Religion, Solitariness, and the Bloodlands

Daniel A. Dombrowski

American Journal of Theology & Philosophy, Volume 36, Number 3, September 2015, pp. 226-239 (Article)

Published by University of Illinois Press

Religion, Solitariness, and the Bloodlands

Daniel A. Dombrowski / Seattle University

I. Introduction

One of the most controversial features of Alfred North Whitehead's enormous influence on how philosophers and theologians think about God and religion is the close connection he sees between religion and solitariness in his classic work *Religion in the Making* (hereafter: RM).[1] The purposes of the present article are: (1) to understand the connection Whitehead sees between religion and solitariness; (2) to understand why Whitehead's view of this connection is so controversial; and (3) nonetheless to defend the close connection that Whitehead sees. Regarding this last purpose, I will appeal to authors who write from or about the "Bloodlands," a term coined by the historian Timothy Snyder that refers to a large portion of Eastern Europe where, between 1933–1945, over 14 million individuals were murdered by either Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union. In addition to Snyder, I will be engaging with the Nobel laureate Czeslaw Milosz (as well as with Milosz's communication with Jerzy Andrzejewski), who lived through this disastrous period in the Bloodlands.

II. Religion as Solitariness

The Whiteheadian view in RM that there is, at the very least, a close connection between religion and solitariness is in part a protest against the view of religion as a social fact or as public display. In addition to the pageantry of religion, there is something more important that occurs when someone is seized by the inwardness of a particular religious tradition. "Religion is the art and the theory of the internal life" of an individual (RM 16). Whitehead well realizes, along with John Donne, that no person is an island and that we cannot understand individuals apart from the social facts within which they have grown. However, collective emotion and societal influences leave untouched "the awful ultimate fact" that, in a sense, each of us is alone, especially when we die. To be alone, however, is not necessarily to be lonely or to be bereft of meaningful contact with others.

1. See Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996).

American Journal of Theology & Philosophy · Vol. 36, No. 3, September 2015

"Religion is what the individual does with . . . solitariness" (RM 16), on Whitehead's view. When stress is placed on the word "does" in this quotation, some misconceptions of his view can be avoided. Perhaps what one can do is to commit oneself to service of one's family or community. Or perhaps what one can do is to imitate God, seen in Whitehead's process terms, not as an omnipotent tyrant, but as a companion, a fellow-sufferer who understands (RM 17).[2] In stronger terms, at times Whitehead suggests that there is more than a close relationship between religion and solitariness, there is an identity of the two: "religion *is* solitariness" (RM 17—emphasis added). What this means is that if one has never been solitary, one cannot be religious. On this account, religion is beyond collective enthusiasm, institutions, churches, revivals, sacred texts, rituals, codes of behavior, and other trappings or external manifestations. Rather, "what should emerge from religion is individual worth of character" (RM 17).

The earliest phases of religion do indeed tend to reduce it to a social fact or a tribal identity, fueled by herd psychology. But once efforts to rationalize religious belief are initiated, solitariness comes to the fore. Whitehead lists as examples of the solitariness that haunts the imaginations of religious believers scenes where Prometheus is chained to a rock, the Hebrew prophets protest and denounce unjust rulers, Mohammed broods in the desert, the Buddha meditates, and Jesus suffers on the cross. In each case, there is a sense that the solitary individual in question felt forsaken (RM 19–20, 28, 30). The great rationalized religions are the result of a religious consciousness that is universal rather than tribal. And it is *precisely because* of such universality that solitariness is introduced. The universality of rationalized religion signals both a disconnection or detachment from immediate surroundings and the search for something that is intelligible and everlasting in the midst of the flux. Once again, religion consists in the cleansing of one's inner parts and in what one *does* with one's own solitariness (RM 47, 58, 60).

It is easy to see why some critics might be skittish about Whitehead's view that religion *is* solitariness (RM 17), but it is important to notice that this view is not at odds with the more familiar claim that human beings are social animals. The topic of religion, for Whitehead, is individuality *in* community, with the individuality of human beings just as important as their communal existence. In one sense, Whitehead's view seems to be that individuality and community are on a par. But in another sense, his view seems to be that the world is a scene of solitariness in community such that religion is primarily

2. Also see Whitehead, *Process and Reality,* corrected ed., ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), 7.

individual. Perhaps the safest characterization of his stance is that, although it is correct to say that one cannot really understand human individuals apart from their societal influences, it is equally true to say that one cannot really understand *human* community without coming to terms with what it means to be a solitary individual. The profundity of this insight will become apparent when we examine what Snyder and especially Milosz and Andrzejewski say about the Bloodlands.

III. Snyder on the Bloodlands

Each of the 14 million people murdered in the Bloodlands became a number. (By the "Bloodlands," Snyder refers to the territories subject to both German and Soviet police power between 1933–1945, principally Poland, the Baltic states, the Ukraine, Belarus, and western Russia.) The killing began with the political famine that Stalin directed at the Ukraine, which took 3 million lives. It continued with Stalin's "Great Terror" of 1937–1938, in which about 700,000 people were shot. Then in 1939, the Germans and the Soviets cooperated in the destruction of Poland. After Germany declared war on the Soviet Union in June of 1941, there were 4 million non-Jews, mostly prisoners of war and the inhabitants of Leningrad, who were murdered. During the war, approximately 5.7 million Jews were killed by the Germans (and the Rumanians). It is no wonder that Hannah Arendt, in her classic study of totalitarianism, painted this picture in terms of the contemporary superfluity of the individual.[3] First we slowly lose our humanity in mass society, then it is extinguished altogether in the death camps. As Snyder puts the point in his book on the Bloodlands (hereafter: BL), "Auschwitz is the coda to the death fugue" (BL 383).[4]

One of the many virtues of Snyder's magisterial book is that it forces us to slow down the theoretical impulse, including that found in the present article. Europe's mass killing tends to be overtheorized and, as a result, misunderstood. That is, there is a lack of proportionality between theory and historical knowledge. Nazi Germany murdered about 10 million people in the Bloodlands (and about 12 million overall), and the Soviet Union under Stalin murdered about 4 million people in the Bloodlands (and about 9 million total). These numbers, of course, are staggering, even if they lean on the conservative side (BL 384, 412). Nazi Germany, in particular, killed millions of people faster than any state in history to that point. Mao's China exceeded Hitler's Germany in the

3. See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1966).

4. Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

famine of 1958–1962 by killing approximately 30 million people (see BL 504). However, if Nazi Germany had won the war, Hitler's plan was to kill within a few years another 30 million Slavs such that, by culling the Slavic herd, Eastern Europe would be available for German colonization (BL 416). These enormous numbers do not include those killed in battle, those who died as forced laborers, those who died of hunger due to wartime shortfalls, or civilians who died in bombings. The 14 million in question were *murdered* (BL 410).

It is perhaps not surprising that there is at present an international competition for martyrdom as these numbers, beyond biblical proportions, have become nationalized and politicized. "Nationalists throughout the bloodlands (and beyond) have indulged in the quantitative exaggeration of victimhood, thereby claiming for themselves the mantle of innocence" (BL 402). But the accurate numbers are nonetheless shocking. The greatest single crime in the Bloodlands was the annihilation of the Jews, but other crimes, including the murder of millions each of Poles, Ukrainians, and Belarusians, are quite remarkable (BL 405–6).

The connection between Snyder and Whitehead comes into focus in the following questions asked by Snyder:

> Can the dead really belong to anyone? Of the more than four million Polish citizens murdered by the Germans, about three million were Jews. All of these three million Jews are counted as Polish citizens, which they were. Many of them strongly identified with Poland; certain people who died as Jews did not even consider themselves as such. More than a million of these Jews also counted as Soviet citizens, because they lived in the half of Poland annexed by the USSR at the beginning of the war. Most of these million lived on lands that now belong to independent Ukraine. Does the Jewish girl who scratched a note to her mother on the wall of the Kovel synagogue belong to Polish, or Soviet, or Israeli, or Ukrainian history? . . . So even when we have the numbers right, we have to take care. The right number is not enough. (BL 406–7)

Although accurate counting is a necessary condition for understanding what happened in the Bloodlands between 1933–1945, it is not sufficient. For example, the 5.7 million Jewish dead should be counted as 5.7 million *times one* in that no generic Jews were killed, but specific individuals. Snyder offers an instructive way to grasp the individuality and Whiteheadian solitariness of the dead. The official number of those killed at Treblinka is 780,863. The 3 at the end might be seen to refer to Tamara and Itta Willenberg, whose clothes clung together after their bodies were gassed, and Ruth Dorfmann, who was able to cry with the barber who cut her hair before she entered the gas chamber and who consoled her by saying that her death would be quick. Or again, of

the 33,761 individuals shot at Babi Yar, the 1 at the end, let us say, was Dina Pronicheva's mother (BL 408).

To put Snyder's point in Whiteheadian terms, if one has never been solitary, one has never been religious. And to put Whitehead's point in Snyder's terms, if one does not grasp the murders in the Bloodlands as 14 million *times one,* then one fails to comprehend the immorality (and hence the irreligiosity) of these events. On the religious view, at least in the Abrahamic religions (as evidenced in Genesis) and perhaps in other religions as well, it is individual human beings who are made in the image of God, with this view modified somewhat in Islam where images are prohibited. As this point is made in Christian scripture, God cares even for the fall of a sparrow, but *each* of us is of more value than many sparrows (Matthew 10:28). This omnibenevolent concern for individuals in their solitariness was not lost on Hamlet, who alludes to this piece of scripture shortly before his death (act 5, scene 2).

IV. Milosz, the Individual, and the Collective

Much more needs to be said, and Milosz helps us to say it. During World War Two, Milosz lived in Warsaw and was part of the Polish resistance to the Nazis. After the war, he received political asylum from Soviet domination of Poland and lived in Europe and the United States until his death in 2004. In 1996 a collection of essays written from 1942–1943 appeared in print and was subsequently translated into English in 2005. These essays, gathered together under the title *Legends of Modernity* (hereafter: LM), cluster around the themes of religion and the tension between the individual and the collective.[5] In each essay of the book, a single author is analyzed in terms of the contribution made in the effort to understand both the nature of religion and the related tension between the individual and the collective. My claim is that by coming to grips with Milosz's understanding of this tension, and the impact this tension has on religion, we will come to better appreciate the nuances of the Whiteheadian view of religion that is the focus of the present essay. The high-pressured atmosphere of Warsaw during the war, where brute force reigned supreme, sheds light on human nakedness that can be quite revealing.

Legend of the Island

Milosz was formed intellectually as a Catholic. On his view, the path to perfection in Catholicism is strictly communal and based on the concept of *the*

5. Czeslaw Milosz, *Legends of Modernity,* trans. Madeline Levine (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005).

common good. This perhaps explains the fascination Milosz has, by contrast, for Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*,[6] which is the subject matter of the first essay in the book and of the first legend of modernity: the legend of the island. When communal life becomes oppressive, a longing arises for total isolation, where island life symbolizes an absence of human conflict. Milosz reads *Robinson Crusoe* as a Christian book of removal and repentance. Specifically, it is a Protestant book that, although it does not reveal *in toto* the true nature of a human being, it does nonetheless accurately depict a search for something that is crucial: a place where one can flee in order to rescue. It is well known, however, that Robinson Crusoe is himself not an island in that he brought civilization with him, including the desire for profit and a willingness to exploit. Thus, neither Catholic communalism nor "Protestant merchant morality," to use Milosz's language, is individually sufficient. The legend of the island is supported by Rousseau's idea that the source of evil is outside of us and that both goodness and religion are innate. Living on an "island" enables one to submit human nature to close analysis, however, the result of which is a certain skepticism regarding Rousseau's buoyancy, as Robinson Crusoe's own guilt makes apparent. There will be no easy, sentimentalized *romantische Strasse* to understanding the solitariness that is the origin of religion, as Whitehead understands it.

Legend of the Monster City

Just as Robinson Crusoe carries civilization with him to the island, so also people in a capitalist society bring their individualism with them when they enter a city. Milosz's chapter on the legend of the monster city examines Balzac's contribution to the subject matter in question. Indeed, a capitalist city is one where isolated individuals struggle against other isolated individuals. Paris, for example, is the Babylon of our times, according to Milosz, in that the frantic tempo of contemporary life found there fosters depersonalization. Those who live in a small town tend to see the same people over and over, such that any change that occurs there happens only gradually. In big cities, however, we meet and pass by so many people in a short amount of time that we cannot really learn to care for them and we are instead encouraged to foster the desire to preserve our own interests. Balzac himself seems incapable of constructing a noble character in his novels.[7] Quite ironically, living in a throng actually

6. Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (New York: Scribner, 1983). On process thought and the common good, see John Cobb and Herman Daly, *For the Common Good* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), a view that is compatible with my own Rawlsian leanings.

7. See, e.g., Honore de Balzac, *Old Goriot*, trans. Ellen Marriage (New York: Knopf, 1991).

encourages the interiorization of religion, especially if there is enormous evil that is being perpetrated in the city. Whereas cities seem to be life affirming in that they, like Noah, preserve a pair of every form of life, they actually facilitate various phenomena that are nothing less than monstrous. In effect, the legend of the island and the legend of the monster city hold each other in check in the effort to understand the Whiteheadian view of religion as solitariness.

Legend of the Will

The first two legends give rise to a third: the legend of the will. Here Milosz considers the thought of Marie-Henri Beyle, who is better known by his pseudonym, Stendhal, especially his novel *The Red and the Black*.[8] Because we live in monster cities, like so many Jonahs inside a whale, some individuals arise who think themselves to be superior to others and whose *ressentiment*, which includes a volatile mixture of envy and anger, propels them toward conspiracy theories regarding why they have been kept down. These supposed superior individuals tend to see religion as merely a human fiction. In fact, the tendency on the part of the allegedly superior individual is to think that only *he* sees things as they are and only *he* is not deceived. (In his analysis of Stendhal's character Julien Sorel, Milosz relies heavily on the thought of Max Scheler.[9])

Stendhal's novel is consistently individualistic, but unlike the individualism of Defoe, which is tied to the legend of retreat and repentence, the individualism evidenced in the legend of the will is fueled by histrionic and hyperbolic ambition. Raskolnikov in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*[10] has thoughts and urges much like those of Julien Sorel, and these constitute nothing less than the deification of the will, according to Milosz. It is not surprising that Stendhal exerted a strong influence on Nietzsche, who, on Milosz's interpretation, played a significant role in the formation of the Nazi version of totalitarianism; in fact, such a role "cannot be denied," he thinks (LM 46). Great individuals rise above both good and evil as well as truth and falsity such that all blame is to be heaped on those who shackle these great individuals or collection of individuals.

These self-proclaimed great men typically construct a mythic version of history according to a romantic template wherein an original golden age is lost due to some big mistake such that only a great individual can recover former glory. In the case of Nazi Germany, this type of history involved the myth of a

8. Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*, trans. Charles Tergie (New York: Collier, 1961).

9. Max Scheler, *L'Homme du ressentiment* (Paris: Gallimard, 1933).

10. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment,* trans. Jessie Coulson (New York: Norton, 1964).

lost fatherland populated by Siegfried and Barbarosa; only Hitler could bring back and expand lost conquests. The spoils that accrue to great individuals (or to a collection of such, as in the Germans when seen as a master race) are compensation for their having to live among the unwashed masses. Throughout his discussion of the legend of the will, Milosz emphasizes the fact that those along the Stendhal-Nietzsche axis tend to exaggerate both the (real) tension between the individual and the city and the (imagined) superiority of some of the former to the latter. These exaggerations have as their result nothing less than the instrumentalization of the truth for the ends contrived by the supposed superior individuals. As Milosz sees things, however, when religious ideals (as in Christian *agape,* Buddhist compassion) retreat, the result is like a receding tide that leaves behind a population of sandcrabs scrambling in panic, which is an obvious allusion to the chaos he experienced in Warsaw in 1942–1943 (LM 48).

Absolute Freedom

The legend of the will segues easily into Milosz's treatment of "absolute freedom," where his focus is on Gide, who was heavily influenced by Nietzsche. Gide, like Nietzsche, came from a Protestant background, yet he rejected Christianity. He is instructive because, although he advocated an extreme form of individualism, he (like Sartre) eventually turned to communism. This is analogous to the fact that Nietzsche's hyper-individualism exerted considerable influence over the architects of the fascistic version of totalitarianism. Failure to understand and appreciate the idea, congenial to Whitehead, that we are individuals-in-community can lead to the disastrous consequences that Milosz witnessed personally under the Nazis and the Soviets. That is, the aforementioned histrionic and hyperbolic version of individualism, termed by Milosz the legend of the will, is itself susceptible to a diabolical strain of collectivization. This is because the absolute, unrestricted freedom claimed by defenders of the legend of the will includes the freedom to declare not only oneself but also one's *volk* or one's party to possess a monopoly on, and a license to use, force.

In Gide's book *Travels in the Congo,*[11] the author empathizes with the people he saw in that part of the world, but he does so from above, not only from the perspective of a Nietzschean who apparently thought of himself as an *ubermensch,* but also from the vantage point of a wealthy background. From Milosz's quite different point of view, the people described by Gide were apparently living in what amounted to concentration camps. Gide in effect drapes

11. Andre Gide, *Travels in the Congo,* trans. Dorothy Bussy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962).

an aesthetic cloak around certain poisonous international currents. Both Nietzsche's and Gide's inner heroic powers were in reality inner demons. As a result, the sword that fell into the hands of madmen like Hitler and Stalin was actually forged by certain romantic thinkers (LM 57) whose apotheocizing of the solitary individual had unintentional yet devastating consequences.

Gide is unfair to Protestantism when he sees Nietzsche as its culmination, although it must be admitted that in the tension between the individual and the communal there is a tendency in Protestantism toward the former. Where Gide is very helpful is in his unwittingly alerting us to the close connection that can exist between self-liberation and the rapture of destruction. The nonchalance with which Nietzsche and Gide talk about destruction, however, pained Milosz a great deal as a denizen of the Bloodlands. He is intent to defend the claims that the delicate hands of intellectuals are very often stained with blood and that the mottos of totalitarian regimes are simplified versions of philosophy.

It is noteworthy that Milosz read William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* just after he graduated from high school.[12] This book had a profound effect on him in the effort to reach equilibrium among conflicting (not necessarily contradictory) forces (LM 68). Among these are the tension between the Jamesian will to believe and rationality as well as the tension between the individual and the communal. As Milosz was writing in 1942–1943, World War Two was not yet a social, historical fact. It was a personally *experienced* reality. War is by its very nature destructive of equilibrium and produces in its victims a sense of helplessness and biblical destitution. It is also conducive to a loss of faith in both civilization and religion and encourages a deep yearning for harmony and equilibrium. War brings about a rupture in which it is understandable to ask the question as to which of our ideals and goals are primary.

This is very close to what Whitehead means by claiming a close connection, even identification, between religion and solitariness. War makes us very much aware of the fact that human beings can commit monumental evil, but they are also capable of incredible saintliness. It should not, but often does, hide from us the great and wise harmony or equilibrium of existence in general (LM 84). Here Milosz learns a great deal from Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.[13] Does one *need* severity in order to accept civilization and religion? This is a complicated question, both psychologically and philosophically. Whitehead himself apparently

12. See William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

13. Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace,* trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage, 2008).

linked the impulse to worship and the religious philosophy for which he became famous, on the one hand, with his son Eric's death in World War One, on the other. This particular death insured that Whitehead would not be calloused by years of mass slaughter. The very worth of the world was confirmed by Eric's death.[14] Milosz, too, was well aware of the common Slavic theme of purification through suffering. Solitariness need not be equated with the various types of egoism that are so hard to eradicate.

As Milosz sees things, there is a question mark that hovers over the future of religion. Solitariness can lead one to some version of theism, to nontheistic religiosity in the case of Buddhism, or to agnosticism or atheism. Milosz's fear was that ethics would devour theistic metaphysics and religion and that relativistic aesthetics would devour ethics. It was certainly easy in 1942–1943 to be persuaded by catastrophism. But the problem he faces is not as particular as it seems initially. Religion started losing its influence once philosophy arrived in ancient Greece. That is, the equilibrium supplied by dominant religion has been challenged ever since Socrates' questioning. Milosz and Whitehead are alike in thinking that if we are to achieve some sort of reflective equilibrium (which involves an overcoming of the bifurcation of nature, in Whitehead's terms[15]), then a theistic metaphysics is required, although Milosz is less advantaged than Whitehead in this regard in that he would have been familiar only with the Thomistic, classical theistic view (and with certain forms of German idealism) and not with Whitehead's and Hartshorne's neoclassical or process theistic alternative.[16] Milosz well knew, however, that neo-Thomism did not bring us close to the equilibrium that is needed wherein the great achievements in the humanities along with those in the sciences would be brought under the umbrella of one conceptual system, albeit a fallible and revisable one as the ongoing process of critical inquiry advances.

Despite the fact that Milosz felt that he was saturated with collective categories imposed by both the political right and left, he thought, along with Whitehead, that it was anxiety regarding one's individual existence that led people, not only to religion, but also to art, which is a poor substitute for religion, he thinks. In an essay on a thinker well known in Poland but not elsewhere (Stanislaw Witkiewicz), Milosz suggests that religion arises in an individual

14. See Whitehead's *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead,* ed. Lucien Price (Jaffrey, NH: Nonpareil Books, 2001), 7, 19, 112, 290, 292–93.

15. Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920).

16. One of the few authors who has noted the similarity between Whitehead and Milosz is Bruno Latour, "What Is the Style of Matters of Concern?," in *The Lure of Whitehead,* ed. Nicholas Gaskill and A. J. Nocek (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 92.

who is astonished that one is oneself. Coming to terms with one's personal identity involves a process whereby religious questions are inevitable. Milosz is also like Whitehead in thinking that each moment brings with it a partially new reality, such that hope, however faint, is awakened with each drop of experience. When everything seemed to be hatred and despair, Milosz's method was to look within and write measured, perfectly calm sentences expressing his deepest thoughts and feelings (LM 260).

V. Milosz and Andrzejewski on Equilibrium

At the end of *Legends of Modernity,* an extended exchange of letters between Milosz and his less famous friend Andrzejewski has as its focus the individual and his or her solitariness. It is not surprising that, under the circumstances in the Bloodlands when these letters were written, society is seen as a terrifying desert because of the loss of a sense of the tragic. Individuals are precious precisely because they are fragile; they can fall and break. To be religious is to recognize this preciousness of the individual and to strive to preserve an ethical sense of the tragedy involved when one of them falls unnecessarily. This sort of individualism, it should be emphasized, is not to be confused with the legend of the island or capitalist self-interest or anarchism. The times in which Milosz and Andrzejewski lived enabled them to awaken to the sound of individual voices that in normal circumstances might have been taken for granted. In a sense, we live *and die* in isolation, as Joseph Conrad also noticed. And it is precisely this sort of isolation that counterintuitively makes it possible to achieve a solidarity that is deeper than any hoped for in the slogans of the French Revolution. Isolation is a burden that crushes individuals, thereby fueling the desire to be together voluntarily with other individuals who have preserved a sense of the tragic (LM 149, 154–55, 158, 160–61).

The solitariness of life in the Bloodlands led to a desire to get past one's time, to imagine a period in which the tyranny of the collective would end. But the end of such tyranny does not necessarily point toward individual*ism* in the pejorative sense of the term. Rather, as indicated in the previous paragraph, it could lead to genuine communion with others, to the sort of *solidarnosc* later developed by Lech Walesa and others. We are all familiar with the desiccated husk of religion. However, life in the Bloodlands can remind us of the solitary origins of the concepts of God and communal solidarity, of what Catholics call the Mystical Body of Christ, although there are rough equivalents to this in other religions. Instead of individual*ism,* Milosz and Andrzejewski seem to be pointing us toward the individual*ization* of human beings in solidarity with the same. Becoming a true individual is an arduous process rather than any accomplished fact or ready-made product. There is no need to overstep the mark by claiming

that individuals are so different from each other that no commonality can be found. By contrast, on the Milosz-Andrzejewski account, we are united in our solitariness, which can be seen to be Whitehead's very point (LM 163–64, 168).

The fact that individuals can communicate with each other helps to ease the tension between solitariness and communal values. It is such ability to communicate that leads to a deeper fraternity/sorority, indeed to a deeper solidarity, than might be suspected initially. The fact that we can talk with disgust about the Gestapo killing Jews or the communists liquidating the bourgeois intelligentsia is itself important in that such talk helps us to realize that a value is not necessarily defensible merely because it is communal. Likewise, it would be a mistake to think that a value is necessarily indefensible merely because it arises individually. In this regard, it is worth remembering that Socrates' daemon and Kant's categorical imperative so arose. When people are killed like bedbugs or flies, some respond to such insectivity by becoming indifferent to the death of others. But this is not the only response that is possible in that some are fettered by pangs of conscience even if they are not the ones responsible for the exterminations. Human nature is quite elastic. As we have seen Whitehead suggest, religion is what one *does* with one's solitariness. There is no guarantee that what will be done is good (LM 169–70, 174–77, 182, 189).

There is a vague sense in Milosz-Andrzejewski that the concept of God is improved through time and experience and that eventually there will be a new equilibrium where various conceptual tensions (e.g., religion and science, individuality and community) will be relaxed. In the Bloodlands, however, it is difficult to escape from the sense that solitariness brings one face to face with inner darkness. The hoped for new equilibrium would also bring about a relaxation of the tension between faith and reason. Tertullian's *credo quia absurdum est* ("I believe that which is absurd") has a certain beauty and usefulness when it is uttered to fill in certain gaps in human understanding, but it is extremely dangerous when it is placed on a banner as the chief slogan. Although Marxism, in particular, has been beneficial in exposing what often goes on behind the scenes in religion, the truly sacred things that are sometimes felt or thought in solitude are nonetheless left untouched by Feuerbach and Marx (LM 197, 199–200, 203, 206–10).

Those who have very strong social instincts will likely find cloistered monasteries, or the solitary equivalent of these in everyday life ("a room of one's own," "quiet time," etc.) as shallow, empty, useless, perhaps even parasitical. But this knife can cut both ways in that those who have developed contemplative lives will likely find odious the blithe energy with which active people move through their lives like ants. Both sides in this tension are subject to caricature. Milosz-Andrzejewski are aware of how difficult it is to achieve measure or Aristotelian moderation or equilibrium between the individual and the communal, but the

task is not impossible, say when communal values mirror, indeed amplify, the value of the individual and when one is able to rise above the quotidian. The Whiteheadian insight in this regard would seem to be that one cannot be a contemplative-in-action without first being a contemplative, someone who is renewed by solitariness. The sort of solitariness that is being extoled here is very much at odds with hubris or arrogance. The fact that collective currents affect who we are as individuals is not to be confused with the claim that they are sufficient in explaining the activity of solitary contemplation. And solitude *is* an activity, specifically an activity in which we can be astonished by both the transitoriness of momentary experience and the degree to which solitude is actually shared by reflective human beings (LM 215–57).

VI. Conclusion

The purpose of the present short article has been to explore the nuances of Whitehead's thesis that there is a crucial connection between religion and solitariness and to argue in favor of the claim that this thesis is not only not as implausible as many think but actually provides insight into the origins and nature of any religious belief that moves beyond mere conformity to social convention or obeisance to communal pressure. The effort to understand Whitehead's view is facilitated by Whitehead himself when it makes it clear that what he means by solipsism in *Process and Reality*[17] is markedly different from what he means by solitariness in *Religion in the Making*. But the effort to understand Whitehead's view also depends on a firm grasp of those communal values that are in dialectical tension with the solitary. Here it is crucial to note that we may just now be in an enviable position to come to grips with communal values in the contemporary world when they run amok.

Of course it has been my intent to say that even during the darkest days in the Bloodlands there were solitary individuals like Milosz and Andrzejewski who are instructive even today regarding the connection between solitariness and religion and regarding the dangers involved when communal values become simultaneously distorted and hegemonic. But their views were never made public until 1996 and did not appear in English until 2005. It should also be noted that, because most of the killings in the Bloodlands took place in regions under Soviet control after the war (including those committed by Nazi Germany, especially the Holocaust of the Jews), we have only recently been in a position to adequately assess these atrocities. Only since 1989 has the archival evidence in Eastern Europe really been opened up to historians

17. See Whitehead's *Process and Reality,* 81, 152, 158.

like Snyder. This evidence makes clearer than had been the case previously that the similarities between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union are as intelligible as the differences between the two, especially given the hatred each of these exhibited toward solitude and hence (pace Whitehead) toward religion. That is, we are in a better position at present to assess Whitehead's view of the connection between solitariness and religion than at any point since he made the connection in 1926. Further, scholars have hardly started the process of morally assessing China's version of the Bloodlands in the late 1950s and early 1960s, despite the fact that the Communist Party is still in power.[18] We should not ignore the nonviolent individuals in Hong Kong who, as I write in October of 2014, are heroically protesting the continued tyranny of the collective.

Snyder points out in an instructive way that not only Milosz but also Vasily Grossman (a journalist who travelled with the Red army) saw the few remaining Poles and Jews living in Warsaw at the end of the war as latter-day Robinson Crusoes. Each was aware of the other, but very often they were not in solidarity with each other as common victims of both the Soviets and especially the Nazis (for various complicated reasons that are not the foci of the present article). But Snyder also notes that Milosz tried to bridge the gap between Pole and Jew by highlighting what I have referred to above as shared solitude. As a Pole in solitude he could not help but notice that the Jews who died in the Warsaw ghetto (which did not exist before the war in that most Warsaw Jews were "assimilated") did so alone. As Snyder puts the point, "no earthly agent could sort the Jewish ashes from the Polish ones" (BL 297; also 280, 290).

The Milosz-Andrzejewski solitude-in-solidarity in the Bloodlands, as well as Whitehead's solitude after the death of his son in World War One, obviously encourages serious engagement with the theodicy problem. Such an engagement is not my focus here, even if it would be a rewarding topic for a future article. Suffice it to say that the keystone of process theodicy is provided by a critique of the concept of divine omnipotence. This critique is analogous to Andrzejewski's prediction that "the time will come to bid farewell, and not without regret, to the vanishing throne of God the Father" (LM 197). If God *is* omnipotent, then moral responsibility for the enormous suffering and death in the Bloodlands would seem to lie at the divine doorstep. Whitehead even goes so far as to compare the omnipotent God of classical theism with Hitler![19] However, theists can receive solace in knowing that there is a neoclassical, process alternative to classical theism.

18. See, e.g., Frank Dikotter, *Mao's Great Famine* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010).

19. See Whitehead's *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead,* 172–73, in an entry from August 30, 1941.