social leads ineluctably to the concept of “the social soul.” Here, Royce’s concept of loyalty becomes important because “spontaneous loyalty” gives us insight into a larger reality; it can be exhibited in the family and its clannish extensions, the community, the class, the nation, the church, and various cultural identities. It is an interlacing and overlapping of souls. With the growth of a common cause and common interests, the beloved community is formed, “the community soul” (Boodin 1939, p. 172). We must not think of this as the social soul versus the individual soul; rather, we should consider it as an integration of both. Each generic social situation has a unique mind that is distinct to it and is comprised of individuals, with their creative and persistent lives being conditioned by the social contexts into which they have been born and chosen to participate in. Indeed, individual conduct is painted, however drably or colorfully, on the canvas of the social mind in which it acts and is acted upon; it is here where we find our cumulative life, as they interpenetrate one another. In this sense, there is not one social unity but many for any one individual (Boodin 1939, pp. 175–76). Therefore, it can be readily appreciated that, in the final analysis, objective and subjective immortality is not an either/or situation but one in which we must “jealously guard” our social situation because it is made up of individual souls.

In the broader sense, the question of immortality for process theists has been complex. Whitehead equivocates on the subject. Viewing the soul not as a distinct substance but as an ordered set of “occasions,” objective immortality (immortality existing in the mind of God) is mostly emphasized (Whitehead [1929] 1978, pp. 56–245 passim). But Whitehead admits that “objective immortality within the temporal world does not solve the problem set by the penetration of the finer religious intuition. ‘Everlastingness’ has been lost; and the ‘everlastingness’ is the content of that vision upon which the finer religions are built—the ‘many’ absorbed everlastingly in the final unity” (Whitehead [1929] 1978, p. 347). Then, the door to subjective immortality is suggestively opened by saying that, “In everlastingness, immediacy is reconciled with objective immortality” (Whitehead [1929] 1978, p. 351). Because of Whitehead’s dipolar nature of God as primordial and consequential, “there is no loss, no obstruction. The world is felt in unison of immediacy” (Whitehead [1929] 1978, p. 346). In other words, nothing is lost to God. “God is to be conceived as one and as many in the converse sense in which the World is to be conceived as many and as one... [It is] the story of the dynamic effort of the World passing into everlasting unity, and of the static majesty of God’s vision, accomplishing its purpose of completion by absorption of the World’s multiplicity of effort” (Whitehead [1929] 1978, p. 349). Charles Hartshorne is more adamant on the matter. For him, objective immortality is the only kind of immortality we can have because immortality is a divine trait; we cannot turn it into a means to our own ends by subjectivizing it. But many process theists—Marjorie Suchocki, David Ray Griffin, John B. Cobb Jr., Joseph A. Bracken—have made room for subjective immortality within their process-based theologies. Boodin may be added to these because, for him, as we have seen, the individual (subjective) and the social (objective) mind are inextricably intertwined. To reiterate, for Boodin, social immortality entails no loss of immortality for the individual, as he states: “To live in this larger subconscious social mind, as a genuine, vital, inspiring part of its faith and movement and to be able to say in supreme renunciation, not I but
the social mind liveth in me, this is indeed to save one’s soul, to count eternally. And in the infinite age, God only knows which is the more significant in the developing spiritual community where to live is to lose oneself, to be master is to minister. After all what will a name mean in a hundred thousand years?” (Boodin 1939, p. 584).

Whatever immortality may be, it exists within a larger metaphysical context, and, for Boodin the essential glue or broth of it all is found in CI. CI is the genius by which God operates, and it suffuses everything and everyone from the stars and galaxies to individual persons. It is not God nor a substance of God—Boodin was as wary of substance as Whitehead—it is an omnipresent attribute, limited only by the freedom instilled within creation itself, supremely manifested by that which is most in the image of God—ourselves. It is not seen and measured, it is heard as the heart listens and felt as the spirit is moved. Why we have heard so little about CI from classical theology probably has much to do with confusion over the attributes of God.

5. Boodin, Process Thought and Whitehead

God as eternal and unchanging standing stiff and statuesque—Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover—before all creation in its omnipotence and omniscience has become the standard fare of classical theology. If God is pictured, the image is often anthropomorphic and usually that of a divine potentate or royal monarch. The sources of these attributes come from Augustine and were carried forward by the Aristotelianism of Thomas Aquinas. It was Augustine, in particular, “the authoritative interpreter of Rome”, who derived divine omnipotence from the “will-to-power by the Roman state”, and its collapse suggested a new will-to-power not in the state but in the Church, the new City of God (Boodin 1934c, pp. 437–42).

No less an informed scientist/theologian than John Polkinghorne shows the difficulty in understanding process thought turned towards God. Citing Peter Baelz requiring an eternal fount of love along with its continuing expression (what process theist has suggested anything less!), Polkinghorne rejects Hartshorne’s proposed God of pure becoming because his reliance upon the “event-dominated metaphysic of Whitehead is almost bound to lead to such a lopsided stance” (Polkinghorne 1989, p. 80). However, a process-based God living in free relationship with all creation must be a “becoming” God, a God who feels every joy and suffers every pain of creation. As Boodin observed, “All our thinking and searching moves in God—is God’s becoming conscious of Himself in us” (Boodin [1943] 2024, p. 68).

In fact, for Boodin there are three factors in creation: structure, space, and becoming (Boodin 1934c, pp. 309–10). God, in effect, cooperates with humankind, and cooperation implies participation, i.e., as we change and “become,” so too must God by interacting with creatures and creation. “God is not static and immutable, but enters sympathetically into our situations” (Boodin 1957, p. 30). If God is the same always and everywhere (as surely God’s primordial nature must be so), then we must consider God’s consequential nature, which may not be “I am what I am” but the preferred rendering of Exodus 3:14, “I will be what I will be” (ESV). In the final analysis, the omnipotent and omniscient God of classical theology is the understandable but misguided exemplification of Augustinian experience and the “otherness” and separation of God from creation is an Aristotelian byproduct of Thomistic theology.

While Boodin was in general agreement with Whitehead on these issues, he was not uncritical of Whiteheadian metaphysics. To understand the nature of these objections it is necessary to step back and look at Whitehead’s development and ideas. His career may be viewed in the following three distinct phases: the first is the Cambridge period from 1887 to 1910, marked by work in mathematics and culminating in his major treatise with Bertrand Russell, their three-volume *Principia Mathematica* (1910–1913); the second, from 1910 to 1924, was the London period when he concentrated on the philosophy of science by a close examination of Einstein’s relativity theory and physics generally; finally, 1924 to his death in 1947 marked the Harvard years, where the mathematician-turned-philosopher shifted to metaphysics and wrote his process-based magnum opus, *Process and Reality*.
Thus, Whitehead may be considered a mathematician-turned-philosopher who became a philosopher-turned-metaphysician. Whitehead’s metaphysics was Boodin’s chief interest, which was identified with preformation, “the notion that evolutionary development is latent in the process so that later forms and stages are really an unfolding or making explicit in what is already present in the earlier stages of the same history” or “as imminent in history from the beginning” (Boodin 1934c, pp. 13, 275). Its greatest proponent in the history of philosophy is found in the ninth century Irish neoplatonist Scotus Eriugena (sometimes spelled Eriugena). Of course, Whitehead represents a vast modernization of preformation under the rubric of process thought. Whitehead called his system a philosophy of organism. The cosmic is not comprised of static substances but of “events” and “occasions” which form a dynamic whole of process. It is actually an event-based ontology—Whitehead’s panexperientialism. The tiniest processes are “actual occasions” or “actual entities”—“drops of experience”—that make up nature. These form “actual entities” that come into being and vanish; these are a “concrescence” that is made up of an “initial subjective aim.” An entity “prehends” other actual entities as parts to wholes or, in other words, as “objective datum” and as a “subjective form” that is a “nexus” for the actual world of the occasion.

An entity’s prehension is “an eternal object,” a metaphysical potential existing in the mind of God that has already been mentioned in Section 2. These prehensions can be subdivided into positive or negative, physical or conceptual, and different hybrid forms. Actual entities are determined by past prehensions (efficient causation) and also are self-determined to varying degrees by their subjective aims (a kind of final causation or cosmic teleology). This is the skeletal form of Whitehead’s cosmic vision. The many quotation marks are intentionally inserted to show the very special nomenclature he employs; so special, in fact, that a whole book unpacking this gallimaufry of special usages and meanings has been issued in John B. Cobb Jr.’s Whitehead Wordbook (2015).

But is all this necessary? This influential but admittedly difficult metaphysical construct forced Boodin to raise four principal objections. First, the importance of experience is acceptable (no student of William James would think otherwise), but not Whitehead’s brand of experience on steroids, panexperientialism. Boodin’s extended comment on this aspect of Whitehead is illuminating:

It has no meaning to say that a stone has experience of the ground upon which it rests or that chemical elements have experience of the synthesis or analysis which they undergo. I cannot, therefore, accept A. N. Whitehead’s generalization: ‘The direct evidence as to the connectedness of one’s immediate present occasion of experience with one’s immediately past occasions can be validly used to suggest categories applying to the connectedness of all occasions in nature.’ I am obliged to translate Whitehead’s statement into our common vernacular. We are organisms characterized by mnemonic causation. By habit and memory we conserve our behavior in such a way that we can refer backward to events which are no longer perceptually present and, since we are conative organisms, having instincts and desires, we can by means of imagination anticipate future events. Can we generalize from our experience of nature to a similar connectedness in nature’s activities everywhere? … The trick lies in the phrase, ‘occasion of experience.’ There are occasions of experiencing or having experience of events acting upon our organism. Experience is not a substantive. There are no occasions of experience. There is no continuum of experience. Whether there is a continuum of experiencing is another question. We have a succession of occasions of experiencing events. And we have experience of a great variety of simultaneous events. But whether, temporally or spatially, we can prove a continuum, in either a mathematical or metaphysical sense, is doubtful. The quantum character of nature makes such a supposition improbable. Whitehead implies the substantival conception of experience in his grades of ‘occasions of experience’ of which human nature is an extreme instance. We can grade individuals on some basis, such as complexity. But individuals are not occasions of experience but occasions of experiencing other individuals.
The grades are not based on the experiencing but on the character of the individuals. There is no stuff of experience out of which individuals are constituted. Experiencing is a relation, not a substantive. It is the substantival conception of experience which makes the relation of experience to its world so mysterious for Whitehead: ‘The world within experience is identical with the world beyond experience, the occasion of experience is within the world and the world is within the occasion. The categories have to elucidate this paradox of the connectedness of things: the many things, the one world without and within.’ The paradox is of Whitehead’s own making. It disappears if we view experience as relational or prepositional (to use J. Loewenberg’s expression) instead of as substantival. We, as organisms, with mnemonic causation, have experience of a variety of things under a variety of conditions. The world is in our experience in the sense that the world enters into relation to our organisms; or, conversely, that our organism establishes relations to the world in the way of perception and interpretation. In this sense, we can say that the structure of the world becomes immanent in our organism and the structure of our organism becomes immanent in the world as selected by our interest. (Boodin 1943c, pp. 701–2)

These criticisms of Boodin’s are significant and would potentially unravel Whitehead’s entire cosmological metaphysic.

Boodin’s second objection regards Whitehead’s vast penchant for generalization, an obsession that leads him into an unwarranted mysticism. Boodin preferred his poetics tethered to the ground: “Nature reveals itself in specificities. We can not generalize from a specific relation to nature in general. Experiencing is a specific relation and has no meaning when the specific conditions are lacking” (Boodin 1943c, p. 703). This Whiteheadian generalization speaks to an inclination towards monism, but “dualism on the epistemological level is inescapable, so long as we are trying to cognize our world. There must always be the effort to assimilate the evidence of the larger world into the context of our interpretation. And that effort will always persist so long as we think about our world. The only way to transcend thinking is mysticism, into which F. H. Bradley finally found an escape; and, as I understand Whitehead, he agrees with Bradley’s final solution. If I have used Whitehead as a type in discussing the concept of experience, it is because he is the most influential representative at present of the view which I am combatting” (Boodin 1943c, p. 704).

Third, Boodin has little patience with Whitehead’s abstractions, saying that “his method of extensive abstraction, assumes . . . a general homogeneous extension and adds a general homogeneous duration, having in mind, I suppose, Newton’s uniform flow of time. By introducing the conception of container and contained, he [Whitehead] can show that any extension contains extensions and any duration contains durations. You can choose a smaller and smaller extension or duration within the larger extension or duration and thus derive the conception of a point or of an instant, which need not be infinitesimal but is merely the convenient stopping place in your division—different for different purposes. You can, then, hyphenate the point and the instant into point-instant, if you deal with measurements involving space-time. It is all very clear, if you start with certain abstractions of extension and duration. In fact, duration is no more a continuous, homogeneous entity than extension. Duration, like extension, is an adjective. In nature different processes have different durations, under varying conditions. Duration is just as Riemannian or variable as extension. In either case, a general extension or duration is a fiction. Whatever value Whitehead’s method of extensive abstraction may have in mathematics, it has no relevance to metaphysics” (Boodin 1943c, p. 712).

Deeper than the first three, Boodin’s fourth objection lies in the field from which Whitehead came. Inspired by Gottlob Frege, Whitehead and Russell’s brave but abortive attempt to sail mathematics securely into logic’s harbor seems to run aground on Gödel’s incompleteness theorems and some difficulties attending the analytic/synthetic distinction, all of which are beyond the scope of this essay. But this undoubtedly lurked in the back of Boodin’s mind when—before the Carnap–Quine debate—he complained, “My quarrel
is with mathematicizing philosophers who confuse the fictions, altogether legitimate in mathematics, with physics or metaphysics” (Boodin 1943c, p. 710).

Taken altogether, Boodin’s general distaste for Whiteheadian metaphysics came from the sheer density and obscurity of it all. In that, he was not alone. If Whitehead’s thought is impenetrably difficult in print, he was no less so in public. The 1927 Gifford Lecturer, physicist/astronomer Arthur Eddington, was tremendously popular, packing the house with an audience of 600. A few months later, Whitehead began presenting what would become his book, Process and Reality. His lectures were so murky and obscure that the audience soon shrank to under a dozen, making the chair of the lecture, distinguished mathematician Edmund Taylor Whittaker, suspect (had he not known better) that an impostor had inserted himself into the proceedings (Lowe 1985–1990, vol. 2, p. 250).

Of course, this was not the final verdict on Whitehead. He gained quite a following by sending out Harvard graduates to spread his metaphysical gospel, which was appreciably furthered with his University of Chicago disciple Charles Hartshorne’s call to process theology’s “great commission.” But this begs the question, are the anfractuous musings of Process and Reality the only way to arrive at process thought? This is clearly not the case if we define process thought and its theistic twin by the seven process principles that opened this essay. Put another way, it is possible to reach the fundamentals of process theology through Boodin as readily and perhaps more easily than Whitehead. Boodin was right that his Harvard colleague gave the philosophers much to keep them busy and employed, and this meant that it remained much studied and discussed for years to come. We need not require creativity as an ultimate for a process God; CI, as we have seen, works as well.

While we may not need a Whiteheadian interpreter to subscribe to process thought, the related question of relevance is, does Boodin provide sufficient philosophical and metaphysical infrastructure to make his ideas work? This is provided in the concept of CI; remember it is called “the Hercules” that is able to extricate direct experience from the clutches of the epistemologists [i.e., Whitehead?]. Stated more directly, he said, “we are obliged to take account of the cosmic architect, the guiding cosmic field which reveals itself in the whole process. We are obliged to view evolution not only horizontally as a temporal series of levels but also vertically from the point of view of the guidance by the cosmic space–time whole which, while transcending nature, viewed as parts, is immanent in the process as a whole… You cannot use categories of higher levels such as feeling and soul to characterize levels of matter. It is equally a mistake to suppose there is no community in nature. The lower levels are sensitive to the higher and vice versa. There is a community through interaction and support” (Boodin 1957, p. 124).

We might substitute community here for society, and, in fairness to Whitehead, it should be said that societies are also part of his metaphysical scheme. Boodin’s social theology has already been discussed, but to what extent do either of them relate societies/communities to the larger cosmic whole? Can societies form systems? Of course, societies are systems. Boodin devoted an entire chapter (chapter six) to social systems in The Social Mind. For Boodin, social systems are energy relations and must be described as such; their coherence is found not in that of a mechanical system. There is a dynamic interaction between variation, selection, and adaptation in all social evolution. It is teleological in the sense of striving for creative harmony. But, even cosmically speaking, there is not just one evolution but, in fact, “an infinite number of evolutions and devolutions at various stages; and these interact. They interstimulate one another as the generations in human society interstimulate one another” (Boodin 1957, p. 104). Elsewhere, he says “there is a system of factors which constitute the program of a new life” but it is an order not of geometry but, like music, an order of time (Boodin 1957, p. 141). “Nature is a great symphony with various movements synchronized into a harmonic whole” (Boodin 1934b, p. 208). If ever there was a system, it is this.

Whitehead’s concept of society seems less developed and more vaguely ordered to systems. At one point, he suggests provocatively that “the notion of a ‘Society,’ as here employed, [is] that a set of mutually contemporary occasions cannot form a complete
society. For the genetic conditions cannot be satisfied by such a set of contemporaries. Of course a set of contemporaries may belong to a society. But the society, as such, must involve antecedents and subsequents. In other words, a society must exhibit the peculiar quality of endurance. The real actual things that endure are all societies” (Whitehead [1933] 1967, p. 204). Unfortunately, there is no elaboration on this point. Boodin says much the same with, as we have seen, much more emphasis upon the interrelationship between objective and subjective immortals in a social context (Boodin 1915a). But do either of these positions solve the problem of the one and the many? Jesuit scholar and process theologian Joseph A. Bracken says no. A new synthesis is needed.

6. A New Synthesis

The problem for both Boodin and Whitehead rests in their relationship between a singular God and the societies to which they allude (Bracken 2015). Although Boodin’s CI clears away much of Whitehead’s metaphysical baggage, their problems are the same in the sense that there is no relationship to the singular Godhead. In effect they posit a “block God” ill-fitted to the dynamic “life systems” that form the cosmic whole. This block God is as bad as the block universe mentioned earlier. Whitehead did not speak of the Trinity; Boodin effectively rejected it referring to it as a “confused and antiquated concept” (Boodin [1943] 2024, pp. 82–83). They thereby both become victims of their own block God. Bracken provides a corrective that effectively rescues both. If societies are so important, God must exhibit a communitarian nature which is achieved through God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Bracken cites Whitehead on the permanence of societies (Bracken 1991, p. 45) but admits that he failed to develop this further. Harkening to Richard of St. Victor, Bracken uses the social model of the Trinity to brilliantly fill in this gap in process thought (Bracken 2008, pp. 21–22). For Bracken, community life is realized not in bland uniformity but in “dynamic, ever-changing unity-in-difference” like the three persons of the Trinity (Bracken 2008, p. 72). Furthermore, it is incompatible with Hartshorne’s “God as the ‘soul’ of the world” with the world being the “body of God” because this suggests a divine dependence upon the world, robbing God of the freedom to create or not create and establishing some existential need on God’s part rather than the more Scriptural creation out of overflowing love (Bracken 2008, p. 79). Hartshorne’s God-as-world-soul seems to make for an anemic primordial nature. Bracken’s more explicitly developed open-ended systems approach avoids this. The proposal is for “a new model or paradigm for the relation between the One and the Many in which the Many through their dynamic interrelation from moment to moment co-produce the reality of the One as a higher-order corporate system or mode of operation for themselves as its participants and/or constituent parts” (Bracken 2014, p. 139). Stated succinctly, it is the Many conditioning the One and the One conditioning the Many (Bracken 2015).

As compelling as Bracken’s trinitarian systems-based approach is, it is unfortunate that this otherwise insightful Jesuit priest never linked it to Bertalanffy’s GST. While there is little theological about Bertalanffy’s thought, he exhibited many affinities with Whitehead and Boodin’s thought. He was adamantly opposed to reductionism, questioned the positivist assumptions of neo-Darwinism, and was a staunch and vocal opponent of behaviorism. Bertalanffy’s ideas were so commensurate with those of Whitehead that it was found necessary to explain that, at the time of writing Modern Theories of Development (1928), he had been unaware of Whitehead’s organismic philosophy (Davidson 1983, p. 96). Nevertheless, an overview of Bertalanffy’s magnum opus reveals the common threads binding him to Whitehead, Boodin, and process thought. For him, GST is much more than a collection of scientific perspectives and principles; it is a whole philosophy, “a ‘new philosophy of nature,’ contrasting the ‘blind laws of nature’ of the mechanistic world view and the world process [emphasis mine] as a Shakespearean tale told by an idiot, with an organismic outlook of the ‘world as a great organization’” (Bertalanffy 1969, p. xxvii). The common denominator of GST is interaction and dynamism. What the mechanistic, reductionist view of science took away, Bertalanffy seeks to restore. Echoing Whitehead
and Boodin, the systems theorist argues that the “characteristic of modern science that this scheme of isolable units acting in one-way causality have proved to be insufficient. Hence the appearance, in all fields of science, of notions like wholeness, holistic, organismic, gestalt, etc., which all signify that, in the last resort, we must think in terms of systems of elements in mutual interaction.” This invites “notions of teleology and directiveness” back into serious science because they certainly do exist and living organisms cannot be studied or even conceived without “taking into account what variously and rather loosely is called adaptiveness, purposiveness, goal-seeking and the like” (Bertalanffy 1969, p. 45). Even more interestingly, he relies upon Nicholas of Cusa in visioning a new reality, “the coincidentia oppositorum. Discursive thinking always represents only one aspect of ultimate reality, called God in Cusa’s terminology; it can never exhaust its infinite manifoldness” (Bertalanffy 1969, p. 248). Similarly, it is Bracken who calls upon Cusa in a new understanding of “Learned Ignorance,” the “higher-order integration of allegedly opposite realities in the conceptual order” (Bracken 2008, pp. 37–38; Bracken 2014, p. 187). Given these commonalities, the absence of any mention of GST in Bracken’s systems-oriented approach to theology seems all the more baffling.

This is particularly true because Bertalanffy joins process thought in other ways too. Bertalanffy’s rejection of vitalism, for example, forms another common link between Whitehead and especially Boodin. Whitehead said little directly about vitalism, but he was certainly no traditional vitalist, as witnessed in comments like “there is no absolute gap between ‘living’ and ‘nonliving’ societies. For certain purposes, whatever ‘life’ there is in a society may be important; and for other purposes unimportant. . . A ‘living society’ is one which includes some ‘living occasions.’ Thus a society may be more or less ‘living,’ according to the prevalence of it in ‘living occasions’” (Whitehead [1929] 1978, p. 102). Whitehead is an experientialist not a vitalist. Boodin’s objections to vitalism are plainer. For example, he writes, “Vitalism is a protest against the merely mechanical explanation of life, though it is itself scarcely less mechanical. . . Both the mechanist and the vitalist have over-simplified the problem of life. Both have failed, in their artificial experiments, to take account of the factor of time” (Boodin 1934c, pp. 205, 226). Bergson’s élan vital ends up as mechanical and blind as the principles of chemistry, and vitalism’s effort to explain everything succeeds in explaining nothing at all (Boodin 1916, pp. 366–67). As for Driesch’s entelechies, they “seem to have no meaning at all; they are merely duplicates of the selective and prospective tendencies of the process. . . In any case, it is hard to see what we have gained by hypostasizing such tendencies and giving them a Greek name” (Boodin 1916, p. 365). Similarly, Bertalanffy thought that vitalism’s teleological speculations went “beyond the limits of nature science” and were not, in any case, justified on any empirical grounds (Bertalanffy 1969, p. 79). And, on a more positive note, Bertalanffy also joins these process thinkers in reaching back to Heraclitus on “being and becoming” as a great insight (Bertalanffy 1969, p. 247).

All of this suggests that a new synthesis is in order. As already explained, Whitehead is not the only route to process thought, and it would be quite un-Whiteheadian to be so dogmatic on the subject. Whitehead never claimed to be the final word and invited further discussion, revision, and adjustments to his ideas. We might as readily climb the mountain of Ultimates with Boodin, leaving all that panexperientialism behind along with its obfuscating neologisms. The question is less is Whitehead wrong but rather is Whitehead necessary? Readers can make their own assessment, but this essay is an invitation to perhaps accept the easier path of Boodin’s CI.

One final observation needs to be made regarding this invitational synthesis. It is suggested here that Boodin alone will not suffice. An ontology of societies must face a social God, and the only way to do that is to see God as a triune society—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—interconnected in an inseparable unity. This is why Jesuit Joseph A. Bracken’s addition of a society/systems approach is so important. Neither Whitehead nor Boodin have that, but both are amenable to Bracken’s helpful—indeed critical—addition. Here, Bertalanffy’s GST provides a useful strengthening of Bracken’s systems approach. But GST
has within it a fatal flaw. In its effort to realign science along a broader non-reductionist path, it also became too "law-based," too mechanistic in design. It has been noted that Bertalanffy's system "requires an abrupt departure from the almost inadvertent reductionism of GST. Organismic theorists tend to use the 'system-environment' dichotomy in ways which 'overconcretize' the single system (organization) while overgeneralizing its relations with other systems, and without taking into account how those other systems actually function" (Thayer 1972, p. 491). Bertalanffy and many of his followers are collectively too "disparate a group to be labeled as subscribing to a singular point of view. Yet, their search for universals has led them all too quickly to adopt a somewhat deterministic outlook which, combined with their acceptance of such notions and hierarchy and competition as 'laws,' can be dangerous" (Thayer 1972, p. 492). It is hard to disagree that "the GST approach offers us—in the final analysis—the grim pursuit of our own death, and some of the 'laws' it has accepted up to now seem guaranteed to make that prediction come true. Even the old mechanistic approach is better than that, and so we must continue the search for the humanism we cannot find except, perhaps, in process thought" (Thayer 1972, p. 493). This not surprising. It is the natural consequence of Bertalanffy's non-religious nature. Although certain affinities for the subject show up in his dissertation on the mystic pantheist physicist Gustav Fechner, this philosophically inclined scientist was overall a secular man who was more interested in science than metaphysics. Bertalanffy seldom discussed religion, but his wife Maria stated that privately he admitted to "a feeling of something higher, something beyond this world" (qtd. in Davidson 1983, p. 220). That "something" is provided with Bracken's theology. Therefore, here we have a kind of synergy between GST and a social systems-based theology held together by Boodin's CI and Bracken's trinitarian Godhead. The ideas of all three—Boodin, Bertalanffy, and Bracken—are thereby mutually enhanced.

7. Conclusions

So now we have our answer to what CI is and why it matters. It is an attribute of God—the ultimate attribute—that holds everything together in its cosmic genius. It is, in effect, “the Ought” and the Logos of the universe. With CI, we can replace Whitehead's overworked, inkhornish and anfractuous panexperientialism, replacing it with a teleological coherence without any important loss (except perhaps the need for a glossary); it is the application of Occam's razor—pluralitas non est ponenda sine necessitate—to process theology. It matters because it shows an alternative way to process thought in general and, more specifically, to process relational theology. God stands as One in singular majesty, demonstrating a changeless, boundless empathetic love (the primordial nature of the divine) and concomitantly as a triune society of dynamic interactive personalities luring the created societies to it in a context of ever-changing interpenetrating systems (the consequential nature of the divine). Put another way, God's primordial nature is something postulated to understand the world, something above "a dead level of ineffectiveness," at once "infinite, free, complete, eternal, actually deficient"; the consequent nature of God "is subjectively conscious," it is "physical experience derived from the temporal world" and then integrated with the primordial side (Boodin 1934c, pp. 42–43). No wonder it is so hard for us to separate the two. In the end, “God and the World cannot be torn apart” (Boodin 1934c, p. 43). Why? Because in the final analysis, CI must reside in both aspects of God—from God's primordial existence apart from the world and from God's consequent concrescence in the world.

No doubt many process theists will resist leaving Whitehead. He is the product of such painstaking labor and extended study required to understand that, once mastered, it seems steadfastness of the Whiteheadian faith is its only reward. But we must leave simplistic, formulaic equations—e.g., Whitehead = process thought or worse, Process and Reality = process thought—for something as complex as process philosophy behind. Most are wedded to process thought because they have come by way of Bergson, Whitehead, and
Hartshorne. That is all well and good as far as it goes; however, it is mere historiographical and circumstantial dogmatism to insist this is the only way.

Whitehead, every bit the philosopher first and theist a distant second, would have left God almost totally behind had it not been for the last chapter of *Process and Reality*. This is less so for Hartshorne, but process thought in general, which need not be theistic, certainly takes its philosophical predilections from Whitehead. Tertullian’s rhetorical question, “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem, the Academy with the Church?” would have shocked anyone who had read his earlier paean to Christian stoicism *De Anima*. Tertullian’s implicit emphatic “nothing!” was a reflection of his later descent into a morose and misogynistic puritanism that was ably answered by Origen and Augustine, to the relief of every process theist. But Whitehead treaded lightly on Jerusalem and Bergson visited Jerusalem hardly at all, and only then as a “stranger in a strange land” (his purported “conversion” to Catholicism has been exaggerated; he ended his life a cultural if not a religious Jew). In contrast, Royce and Boodin know Athens and Jerusalem equally well, and anyone who reads them comes away knowing both better too. If it is philosophy you are after, by all means Bergson and Whitehead can be your guides; if you want informed inspiration, go to Royce and Boodin.

The perennialist theologian reminds us that there are several—not all—but several paths up the mountain to the summit of God (Cutsinger 2013). Why not several paths to the God of process thought? We need not even be a perennialist to see that, “In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2 [esv]). In the end, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7 [esv]). None other than the prince of process himself said that “The importance of philosophy lies in its sustained effort to make such schemes explicit, and thereby capable of criticism and improvement. . . In philosophical discussion, the merest hint of dogmatic certainty as to finality of statement is an exhibition of folly” (Whitehead [1929] 1978, p. xiv). We should heed his advice.

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### Notes

1 *Holistic* is the more generally accepted usage today, but prior to the 1920s this form was unknown. Because Boodin always preferred *wholistic*, it will be adopted consistently in this essay. Both terms refer to a cosmic order that must be interrelated, the totality of which is greater than the sum of its parts. It is the product of the theories of relativity and quantum physics emerging in the early twentieth century from Albert Einstein, Neils Bohr, Erwin Schrödinger, Werner Heisenberg, and later carried forward by David Bohm. The metaphor of the universe as a machine is replaced by a looking-glass universe where everything mirrors everything else.

2 Whether Bradley may be regarded as an outright mystic is certainly arguable. However, he most assuredly represents the best of the British absolute idealists.

3 What might be called Boodin’s cosmic sociology came together as *The Social Mind* (1939), but it was developed much earlier over time, as early as 1913, with the publication of “The Existence of Social Minds”, then in 1914 with “Cognition and Social Interpretation”, and then a year later with “Value and Social Interpretation” and “Social Immortality”; in 1918, “Social Systems” appeared, and “The Law of Social Participation” came out in 1921. While not an exhaustive list of its predecessors, these represent its main sources; so much so, in fact, that, of the book’s fifteen chapters, only 2, 9, 10, and 13 are new. Because nearly all of Boodin’s social thought is contained in this book, it will (except where noted) be cited consistently for simplicity’s sake rather than the individual original articles of which it is comprised.

4 In *The Social Mind*, Boodin refers to “overlapping interests”. It was an unfortunate alteration from his original “overlapping souls”, which obscures the more important metaphysical message he seeks to impart (Boodin 1913a, p. 29).
Introduced by Bernhard Riemann in 1854, Riemannian geometry is used to study curvatures, angles, and manifolds, giving surface area and volume.

Joseph A. Bracken (1930–2024) was a process philosopher/theologian who, after engaging in theological studies and graduating with a PhD from the University of Freiburg, made important and constructive revisions to Whiteheadian philosophy. His Society and Spirit: A Trinitarian Cosmology (Bracken 1991) offered his first extensive and detailed critique of Whitehead, earning a laudatory foreword from leading process philosopher John B. Cobb Jr. This and other relevant works are listed in the references, though his entire corpus of publications is far too large to include here. For Bracken, the trinitarian God/world connection is the key to understanding process and society in intimate relation.

Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1901–1972) was an Austrian biologist who had a difficult existence under the Nazi regime. His wife Maria recalled copies of his 1930 anti-racist essay The Science of Life and Education being subjected to a Nazi book burning, and the war destroyed everything they owned, including his 15,000-volume library. But the Bertalanffys survived and emigrated, first to London, then to Canada (holding a number of academic positions there), before finally arriving at SUNY in Buffalo.

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