

2-10-2023

The Process Theology of John Elob Boodin

Michael A. Flannery

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/libraries-pw>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

The Process Theology of John Elof Boodin*

©Michael A. Flannery

Abstract: Despite his impeccable academic pedigree, a protégé of Josiah Royce and a friend and student of William James, John Elof Boodin is nearly forgotten today among American philosophers; hence, an essential aspect of his thought lost to history is his contribution to process theology. The leading features of process thought demonstrate Boodin's connections to this unique theology and show it to have been established early on, as early as 1900 and 1904. This places Boodin's writing on process philosophy/theology well *before* Alfred North Whitehead, the putative pioneer in modern process metaphysics, by more than twenty years, and co-extensive with Henri Bergson, who influenced Whitehead. Nevertheless, when Boodin is discussed today, it is usually as an early pragmatist rather than as a process philosopher. The central claim of this essay argues that Boodin is best understood as a pragmatically influenced process theist, one of the first in a modern context. This historiographical revision will permit a better portrayal of process thought by revealing a more nuanced and pluralistic theological landscape beyond the standard Bergsonian/Whiteheadian/Hartshornian triumvirate.

Keywords: process theology; metaphysics; John Elof Boodin; Alfred North Whitehead; Charles Hartshorne; Henri Bergson

I. Introduction

When process philosophy and its theological companion are thought of today, two names come immediately to mind: Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) and Charles Hartshorne (1897-2000). This essay will introduce a “new” and relatively unfamiliar figure into the panoply of process thought, John Elof Boodin (1869-1950). The warrant for this inclusion involves a four-fold process: first, a brief biographical sketch of Boodin will place him in historical context; second, seven key features of process theology will be given; third, Boodin's connections to them will be firmly established; and finally, his place in process historiography will be discussed. This last piece is probably the most interesting and controversial since Henri

*Originally published in [Religions](#) 2023, 14, 238, Special Issue, “New Voices in Philosophical Theology,” Derek A. Michaud, editor. Reissued with minor corrections and revisions.

Bergson (1859-1941) is often regarded as the first to present a version of modern process thought. This requires a careful and nuanced response that will conclude with some of the implications for current process theology.

2. Who Was John Elov Boodin?

Only the essentials of Boodin's life can be given here. He was born on September 14, 1869, to farming parents in the rural Swedish parish of Pjetteryd. Boodin's life started with a bright academic future. After attending several schools there and impressing all his instructors, he eventually traveled on steamer to New York with his older sister Blenda and made his way to Clochester in west central Illinois in the summer of 1887 (Nelson 1987, p. 33). By 1890 he was one of nearly 800,000 Swedish-Americans residing mostly in the Midwest.

Seven years later his scholarly acumen led him to Harvard. Boodin's Harvard years were definitive in shaping his later development. He received his PhD under famed idealist philosopher Josiah Royce (1855-1916) and became influenced by his teacher and friend, the pragmatist William James (1842-1910). Although he adopted a Jamesian pragmatist perspective, he admitted he owed more to Royce than any other philosopher (Nelson 1987, p. 42). Royce's idealist Absolute combined with James's relationally focused radical empiricism to blend with the confessional Lutheranism of his youth, making Boodin well-inclined to climb the process steps toward God. If those devoted Lutheran pastors and Royce set Boodin's eyes heavenward, the difficulties of eking out a living in the stony and stark Småland district of his childhood kept him firmly grounded in the pragmatism of experience. This carried through to the academy. He took his first position at Grinnell College in Iowa; spent nine years at the University of Kansas, and after conflicts with the administration there, spent 1912 to 1913 in "exile" in Cambridge, Massachusetts before securing a position in the fall of 1913 at Carleton College; finally, in 1923 he was invited as a guest lecturer at what was then known as the Southern Branch of the University of California (now UCLA). The "visiting" professor never left this rapidly growing school. After a long and fruitful career, he retired in 1939 but remained professionally active almost to the end of his life from a devastating stroke on November 14, 1950.

Boodin had a prolific scholarly output. He published eight books and nearly sixty peer-reviewed articles, plus a volume of posthumous papers compiled in 1957. Boodin's theology is

presented in three books: *Three Interpretations of the Universe* (1934), *God: A Cosmic Philosophy of Religion* (1934), and *Religion of Tomorrow* (1943). However, his process theology was in evidence well before these, starting with “The Reality of the Ideal With Special Reference to the Religious Ideal” (1900) and *Time and Reality* (1904), the latter a published version of his dissertation submitted in 1899, and a host of publications that continued throughout his life.¹

Boodin amassed an impressive résumé as president of the Western Philosophical Association, an invited lecturer at the Aristotelian Society of London, the University of London, the Psychological Society at Cambridge, the Philosophical Society of Oxford, and elected a permanent member of the prestigious International Congress of Philosophy. However, by the 1960s, the philosophical world had largely passed him by. One spokesman for his generation dismissed Boodin’s ideas as “vague and unwarranted” (Reck 1967, p. 346).

The reasons for Boodin’s obscurity are complex. Although his potentially strongest allies could be found among the small but growing body of process thinkers following Whitehead, he was located far from Whitehead’s Harvard and Hartshorne’s School of Divinity at the University of Chicago, both of whom surrounded themselves with devoted graduate students—apostles to the process cause. In contrast, Boodin had no intellectual offspring, his fledgling UCLA philosophy department didn’t graduate its first PhD student

¹Boodin’s publication chronology can be misleading because significant portions of his monographs appeared much earlier in a variety of peer-reviewed journals. For our purposes, the most pertinent are the following: Chapter XVII of *Truth and Reality* (1911) was originally published as “The Reality of Religious Ideals,” *The Harvard Theological Review* (Jan. 1909), representing a substantially revised version of “The Reality of the Ideal with Special Reference to the Religious Ideal,” *The Unit* (Iowa College) (1900); chapter I of *A Realistic Universe* (1916, rev. ed. 1931) first appeared as “The Divine Five-Fold Truth,” *The Monist* (Apr. 1911), and chapter XVIII of that same volume was originally published as “The Reinstatement of Teleology,” *The Harvard Theological Review* (Jan. 1913); the Introduction in *Religion of Tomorrow* (1943) originally appeared as “The Function of Religion,” *The Biblical World* (Aug. 1915). Boodin’s work on social minds appeared as chapter XI in *A Realistic Universe* (1916) first as “Individual and Social Minds,” *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* (Mar. 27, 1913); chapter IV of *The Social Mind* (1939) first appeared as “The Existence of Social Minds,” *American Journal of Philosophy* (Jul. 1913); and finally, chapter XV of *The Social Mind* first appeared as “Social Immortality,” *International Journal of Ethics* (Jan. 1915). In order to emphasize Boodin’s priority I have elected to reference each of these in their respective journal forms, although in some cases direct citation of later publications has been unavoidable, appearing nowhere else in Boodin’s writings. In all cases complete citations can be found in the references.

until 1942, three years after Boodin's retirement. Although Boodin did have the opportunity to teach at the graduate level, during his tenure it only offered the master's degree. It was Hans Reichenbach (1891-1953), who had already established himself as an important philosopher of science in Germany, that put UCLA on the map of significant American philosophical institutions when he, fleeing from Nazi persecution, settled in Los Angeles in 1938 (one year before Boodin's retirement). At UCLA, great twentieth-century American philosophers like C.G. "Peter" Hempel, Wesley Salmon, and Hilary Putnam all bore the Reichenbach/UCLA stamp. Until then, to be a philosopher in the city of Angels was to be in academic isolation. It is unfortunate that in academia, demography can often make or break reputations more readily than ideas. For Boodin, that certainly seems to be at least partially the case.

However, other factors were involved. Boodin's emphasis on metaphysics also came at a time when American philosophy was taking a linguistic turn away from such grand theorizing and was becoming dominated by reductionist philosophies of materialism and physicalism. Boodin fought an unpopular battle against these *isms*, leaving him marginalized and neglected. This prejudice persists, as when he is unfavorably compared to Roy Wood Sellars's critical realism and chided for distancing himself from pragmatism in favor of his own functional realism (Neuber 2019). It is said that Boodin got "lost in the isms," but this is based on a skewed reading of Boodin; it is rather Sellars who got lost in his own "isms" of reductionist critical realism and its attendant brain-state materialism, an argument I elaborate upon in chapter six of my forthcoming book, [*America's Forgotten Poet-Philosopher: The Thought of John Elof Boodin in His Time and Ours*](#) (Albany: SUNY Press). Finally, it didn't help when Hartshorne said of him, "John Boodin in California wrote well and thought well, up to a point. He paid (I understand) to have his works reprinted on extra durable paper. The paper doubtless survives; but the thoughts, although sensible and, in my opinion vaguely right, are not sharp enough, original enough, or logically coherent enough to last as long as the paper" (Hartshorne 1990, 334). Whether this assessment should stand or be ascribed to self-serving sarcasm remains an important focus of this essay.

3. What is Process Theology and How is Boodin Related to It?

Because John Eloff Boodin is largely unknown, some effort must be made to place him firmly within a process context. This involves a two-step plan to first present its leading ideas and second to show how Boodin's work exemplifies them. We begin with a few preliminary comments.

Process theology is first and foremost distinguished by its metaphysical approach in which science and religion are systematically defended primarily from a philosophical rather than a theological standpoint (Griffin 2017, p. 2). This does not mean that philosophy "becomes the arbiter of faith" and substitutes for "what we know of God through the biblical witness" (Suchocki 1989, 6). However, theology for process theists is not simply biblical hermeneutics. They take scripture seriously, but refuse to read it with hyperlexic literalness. Scripture always requires historical context and serious dialogue with its authors. The Bible should never become an object of idolatrous worship (Cobb and Slettom [2003] 2020, pp. 75-77). It is not some supernatural pagan oracle, it is the special revelation of God that is "integral to the divine nature" (Suchocki 1989, p. 47). Process theology respects the Bible and, at the same time, acknowledges its debt to sound metaphysics, adding an interpretive layer to both natural and revealed theology. Indeed the metaphysical foundations established by Whitehead especially with his magnum opus, *Process and Reality* (1929), gave birth by common assent to modern process thought.¹ It is from Hartshorne that Whitehead's ideas (and others incorporated from diverse sources such as Matthew Arnold, Charles Sanders Peirce, and William James) were built into a coherent theology. None of it dismisses natural or revealed theology, but they do not stand alone from each other nor apart from rational existence.

The primary idea behind all modern process thought is the nature of time and relationships, being as becoming in constant free relationship toward creativity. It is not new; at least as old as the theory of flux proposed by Heraclitis (540-ca.480 BCE) and famously characterized in the Presocratic's quote that "It is not possible to step into the same river twice." But its modern permutation as process theology is our concern here, and there are many variations on that theme. Nevertheless, an encompassing idea behind all process thought is the

¹Whitehead's *Process and Reality* first appeared as a series of Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh in 1927-28. For purposes here, however, the "corrected edition" is cited (see References). Similarly, *Religion in the Making* was first published by Macmillan in 1926 (originally delivered as Lowell Lectures), but the new edition of 1996 with Judith Jones's introduction and Randall Auxier's glossary is cited.

dynamic nature of time. It has been said that our “own flow of experience is a paradigm for the process-relational vision of reality” (Mesle 2008, p. 7). Moreover it is a flow *in time*. This is diametrically opposed to the traditional or classical theistic view of God as timeless and eternal, glimpsed only through introverted meditation (a private mystical dualism) on the one hand and extroverted effusion (a demonstrative explosion of chaotic pluralism) on the other. Whitehead especially complained about the latter, warning that “a rational religion must not confine itself to moments of emotional excitement. It must find its verification at all temperatures. It must admit the wisdom of the golden mean . . .,” and citing Ecclesiastes 9:11, “it must admit that ‘time and chance happeneth to them all’” (Whitehead 1996, p. 54). This includes God.

Boodin recognized the importance of time. He defined time as the “ultimate nature of reality,” which comprises a habit-taking process that creeps into all our belief systems and negates them, necessitating new ones (Boodin 1904, p. 28). The past is irreversible, and the future is unknown and unknowable. However, the nature of the universe is one of *process* and is the essential context of all causality (Boodin 1904, pp. 52-53). For Boodin, “time is absolute or dynamic non-being” (Boodin 1904, p. 118). How temporal meaning is given is critical since, for time to be truly dynamic, it must instantiate real freedom. In this way, “we can become masters of the show, prophets instead of mere puppets. In the flux of things the soul can build itself nobler mansions, or, if not nobler, mansions that are more homelike and that better fit its needs. The new wine at any rate requires new bottles, concepts must be remade to fit the demands of a changing environment and a growing consciousness” (Boodin 1904, p. 119). How does the soul do this? Not through any direct intervention but with a divine lure from God, whom Boodin calls “the impartial and sympathetic Spectator and Coöperator” (Boodin 1900, p. 107).¹ All of this—including the great “Spectator and Coöperator”—functions in an

¹Whom is a perfectly legitimate pronoun to use in reference to God since for the process theist deity is not an abstract thing or entity but essentially personal. This point was well established by the process-inclined personalist philosopher Edgar Sheffield Brightman (1884-1953) in *The Problem of God* (1930), a book that caught the attention of Charles Hartshorne and launched a lengthy correspondence. But pronouns referencing God should be used with caution. Process feminists have well pointed out the folly of using masculine pronouns “He,” “His,” “Him” for God. While ascribing personhood to God seems perfectly legitimate, assigning gender to deity is unwarranted. Boodin’s and others use of these masculine forms must be ascribed to the socio-cultural times in which they were written rather than to theological authority.

overarching temporal context. This author is aware of only one other current philosopher who has acknowledged Boodin's very process/relational view of time (Auxier 2016).

Having addressed time as an umbrella concept, the central issue becomes one of reducing process theology down to a set of uniform beliefs commonly held by most anyone assuming that label. Here, seven points of process theology are offered. These are by no means exhaustive; others might include naturalistic theism opposing supernaturalism, rejection of *creatio ex nihilo*, objective and/or subjective immortality (touched on later), process theodicy, process soteriology, and religious pluralism (all of which are in evidence in Boodin's publications), but the following are arguably the most definitive. Any one of these could easily comprise an extended essay in its own right, but for our purposes, brief summaries should suffice.

1) Plato rather than Aristotle is the starting point. Whitehead famously remarked that all of Western philosophy consists of a "series of footnotes to Plato" (Whitehead 1978, p. 39). Aristotle's categorical scheme of substances with properties is very uncongenial to process thought. This is not to say that Aristotle had no insights, but his Prime Mover is far too stiff a presence and unilateral an actor for process theology. Although Christianity owes much to both Plato and Aristotle, it was Aquinas who stultified change by taking Aristotle's Unmoved Mover and turning it into a divinity that split nature into supernatural *and* natural orders that reflected God's eternal purpose in both realms. Process theology rejects such notions—even of the supernatural itself—and, therefore, stands as a corrective to Aristotelian and especially to Thomistic influence in Christian thought.

Boodin, showing his Platonist inclinations, acknowledged his debt to the ancient sage, saying, "[A]fter venturing a cosmology of my own, as a result of many years of laborious research, I had occasion to re-read Plato's *Timæus*. To my great surprise, I discovered Plato's footprints everywhere over the ground that I had traversed. . . . In fact Plato's cosmological theory is, I think, his most distinctive contribution and places him in the distinguished succession of Greek naturalists. . . . And I shall try Plato's theory on his own philosophy" (Boodin 1929, p. 489).

2) Process philosophy/theology relies on experience and relationally based radical empiricism, thus incurring an indebtedness to pragmatism. Whitehead frequently

mentioned “the pragmatic test”—that of our own experience and empiricism—that he regarded as essential to all sound metaphysics (Whitehead 1978, pp. 13, 179, 181, 269). In many ways experience, pragmatism’s leading principle, is as important as time in the toolkit of process thought. As C. Robert Mesle puts it, “Each momentary event in the enduring series of experiences we call our mind or soul is a bundle of experienced relationships. Take away the experienced relations and nothing is left” (Mesle 1993, p. 56). As previously mentioned, the centrality of William James in Whitehead’s thought and the latter’s deconstruction of sensationist epistemology follows James’s “radical empiricism” as a well-established principle in process theology (Griffin 2017, pp. 21-22, 26, 28). Some assign great power and significance to experience, even talking about “experience all the way down” or *panexperientialism* (Griffin 2001, pp. 94-128; Mesle 2008, pp. 31-41). However, it has been noted that Whitehead never used this term or the other one it is sometimes synonymous with—*panpsychism*—and unless reduced to meaning simply ubiquitous subjectivity, its extension into these more ambitious categories is at best controversial in process thought (Cobb 2015, p. 19).

Boodin, of course, was deeply influenced by James. Nonetheless, experience is horizontal not vertical for Boodin, and, unlike some process theists, he was always wary of this vertical extension of experience with its panpsychic implications. However, the pragmatic view was always before him. In his earliest publication, he acknowledged the influence of his dissertation director and mentor Josiah Royce and his teacher/friend James, admitting that the influence of the latter, at least at that particular writing, was the greater of the two (Boodin 1900, p. 97). In fact, today Boodin is generally regarded primarily as a pragmatist, as witnessed by the reprinting of his *Truth and Reality* (1911) in volume two of the *Early Defenders of Pragmatism* series in 2001 as well as John R. Shook’s inclusion of Boodin in his important 1998 reference work, *Pragmatism: An Annotated Bibliography, 1898-1940*. Boodin’s presence in these works is fine as far as it goes, but overshadows his more interesting process thought.

3) Teleology is a cosmological given. Process philosophy/theology rejects the Aristotelian notion of passive substances and is generally opposed to the idea of substance. Whitehead’s formulation is altogether different. He states that “occasions”—his word for happenings, occurrences, events which comprise all entities

except God (Cobb 2015, p. 13)—arising from novel “prehensions”—one of Whitehead’s most original concepts, roughly “feelings” or the act of seizing or grasping the objective and subjective, what Cobb calls “the bond between two actual occasions” (Cobb 2015, p. 29)—arise “as an effect facing its past and ends as a cause facing its future. In between lies the teleology of the universe” (Whitehead [1933] 1967, pp. 193-94). It is as if this cosmic trend represents the glue or mortar fitting together pieces of occasions, forming an overall meaning of purposeful direction. And what is its aim? Whitehead says, “The teleology of the Universe is directed to the production of beauty” (Whitehead [1933] 1967, p. 265). Because the universe is absolutely free and undetermined, an element of chance is always involved but it is never blind chance.

Teleology forms an important aspect of Boodin’s thought, rejecting the reductionist and mechanistic excesses to which science and philosophy had fallen. “We have little sympathy today with Plato’s ‘heavenly pattern’ and Aristotle’s ‘final causes,’ that is, with ideal conceptions as determining existence and survival. We are apt to think of the process of evolution as blindly accomplishing its course as a result of internal and external accidents . . .,” writes Boodin, “it yet does not satisfy our reason. From the point of view of reason it is easier to read nature as striving to express certain types or ideals than to read ideals as chance. Nature seems to be, somehow, leading in the direction of human nature; the striving for a type somehow to be determining the direction of the series; and freedom and significant expression of life to be all the time the end to be realized.” For Boodin, teleology meets our demands for coherence and unity with freedom inserting serendipity and uncertainty as a role but not an *ultimate* role in nature (Boodin 1913c, pp. 83-84). All evolutionary processes “must include both mechanism and finalism” (Boodin 1913c, p. 85).

In biology this translates into an orthogenic model (i.e. the theory of *orthogenesis*) or at least some variant thereof in which evolution is construed as directional. Boodin, like most orthogenesists, strongly opposes the Darwinian/neo-Darwinian view of totally random biological evolution (Boodin 1913c, p. 77; Boodin 1925, pp. 56-59, 72, 184; Boodin 1957, 84, 121). Darwin’s campaign against teleology was a long and storied one, but in the mid-twentieth century even *after* the neo-Darwinian synthesis of the 1930s and 40s, orthogenesis vied as an accepted and well-established

theory. Although process theists seldom directly discuss biological evolution, when they do it is usually along orthogenic or teleologically friendly lines (Suchocki 1989, pp. 43-44; Griffin 2001, pp. 186-87).

4) There are two ultimates, God and creativity. The eternally necessary and existent God is essentially creative, working toward novelty, and so are all the finite entities (actualities) of this world. In fact, Whitehead says that *being* and *entity* are synonymous with *creativity*. For Whitehead, creativity is “the universal of universals,” a process whereby “the many become one, and are increased by one” (Whitehead 1978, p. 21). This replaces the Aristotelian category of primary substances where a “Prime Mover” moves these substances around, acting upon them at its pleasure. Instead, creativity replaces the passive receptivity of matter to become the dynamic actualizer of reality. Because creativity is an ultimate, it simply *is*; it never *wasn’t*. For Whitehead, there could be no relevant novelty without God (Whitehead 1978, p. 164). Again, distancing themselves from Aquinas (so influenced by Aristotle’s Prime Mover), Whitehead and Hartshorne reject the familiar creation *ex nihilo* story in favor of Plato’s creation from a formless void. No one has given a better overview of these two process ultimates than David Ray Griffin (2001, pp. 260-84).

Although Boodin doesn’t see creativity as ubiquitous in nature as Whitehead, it is its most interesting aspect. The importance of creation and novelty is evidenced in Boodin’s earliest work (Boodin 1900, pp. 106-07; Boodin 1904, pp. 46, 54, 78-80, 93, 119; Boodin 1911, pp. 61, 148, 258, 304; Boodin 1912, pp. 9, 107). Because freedom is a real and genuine attribute of the universe, chance always enters in. “Wherever there is real process,” writes Boodin, “where events happen, there we have chance. Time and chance used in this ultimate sense are identical” (Boodin 1904, p. 54). Einstein famously remarked that God didn’t play dice with the universe, meaning that the so-called “laws” of nature (process thought prefers *habits* to “laws”) make the world deterministic. But Boodin disagreed, siding with the new quantum physics of Bohr, Heisenberg and Schrödinger, because real freedom means persistent chance, intractable simultaneity, and genuine unpredictability. This is not a machine-based universe. The empirical world, he insisted, “is but an island floating in the larger world of spiritual forces and deriving its direction and significance from it. We are not duped when we believe that

the dice of the universe are loaded for right and reason” (Boodin 1915a, p. 76). Thus, we are not caught in a “mad dance of chance” because each present “holds the past and future together in a dynamism that determines the importance of the past. This dynamism also sets boundaries for what the future might become” (Suchocki 1989, p. 11). Here is how we get from chance to novelty and creativity.

5) God is panenthic. This states that all parts of reality [*pan*] are included in [*en*] and creatively synthesized by the one all-inclusive eternally-creative whole of reality [*theos*]. Contrary to pantheism, panentheism regards theos as greater than and inclusive of all parts of reality or the universe. In short, God is *in* the world not one *with* the world. In terms of process thought this idea comes from Hartshorne who originally called his position pantheism, but was inclined to suggest panentheism as a better term because “it distinguishes God from the ‘all’ and yet makes him include all” (Hartshorne [1941] 1964, pp. 185, 347-48). In his later preface to *Beyond Humanism* he made his position unequivocally panenthic: “I have long ceased to call my position ‘pantheism,’ since I hold that classical theism . . . and classical pantheism deny contingency, and the possibility of a real increase in content, to deity, whereas my panentheism asserts of God both necessity and contingency, both immutability and openness to novelty” (Hartshorne [1937] 1969, p. viii). Although Hartshorne’s panentheism is not identical with Whitehead’s, clearly this comes closer to an accurate description of God’s relationship to the world than traditional theism or pantheism. Myers, emphasizing differences between Whitehead’s and Hartshorne’s panentheisms, states, “The world, for Whitehead, has an independence from God that Hartshorne simply does not accept, thereby allowing on Whitehead’s account for greater resistance [and freedom] on the part of actual occasions. Hartshorne’s panentheism, on the other hand, is one that affords God greater power” (Myers 1998, p. 185). It is important to note that Myers’ position on Whitehead is a detailing rather than a denial of his panentheism. Others have questioned whether Whitehead was a panentheist at all (Conner 2009), but despite differences it seems more coherent to suggest that both Hartshorne and Whitehead

subscribe to varying versions of that position (Dorrien 2008, p. 325).¹ Most process theologians adhere to panentheism rather than to pantheism.

Boodin's God surely fits into this category. He rejected pantheism from the earliest (Boodin 1900, p. 108) and repeatedly embraced a deeply personal deity "capable of entering into sympathetic relations with all good strivings, as it has sufficient power to enforce its ideal. God must not be merely an impersonal constitution" (Boodin 1909, p. 70). Although he never used the word panenthic, he expressed it clearly enough when he said, "The God of religion cannot be conceived as merely the whole of things. God must be conceived as an energizing spirit in the universe who furnishes the inspiration for creating an ideal realm of values—a kingdom of heaven—in a distressed and struggling world" (Boodin 1934a, p. 22). By God's telic nature the divine must be panenthic because "nature cannot become God though it adapts itself in a measure to God and through its order is the expression of the genius of God" (Boodin 1934a, p. 34). Put another way, "God is not a passive spectator of nature. He does not live in blissful and indifferent isolation, as Aristotle conceived Him. Rather He interpenetrates nature, becomes progressively incarnate in nature, and is responsive to the striving of nature. There is nothing foreign or indifferent to him" (Boodin 1925, p. 268). God is "Spectator" and "Coöperator" with the world. A phrase finding its way into his very first publication (Boodin 1900, p. 107) and reiterated later (Boodin 1909, p. 69; Boodin 1911, p. 322).²

¹Dorrien also sides with Drew University's Catherine Keller on this question, who argues in her *On the Mystery: Discerning Divinity in Process* (2008) that panentheism is undoubtedly the mainstream process interpretation. Conner insists in his note (Conner 2009, p. 179) that "Keller and Dorrien are both eminent interpreters of process theology, and yet neither hesitates to ascribe panentheism to process theology categorically. This in my view is a serious error." But Conner's is the more egregious mistake because its only reasonable alternative—pantheism—robs God of all personhood (see note page 6). While Hartshorne is clearer on this than Whitehead, Cobb and Slettom are right when they conclude that although the Whiteheadian God is technically not a person per se, "Yet much of what believers have in mind when they ask whether God is a person is present in God for Whitehead as well" (Cobb and Slettom [2003] 2020, p. 14). A Creator indistinguishable from creation loses meaningful personality.

²Boodin's original use of the phrase "an impartial Spectator and Coöperator" was admittedly ambiguous, but in his 1909 revision of that essay significantly added: "*of the faith in* [emphasis added] an impartial Spectator and Coöperator" thus removing all doubt that he intended it as a description of God. This was again restated two years later in *Truth and Reality*.

6) God is omnipresent but not omniscient or omnipotent. Here there is more agreement among process theists, and it comprises its central and fundamental distinction from traditional theism. Process theology takes freedom seriously. God does not wield unilateral power over creation. This means that choices and options are real. As such, God cannot possibly know in advance what those choices or options are going to be. Godly preferences may invoke a divine “lure” to privilege those preferences, but the principle of genuine freedom means that lure can be ignored or even thwarted, in which case God will necessarily reevaluate and provide a second optimal course, again open to indeterminate freedom. Put another way, divine knowledge is perfect but only insofar as God knows all that is knowable at a given time since the future has not actually occurred. All major proponents of process theology adhere to this (Suchocki 1989, p. 71; Mesle 1993, pp. 37, 40, 73-74; Griffin 2001, 29, 166; Cobb and Slettom [2003] 2020, pp. 5-9; Bracken 2008, pp. 64, 124-25; Cobb 2017, p. 173).

God’s omnipotence is similar. For freedom to be genuinely free, harmony or goodness could not possibly be decreed or coerced. The problem is not one of limiting God and of thereby introducing certain “imperfections” into deity but of sheer logic. Indeed Hartshorne asks, “by what logic is it an imperfection to possess no more power than is possible to any one individual? God’s power is not ‘finite,’ . . . but on the contrary is the fullest possible extent of individual power” (Hartshorne [1937] 1969, p. 54). For process theists, God must possess powers that are reasonable, otherwise we have only a fanciful wizard crafted in our heads.

Boodin agreed. In reviewing George Arthur Wilson’s *The Self and Its World* (1926), he found there was no way to reconcile the absolute omnipotence of God with human freedom. Countering Wilson’s omnipotent God, Boodin insisted, “I have seen no arguments that can reconcile the real freedom of selves with an absolute control of the universe” (Boodin 1926, p. 649). Here Boodin is at one with Hartshorne. And we find Boodin making a similar argument against God’s omniscience particularly with regard to the future. Divine foreknowledge is impossible. “The future is like the past in so far as it has no content. What meaning it has is present meaning. But the past has at least a formal basis for reality. It has a chronology which is binding upon us. . . . The future has not even formal reality. It knows no records, it respects no data. The future,

therefore, is pure ideal construction. It has no factual basis even in the present” (Boodin 1904, p. 103). If God is literally omniscient, we become little more than actors in a play already scripted by a divine playwright. The process view returns freedom to humans and to God to be co-creators of novelty and transcendent growth.

7) God and everything else are relational, which means the ability to affect and be affected. This relational power has three stages: first, to be open and sensitive to the world; second, to be self-creative; and third, to influence others having been initially influenced by them (Mesle 1993, p. 30). This carries with it an important social dimension. It should not go unnoticed that Hartshorne’s most complete metaphysical statement was titled *Reality as Social Process* (1953). But Whitehead does not neglect this either. He refers to the “philosophy of organism” that is usually expressed socially, as “a group of actual entities connected in specific ways” and is also a *nexus*, which in Whiteheadian terms is “any kind of togetherness of actual entities” (Mesle 2008, pp. 106-07). However, a society is much more than this. “To constitute a society,” writes Whitehead, “the class-name has got to apply to each member, by reason of genetic derivation from other members of that same society. The members of the society are alike because, by reason of their common character, they impose on other members of the society the conditions which lead to that likeness.” Most importantly, he adds, unlike mere occasions, “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. They are not actual occasions” (Whitehead [1933] 1967, p. 204). All of Western metaphysics has failed to understand this, according to Whitehead. Put more theologically it can be said that the salvation received through the revelation of God in Christ is essentially social in nature. Thus, “Every aspect of this revelation is a call to community” (Suchocki 1989, 122). More significantly, the social aspect can also be construed in metaphysical and theological terms adding a trinitarian element (God as communitarian), which Jesuit priest and process theologian Joseph A. Bracken has done brilliantly. This idea is not a new one, taking twelfth-century Canon Richard of St. Victor’s social model of the Trinity and applying it in a process context (Bracken 2008, pp. 21-22). For Bracken, apart from God’s social/communitarian nature vis-à-vis the Trinity, other societies are ontological realities too

that exercise “a collective agency derivative from the individual agencies of its constituent actual occasions” (Bracken 1991, p. 45). Thus, Bracken has proposed to solve the problem of the one and the many.

Many years earlier Boodin had pursued this outside a trinitarian perspective through what he called “the social mind”: a collective “sense of reciprocal or sympathetic response to the situation. On the lower levels this means the abandonment to a common impulse, on the higher levels it means the leading of a common purpose” (Boodin 1913a, p. 21). Through societies there arises “an overarching spiritual communion, greater than humanity” that lives beyond in its own “unique individual immortality” (Boodin 1913b, p. 180). For Boodin, the social mind “may mean a deeper and richer sacramental communion with God than the individual is capable of in his abstract capacity” (Boodin 1913a, p. 45). Though it cannot be investigated more fully here, it can be said that societies comprise, for Boodin, a kind of objective *and* subjective immortality: “The immortality of the individual and of the social group of which he [or she] is a part are now recognized to be reciprocal.” Men and women find their “life and joy in service for the community” and this “passion for immortality measures the greatness alike of a people and an individual” (Boodin 1915b, pp. 196, 206). “Religion must be,” Boodin argues, “above all, loyalty to an ideal social order. But this can only be realized as a fulfilment of the past, not in breaking away from the past” (Boodin 1915a, p. 74).¹ Boodin’s long and detailed examination of this social mind reveals what his biographer aptly called his “empirical quest for community” as against unbridled individualism and social nominalism (Nelson 1987, p. 123). But his “social mind” also reflects a theological quest that awaited Bracken to investigate further. Thus, when John B. Cobb Jr. praised Bracken in his foreword to *Society and Spirit* for the author’s “move . . . to introduce relational existence fully into the internal life of God” (Bracken 1991, p. 11), Boodin’s ghostly presence was evoked in the social mind he had constructed nearly eighty years before.

¹Boodin’s social theology captured an essential truth, but unfortunately missed God’s communitarian nature by neglecting Bracken’s trinitarian emphasis. In fact, at one point Boodin referred to the trinity as a “confused and antiquated concept” (1943, 76). One wonders what “past” Boodin thought he was “fulfilling” in such a cavalier dismissal of this longstanding tenet of Christian belief. Given his attitude toward the Trinity, Boodin was ill-equipped to discover Bracken’s key contribution toward understanding the corporate reality of God in unity with what Boodin called “social minds.”

In his last major publication, Boodin gave his most complete overall statement on process theology:

Once we conceive God as a pervasive energy stimulating toward the best, we get a new light on the ontological attributes. . . . The abstract idea of omnipotence makes a mockery of the goodness and justice of God. Rather must we conceive of God as limited in His effectiveness by our willingness, by our cooperation or opposition. Our attitude makes a real difference to God's activity. And while God, because his activity means the wholesome, the economic and best, both in human and cosmic evolution, must win out in some fashion, the character of the result is conditioned by our activity. . . .

We must be careful not to dogmatize about the mind of God. . . . We have been too ready to make a logic machine of God [a reference to Whitehead]. It is possible that He may have ways of perceiving and comprehending our world that infinitely pass ours—more sensitive than the camera film [a jab at Bergson's cinematography], more comprehensive in His intuitions of relations than our slow thought can fathom. More is His thought a mere abstract verbal relation to things [a dart thrown at Whitehead's neologisms]. His is creative intelligence. While "he sees all over, thinks all over, hears all over," what is more important is that He enters into creative relations with our world to produce order, goodness, and beauty. This relation is more than interpenetration, more than intussusception [contra Whitehead]: it is a new birth in grace and beauty. We cannot, as finite, be of "one essence with the Father" [against Hartshorne's objective immortality], but the essence of God is present everywhere and always, and by being compounded with the divine energy, we emerge as a new and higher unity of life (Boodin 1943b, pp. 79-80).

As the editorial brackets indicate, Boodin was his own process thinker. He clearly coincided with the seven process-related points outlined earlier, here he was at one with Whitehead and Hartshorne. But Boodin viewed himself as a creationist cosmologist, not in the sense it is understood popularly today, but as a cosmologist who saw "the occurrence of new forms, characters and stages under the guidance of an actuality which controls and animates the course of history. . . . Thus creation is epigenesis or emergence (in recent terminology) together with control from a higher level." Whitehead, however, Boodin

regarded (like the ninth century Catholic theologian Scotus Erigena) as a preformationist, “the notion that evolutionary development is latent in the process so that later forms and stages are really an unfolding or making explicit what is already present in the earlier stages of the same history” (Boodin 1934c, p. 13). Thus, he was profoundly process oriented and at the same time different and at times provocative in the arrows flown at his colleagues. Boodin believed that Whitehead got lost in his own metaphysics, obsessed with obfuscating word coinage caused by forgetting that much of this would have been unnecessary under “the principle of cosmic immanence” (Boodin 1934b, p. 165). He also accused Whitehead (among other things) of “extensive abstraction” (Boodin 1943a, p. 712), and in papers being prepared at his death, even of mysticism (Boodin 1957, p. III).

Here it is worth noting that Florence Nightingale was perhaps a precursor to Whitehead’s alleged mystical affinities (Webb 2002, pp. 241-45), but this is not Boodin’s process theism. Boodin worried that mysticism could easily lapse into pantheism, arguing that, “The mystics in putting God beyond all distinctions have made him, in fact, Nothing—a great emptiness like empty spaces” (Boodin 1934a, p. 150). He concluded that, “Mysticism, as a way to truth, is a dubious way” (Boodin 1934c, p. 384). Boodin admitted that mysticism could be a legitimate way of knowing, but, ever the pragmatist, asserted that “Whether mystical experience is acquaintance with divinity or devil must be tested by the fruits” (Boodin 1934c, p. 385). In this Nightingale’s God-inspired devotion to reform in nursing care, public health, colonial reform, and medical statistics places her with the angels. What else may be said of this is beyond the scope of this essay, nor can the relationship between Whitehead and Nightingale be further explored here. One wonders, however, if one biographer’s characterization of Nightingale’s “idiosyncratic, Plato-inflected theology” as one in which “if she could only achieve a saintly life *hic et nunc*, in the next stage of life that attended her after death she would rise onto a higher plane of spirituality” (Gill 2005, p. 207) is not more commensurate with Swedenborg than Whitehead. Mysticism aside, Boodin, like most process philosophers, argues for an afterlife, although he follows Marjorie Suchocki, David Ray Griffin, Joseph Bracken, and many other current process theists in adhering to individual immortality against Hartshorne’s personally eliminative objective salvation or immortality existing only in the mind of God.

It is no wonder, then, that Hartshorne's review of Boodin's *Religion of Tomorrow* was critical, accusing its author rather astonishingly of pantheism and Thomism! (Hartshorne 1944, p. 233). Hartshorne agrees with Boodin that God is not a separate and wholly self-sufficient being and that we must be a part of God's creativity but claims he spoils it "by joining with the Thomists in holding that we are in no sense actual parts of God whose 'creative realization' thus becomes something entirely outside his own being." However, the word "entirely" is inaccurate here since "the immortal discovery of Jesus is that the kingdom of heaven is within us" (Boodin 1943b, p. 38). Furthermore, one need not be a Thomist or a pantheist to realize that we are in a creative relationship with God, a "relation [that] is more than interpenetration, more that intussusception: it is a new creation, a new birth in grace and beauty. We cannot, as finite, be of 'one essence with the Father' but the essence of God is present everywhere and always, and by being compounded with the divine energy, we emerge as a new and higher unity of life" (Boodin 1943b, p. 80). God is eminently "personal in that He enters into creative communion with us and participates with us in our striving for the best" (Boodin 1943b, p. 85). These are not the words of a Thomist. This is not "spoilage" but process-based affirmation. Hartshorne gives a blinkered reading of the book at hand.

Whatever the differences between Boodin and his colleagues, we certainly need not concur with all of them. Nevertheless, his position in process theology is obvious, shifting our attentions from the speculative realm of philosophy/theology to more factual issues of where to place him historiographically in process thought. This becomes a significant question affecting current process theology and its future direction.

4. Boodin, Bergson, and the Early Historiography of Process Theism

It will be noted that in the previous section Boodin's earliest writings have been emphasized. It is clear that by the time of Whitehead's *Process and Reality* the Swedish-American's process thought had been well developed in its metaphysical and sociological aspects. In fact, it may be said that the entrance of Alfred North Whitehead into process philosophy with its theistic implications at least as early as his Lowell Lectures of 1925 (published as *Science and the Modern World*) but certainly with his Lowell Lectures a year later (published as *Religion in the Making*) marks the beginning of a mature process theism that awaited Charles Hartshorne for fuller (if somewhat controversial) development.

This pre-Whitehead period includes one dominant figure, Henri Bergson. Such a historiographical model would see Bergson as a bridge between the early and mature periods with Whitehead making the decisive difference. Here Bergson becomes a significant figure for Boodin within this context of early process thought and deserves extended examination because Daniel Dombrowski, a Hartshornian philosopher, believes that Bergson ranks with Whitehead and Hartshorne as three process theists that “stand head and shoulders above the rest” in the period characterizing the development of modern process thought through the mid-twentieth century (2016, 191). Dombrowski makes his case for Bergson by predominantly citing *Le Deux Sources de la Morale et de la Religion* (1932), later translated into English as *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* in 1977. Only twice is Bergson’s *L’Évolution créatrice* (1907) mentioned. The God of *The Two Sources* is love and the object of love (Bergson and Carter [1935] 1963, p. 240), a much more clearly delineated deity that postdates even Whitehead. But two Bergsons need not be seen here. As Jesuit priest Thomas N. Hart has convincingly argued, “Bergson’s *Two Sources*, separated by 25 years from his earlier works though it is, and concerned with apparently quite different questions, is altogether of a piece with all his previous thought and brings it to completion” (Hart 1968, p. 333). The key question is this: is a process God clearly in evidence in Bergson’s work *at any stage*?

God, for Bergson, is an expression indicating time as moving toward and for life, without transcendent power and not a leading direction but rather “*a vis a tergo*” (a force acting from behind), in no sense *a telos*. In fact, Bergson’s *élan vital* “is essentially finite because it is unable to overcome its limitation” (Miquel 2007, p. 51). Bergson himself establishes this point very clearly:

It must not be forgotten that the force which is evolving throughout the organized world is a limited force, which is always seeking to transcend itself and always remains inadequate to the work it would fain produce. The error and puerilities of radical finalism [teleology] are due to the misapprehension of this point (Bergson [1911] 1998, p. 126).

But there is more. Bergson’s own analysis of life leads to the conclusion that life is finite, dependent on matter and that the “limitation of life comes from life itself, which is nothing but an immanent natural force [more vague, impersonal, and pantheistic than Boodin’s cosmic immanence]. Also, if the ‘élan vital’ is a psychological force, if this force is

God as ‘unceasing life, action, freedom,’ as an immanent cause present in nature, *then this means that God is material!*” (Miquel 2007, p. 52).¹ A deity bereft of purpose, locked in its own material prison, that does not lead but acts only behind its prison walls is surely nothing resembling either a neo-classical or a process God.

Actually, Boodin gives Bergson a similar materialist reading, but not without acknowledging certain sympathies. Boodin praised him for his contribution to understanding time. “Bergson,” he said, “deserves credit for breaking away from the mathematical method of picturing our mental life. The durations of our mental processes are not determined by the clock” (Boodin 1943a, p. 714). Bergson had declared as much in 1889 with his *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (translated as *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* in 1910), and Boodin added his process-based understanding of time with *Time and Reality* (1904). Both agreed that time was not a matter of being and structured stability and permanence but of becoming, flux, change, and the unfolding of creative novelty. Boodin also sided with Bergson in his distrust of the linguistic turn in the direction that analytic philosophy was heading. Bergson’s experiential sense of time resonated with Boodin. Finally, both may be seen as waging a relentless campaign against determinism in all its forms. The essential nature of process thought can be seen in all these attitudes.

Exactly how these are expressed in theistic terms is another matter, however, and here is where the differences between Bergson and Boodin become pronounced. Put another way (and for our historiographical analysis here), it can be said that Bergson may be considered the first modern process philosopher, but where does he stand as an early *process theist*? That he was a theist seems acceptable, but in at least two areas his theism must be seen as *sui generis*. His affinities with Whitehead notwithstanding, Bergson’s inability to deal constructively with intuition in terms of personhood, and secondly, his failure to meaningfully distinguish God from the world are at once interrelated problems flanking Bergson’s religion qua process theology.

¹Miquel does not simply equate *élan vital* with psychology. He understands that Bergson’s is a metaphysics of duration; it is more than our consciousness but part of our becoming and therefore part of a larger cosmic property in which duration is a part, including *élan vital*. See Paul-Antoine Miquel. 2022. [“Duration and Becoming in Bergson’s Metaphysics.”](#) (De Gruyter. Open Access.)

These two nagging issues with Bergson have rather ironically been best pointed out by Catholic analysts (ironic because Bergson became sympathetic to Catholicism late in life). For one thing, Bergson views “freedom not as the rational determination of a human act but as the spontaneous bursting forth of vital energy from the depths of the self, a creative but nonrational [not irrational] act expressive of the total personality”; second, although God is described as Love and Creative energy the “relationship to the *élan vital* is never clearly defined, the distinction between God and creatures remains blurred” (Gallagher 2003, p. 297). The first problem, it might be argued, is related to Bergson’s inclination towards pantheism. Bergson said different things at different times on this issue, sometimes seemingly embracing it and at other times emphatically rejecting it. Nevertheless, overall, even Hart’s careful and sympathetic account comes down on the side of Bergson’s pantheism (Hart 1968, p. 363). Pottinger’s detailed analysis of Bergson’s religion concludes unequivocally that he fails to make “any intelligible distinction between Creator and creation,” pointing out that Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain, Jesuit priest Joseph de Tonquédec, Brazilian priest Maurillo T. L. Penido, and philosopher J. Alexander Gunn all agree with this assessment (Pottinger 1969, p. 347). Pottinger goes even further, stating that Bergson’s “God” in *Creative Evolution* is not even the God of theism since he fails to provide a much-needed distinction between creator and creation and posits only an impersonal God that is not enhanced in any of his subsequent work including *The Two Sources* because Bergson “does not really explore the idea of *personal* experience” (Pottinger 1969, p. 348). In fact, “Bergson’s own development of the idea of intuition never goes beyond the biological level. His intuition is the intuition of life, which means growth and continuous creativity, but not the intuition of fully personal being. Bergson’s ‘self’ is the self-in-the-world, and not the self-among-other selves” (Pottinger 1969, p. 349).¹

More recently, Leung thinks that Bergson’s metaphysics may be regarded as panenthic, citing Bergson’s insistence that his *élan vital* is clearly *not* God (2020). Instead, Clare Carlisle’s

¹Pottinger’s dissertation is the most extensive treatment of Bergson’s religion. It has not become a part of the secondary literature on Bergsonian philosophy because it has not been readily available until relatively recently, not being digitized by the Edinburgh Research Archive until May 22, 2018. Nevertheless, Pottinger’s analysis is detailed and thorough, deserving more attention than it has thus far received.

reading of Spinoza as a panentheist is adopted to argue for a similar panenthic reading of Bergson as “being-in-God.” Leung agrees with J. Alexander Gunn’s early interpretation of Bergson that he is not a pantheist “because, for him, the Deity is immanent in nature, not identifiable with it” (Gunn 1920). But that by no means eliminates Bergson’s problematic conception of God since “for him [Bergson], God would seem to be merely a *focus imaginarius* of Life and Spirit, a ‘hypostatization’ of *la durée*. He cannot be regarded as the loving Father of the human race whom He has begotten or created” and “Bergson does not offer us a God, personal, loving, and redemptive, as the Christian religious consciousness demands or imagines. He does not, and can not, affirm Christian Theism, for he considers that the facts do not warrant the positing of a self-conscious and personal Individual in the only sense in which we, from our experience, can understand these words.” We must ask if such a view comports not only with a Christian view of God but with a process view of God. For our purposes here, Leung’s argument for Bergson’s panentheism, while interesting, does little to establish his role as a process theist.

Pottinger may go too far in suggesting that Bergson’s God is not even genuine theism, but such issues do not arise with Boodin. Boodin’s God is clearly panenthic, eminently socially and personally connected to humanity, and teleological. Thus Boodin took many opportunities to criticize Bergson, believing that the Frenchman’s vitalism—if it be called “vitalism”—explained nothing, being itself merely a form of emergent materialism (Boodin 1912, p. 10; Boodin 1913c, p. 82; Boodin 1916, pp. 259-60; Boodin 1934a, pp. 60-61; Boodin 1934c, pp. 204-5). For Boodin, Bergson’s *vis a tergo* anticipates Miquel’s criticism nearly a century later; it is “blind” and in no sense teleological, incapable of providing direction and meaning to the processes of flux and change. And if Boodin’s charge of emergent materialism seems counter to Bergson’s entire corpus of thought, it remains a serious consideration among scholars today. For example Alicia Juarrero, professor emerita of philosophy at Prince George’s Community College (MD), and Anne Fagot-Largeau, a member of the French Academy of Sciences of the Institut de France, agree with Boodin that Bergson is essentially an emergent materialist. Juarrero writes, “The emergent materialism of old such as Bergson’s inevitably ended up appealing to *élan vital*

or other such *dues ex machina* device because it lacked a way to naturalize the variety of nonefficient causality required for this kind of emergence” (Juarrero 2018, p. 200).¹

The historiographical question is not whether or not one agrees with them (that can be settled separately), the issue is historiographically much broader, namely, is Bergson a “head and shoulders above the rest” process theist as Dombrowski proposes? This statement seems untested. Bergson’s religion appears too haunted by the specter of pantheism, and even if panenthic, too incapable of relating the cosmic realities of flux and change to creative novelty in a distinctly personal way. In distinction to Bergson, Boodin does not call upon a biologized “religion of nature” found in intuition and mysticism, instead he seeks inspiration “in the upper reaches that the meaning and goal of the universe, the genius of divine creativeness, is foreshadowed. . . . We cannot worship the whole of things as a mere collection. We must discern and feel the Genius of the whole. There must be ideal direction and synthesis” (Boodin 1925, p. 467). There is direction and synthesis for Bergson, too, though it lurks rather than lures in a dualism of intellect and intuition that finds love in “divine energy” that never seems to fully grasp the personal qualities of God-to-object and object-to-God *agape* love. In Bergson’s view, God’s connection to humanity is through a “dynamic religion” mediated by mystics “communicated in its entirety to [these] exceptional men” (Bergson and Carter [1935] 1963, p. 223). And love is described by Bergson not in terms of recognizable personal characteristics as Paul does in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, but as an “essence,” a “mystical experience” conveyed by mystics themselves (Bergson and Carter [1935] 1963, p. 243). Precisely how this fits into a theological context of process thought warrants further discussion elsewhere. Clearly this is not Boodin’s “impartial and sympathetic Spectator and Coöperator” demanding an inherently personal deity. Boodin’s God is distinct yet related to the whole as he explained many times (Boodin 1900, p. 107; Boodin [1911] 2001, p. 322; Boodin 1925, p. 267; Boodin 1934a, pp. 13, 22, 34, 69-70; 1943, 39, 64,65). And the answer is not especially reserved to the mystics (Boodin 1934a, p. 150). Thus, we can agree with Hart that Bergson’s theology is all “of a piece” and, moreover,

¹It should be noted that Boodin considered C. Lloyd Morgan (1852-1936) and Samuel Alexander (1859-1938), like Bergson to whom they acknowledged their debt, emergent materialists. Morgan invoked God only for heuristic purposes and Alexander was a committed physicalist.

with Pottinger that the anticipated solution to Bergson's theistic problems outlined by Gunn remain unsolved in *Two Sources* (Pottinger 1969, p. 348).

The historiography of process theology deserves more comparative analysis. Dombrowski's ranking of Bergson with Whitehead and Hartshorne in a grand triumvirate of twentieth-century process theology seems an unwarranted special pleading ill-suited to the more complex intellectual terrain of early process theology.

5. Conclusion

In light of this analysis, Hartshorne's curt and sarcastic dismissal of Boodin that opened this essay seems unwarranted, even presumptuous and downright niggardly. Dombrowski is to be credited for opening the historiographical landscape to important early contributors to process theism such as Faustus Socinus, Friedrich von Schelling, and others. He also convincingly suggests contributions to process theism among later figures such as Charles Sanders Peirce, Nicholas Berdyaev, Mohammed Iqbal, Martin Buber, and Teilhard de Chardin. However, for Dombrowski these are all lesser lights compared to Bergson, Whitehead, and Hartshorne. If Whitehead and Hartshorne set the terms of modern process theism—and they should—it is less apparent that Bergson belongs among these luminaries because, at the very least, process theism needs to show how God relates to the world in personal experiential ways that are meaningful. Here Bergson's theism raises questions. This is not to suggest that Bergson should be written out of the historiography of process theology, only that Bergson's theism needs further discussion with other considerations. A strong candidate has been suggested in John Eloy Boodin. Process theists should welcome the opportunity to broaden their horizons and thus open the field up to new possibilities, new creativities. Whether Dombrowski's historiographical triumvirate of process theism needs revision, expansion to a quadrumvirate, or something else is a conversation worth having.

As we think about the history of process theology we might do well to consider Boodin—the poet-philosopher—who in some measure anticipated Whitehead's understanding of God as “the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness” (Whitehead 1978, p. 346).

As compelling as this conception of divinity is, Whitehead himself admitted his was a “speculative scheme” that he never regarded as finished. “In philosophical discussion,” he

wrote, “the merest hint of dogmatic certainty as to finality of statement is an exhibition of folly” (Whitehead 1978, p. xiv). He added, “The study of philosophy is a voyage towards larger generalities” (Whitehead 1978, p. 10). This is true not only for philosophy but for its historiography as well since it sets the parameters of dialogue and conversation. Hopefully this essay has launched a voyage that is just a little larger than it began and it should be a more interesting one with Boodin aboard.

References

- Auxier, Randall E. 2016. “Boodin, John Elof.” In *The Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of Philosophers of America: From 1600 to the Present*. London: Bloomsbury Academic. [Google Books]
- Bergson, Henri. (1911) 1998. *Creative Evolution*. Translated by Arthur Mitchell. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications. First published as *L'Évolution créatrice* (1907)
- _____. (1935) 1963. *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. Translated by R. Schley Audra and Cloudesley Brereton, with the assistance of W. Horsfall Carter. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Boodin, John Elof. 1900. “The Reality of the Ideal with Special Reference to the Religious Ideal.” *The Unit* (Iowa College) [Grinnell College], 5: 97-109.
- _____. 1904. Time and Reality. *The Psychological Review. Monograph Supplements*, v. 6, no. 3. New York: Macmillan.
- _____. 1909. “The Reality of Religious Ideals.” *The Harvard Theological Review*, 2, no. 1: 58-72.
- _____. (1911) 2001. *Truth and Reality: An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*. Early Defenders of Pragmatism, vol. 2. Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press.
- _____. 1912. “Do Things Exist?” *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, 9, no. 1: 5-14.
- _____. 1913a. “The Existence of Social Minds.” *American Journal of Sociology*, 19, no. 1: 1-47.
- _____. 1913b. “Individual and Social Minds.” *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, 10, no. 7: 169-180.
- _____. 1913c. “The Reinstatement of Teleology.” *The Harvard Theological Review*, 6, no. 1: 76-99.
- _____. 1915a. “The Function of Religion.” *The Biblical World*. 46, no. 2: 67-76.
- _____. 1916. *A Realistic Universe: An Introduction to Metaphysics*. Macmillan.
- _____. 1915b. “Social Immortality.” *International Journal of Ethics*, 25, no. 2: 196-212.

- _____. 1925. *Cosmic Evolution: Outlines of Cosmic Idealism*. New York: Macmillan.
- _____. 1926. "Two Philosophies of Personalism." *Reviews of Personality and Reality: A Proof of the Real Existence of a Supreme Self* by J. E. Turner and *The Self and Its World* by George Arthur Wilson. *The Journal of Religion*, 6, no. 6: 644-650.
- _____. 1929. "Cosmology in Plato's Thought (I.)." *Mind*, 38, n. 152: 489-505.
- _____. 1934a. *God: A Cosmic Philosophy of Religion*. New York: Macmillan.
- _____. 1934b. "Functional Realism." *The Philosophical Review*, 43, no. 2: 147-178.
- _____. 1934c. *Three Interpretations of the Universe*. New York: Macmillan.
- _____. 1943a. "Fictions in Science and Philosophy. II." *The Journal of Philosophy*, 40, no. 26: 701-716.
- _____. 1943b. *Religion of Tomorrow*. New York: Philosophical Library.
- _____. 1957. *Studies in Philosophy: The Posthumous Papers of John Eloy Boodin*. Edited by David Ayres Piatt. Los Angeles: University of California.
- Bracken, Joseph A. 1991. *Society and Spirit: A Trinitarian Cosmology*. London: Associated University Presses.
- _____. 2008. *God: Three Who Are One*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.
- Cobb, John B. Jr. 2015. *Whitehead Word Book: A Glossary with Alphabetical Index to Technical Terms in Process and Reality*. Annoka, MN.
- Cobb, John B. Jr. and Jeanyne B. Slettom, ed. (2003) 2020. *The Process Perspective: Frequently Asked Questions About Process Theology*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.
- Conner, David Emory. 2009. "Whitehead the Naturalist." *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy*, 30, no. 2: 168-186.
- Dombrowski, Daniel A. 2016. *A History of the Concept of God: A Process Approach*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Dorrien, Gary 2008. "The Lure and Necessity of Process Theology." *CrossCurrents* 58: 316-336.
- Gallagher, I. J. 2003. Bergson, Henri Louis. In *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. 2nd ed. Vol. 2. Detroit: Thomson Gale; Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America.
- Gill, Gillian. 2005. *Nightingales: The Extraordinary Upbringing and Curious Life of Miss Florence Nightingale*. New York: Random House.
- Griffin, David Ray. 2001. *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell.

- _____. 2017. *Process Theology: On Postmodernism, Morality, Pluralism, Eschatology, and Demonic Evil*. Anoka, MN: Process Century Press.
- Gunn, J. Alexander. 1920. [Bergson and His Philosophy](#). Available full-text.
- Hart, Thomas N. 1968. "God in the Ethico-Religious Thought of Henri Bergson." *The Thomist* 32, no. 3: 333-365.
- Hartshorne, Charles. (1937) 1969. *Beyond Naturalism: Essays in the Philosophy of Nature*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- _____. (1941) 1964. *Man's Vision of God and the Logic of Theism*. Hamden, CT: Archon Books.
- _____. 1944. Review of *Religion of Tomorrow*, by John Elov Boodin. *Ethics*, 54, no. 3: 233-234.
- _____. 1990. *The Darkness and the Light: A Philosopher Reflects on His Fortunate Career and Those Who Made It Possible*. Albany: State University of New York.
- Juarrero, Alicia. 2018. "Context-Sensitive Constraints, Types, Emergent Properties, and Top-Down Causality." In *God's Providence and Randomness in Nature: Scientific and Theological Perspectives*. Edited by Robert John Russell and Joshua M. Moritz. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press.
- Leung, King-Ho. 2020. "Bergson, Pan(en)theism, and 'Being-in-Life'." [Sophia](#). Available full-text.
- Mesle, C. Robert. 1993. *Process Theology a Basic Introduction*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press.
- _____. 2008. *Process-Relational Philosophy: An Introduction to Alfred North Whitehead*. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press.
- Miquel, Paul-Antoine. 2007. "Bergson and Darwin: From an Immanentist to an Emergentist Approach to Evolution." *SubStance*, 36, no. 3: 42-56.
- Myers, William T. 1998. "Hartshorne, Whitehead, and the Religious Availability of God." *The Personalist Forum*, 14, no. 2: 172-190.
- Nelson. Charles H. 1987. *John Elov Boodin: Philosopher-Poet*. New York: Philosophical Library.
- Neuber, Matthias. 2019. ["Between Pragmatism and Realism: The Philosophy of John Elov Boodin."](#) *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, XI-I. Available full-text.
- Pottinger, James I. 1969. ["The Philosophy of Religion of Henri Bergson."](#) PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh. Available full-text.

- Reck, Andrew. 1967. "Boodin, John Elof." In *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Vol. 1. New York: Macmillan.
- Suchocki, Marjorie Hewitt. 1989. *God, Christ, Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology*. New revised edition.
- Webb, Val. 2002. *Nightingale: The Making of a Radical Theologian*. St. Louis: Chalice Press.
- Whitehead, Alfred North. (1933) 1967. *Adventures of Ideas*. New York: The Free Press.
- _____. 1978. *Process and Reality*. Corrected edition. Edited by David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne. New York: The Free Press.
- _____. 1996. *Religion in the Making*. Introduction by Judith A. Jones, Glossary by Randall A. Auxier. New York: Fordham University Press.