



# A Phenomenological Revision of E. E. Harris's Dialectical Holism

James Schofield

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**Fig. 1** Errol E. Harris at Northwestern University, early 1970s. (Photo recreated with permission from Nigel Harris)

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*Dedicated to all those beautiful souls who reflected, inspired, challenged,  
and knew me in Christchurch, New Zealand.*

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PART I

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# An Introduction to Dialectical Holism



# The Need for a New Metaphysics

## 1.1 THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF DIALECTICAL HOLISM

In the winter of 2007, at Plymouth State University, NH, I took a seat in what was to be my first course in philosophy. As it happened, Dr. David Haight was my professor and the course text was Harris's *Cosmos and Anthropos* (1991). After subsequent readings, it was this very text—which I now believe had no business being in an introductory philosophy course—that was to provide a road map for my own approach to philosophy and an essential inspiration for the present work.

Harris grew up in apartheid South Africa and was educated at Rhodes and Oxford. Years later, Harris taught philosophy at Northeastern University, where he and Haight had become friends. Harris's career was poised in a unique span of history that permitted him to witness first-hand the rise and fall of logical positivism, the Second World War, and the quantum revolution. His direct experiences with these and many other key developments in philosophy and science contributed tremendously to his arguments in philosophy of science, ethics, and epistemology, and helped to solidify his overarching worldview. By framing specific theories across the natural sciences within an account of phenomenology and process philosophy, Harris produced a metaphysics that he believed to be our best bet of addressing some

of our most long-standing philosophical problems. I aim to assess this system in light of recent developments in the very disciplines to which he appealed.

My claim is that by outlining and assessing Harris's system in the face of contemporary research there will emerge a form of mutual enlightenment: Harris's metaphysics reveals as yet unnoticed connections between and implications for a number of sympathetic theories, from psychology to cosmology on the one hand, while, on the other, recent research in these fields may also update the empirical content of Harris's original system. I maintain that the resulting metaphysics frames a transdisciplinary paradigm shift and provides a viable solution to the hard problem of consciousness.

Leaving aside monographs and handbooks devoted to the subjects, recent textbooks in metaphysics have largely excluded any mention of process ontology; while those textbooks devoted to the philosophy of science or mind have made little if any mention of *phenomenology*. What is distinctive of Harris's system is the effort to unite a transdisciplinary approach to consciousness with a metaphysics of process and a phenomenological methodology. Importantly, as will be a central theme in the chapters to follow, this approach led Harris to maintain that to be successful, philosophical theories of consciousness, cosmology, and everything in between had to be contextually examined in light of one another. This rendered Harris among the few system-builders who survived a mass extinction of his kind of philosophy by the hands of the empiricists in the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, various veins of research today—from 4E cognitive science to Bohmian mechanics and emergence—appear to at least in part and unwittingly be developing many of the same arguments as Harris had been advancing since 1965. What is especially noteworthy is that proponents of these mutually supportive camps do not appear to be fully aware of their would-be supporters working outside of their home discipline. For these reasons, illuminating Harris's efforts to establish such a transdisciplinary process philosophy is well warranted today.

To understand the metaphysics that Harris developed, and which I claim can be identified in numerous present-day theories, it is important to first become familiar with the traditions that have been influential in its formation. Roughly, but chronologically speaking, these traditions consist of the following four camps:

1. *Process ontology*—developed by ancient Greek philosophers and reignited in the early twentieth century by A.N. Whitehead (1861–1947),

these views hold that what exists (reality or being) is ultimately constituted by some kind of process(es).

2. *Objective idealism*—concerning the works of G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831) and his followers, this thesis argued that mind (Idea) is fundamental in nature and that its genesis aims at *maximally coherent self-reflection* (Absolute).
3. *Phenomenology*—first systematized by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) and later supported by gestalt and pragmatic psychologies, it aims to produce a rigorous method for revealing the necessary conditions and qualities of experience.
4. *Systems theory*—K.L. von Bertalanffy (1901–1972) first proposed this theory about the nature of complex systems, which has since been widely adopted as a framework for understanding organization and emergence across many of the special sciences.

A straightforward contention to follow is that if these camps do in fact reflect the core principles of Harris’s metaphysics, then some viable version of each must be consistent with one another. While I endorse this contention, I also go significantly further. I argue that Harris’s metaphysics provides a means of linking current research and arguments from each of the above camps and that doing so will be both scientifically and philosophically fruitful. If this is so, then “dialectical holism” will have survived Harris’s original formation.

Broadly construed, Harris’s system fits neatly within the tradition of process philosophy, which is based on the notion that ontology or Being is fundamentally dynamic and that this should be the central focus in any philosophical examination of natural phenomena. Traditional philosophies involving neo-empirical theories, by contrast, tend to sidestep or merely ignore the primary questions that process philosophers consider of utmost importance:

- (a) What is the role of mind in our experience of reality as becoming?
- (b) Are there different types of becoming?
- (c) If so, how ought we categorize the respective modes of becoming?
- (d) Is there a common and fundamental (evolutionary) form to all modes of becoming?
- (e) Is there a purpose or telos to the process(es) of nature?



Because the methods of traditional philosophy capture a static view of reality via formal systems such as predicate logic, process philosophers have had to develop their own concepts and methods to support their arguments. Proponents of this approach have consequently contributed immensely to theoretical philosophy, both in Europe and in the US. Throughout history numerous key figures have dealt with the above questions and posited answers that have been particularly influential for Harris's system. In what follows I provide a brief overview of these key historical theses and gesture towards how Harris has both utilized and critically responded to each.

### 1.1.1 *Ancient Philosophy*

In the Western tradition, Greek philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus (born ca. 560 BCE) is recognized as the founder of process metaphysics and has been famously credited with the saying, "it is not possible to step twice into the same river."<sup>1</sup> He believed that ultimate reality is the transformation of a cosmic fire, which produces apparently stable forms of matter such as sea and earth only to consume them again in an ongoing cycle of creation and disintegration. While fire is postulated as an underlying, all pervasive cosmic order that is creative and self-moving (what he called *logos*), the changes produced by fire were believed to occur in regulated ways. Heraclitus articulated three seminal insights in the history of Western process philosophy: (1) he considered process or dynamicity as an explanatory feature, rather than just a feature of nature to be explained; (2) he argued that processes form organizational units and occur in a quantitatively measurable fashion; and (3) he contrasted dynamic transitions or alterations with dynamic permanence, that is, he differentiated between two forms of dynamicity (Kirk 1951).

For the later Stoics, the *logos* was still considered a cosmic fire, dynamic in all existence, but also as divine and *rationally directed*. By calling God "cosmic fire", the Stoics reaffirmed their *ontological* monism, the view that what exists is a *singular* whole. In this vein, God is not over and above matter, but is rather the purest and subtlest aspect of matter. For the stoics, our nearest approach to this subtlest nature is in our reason, which is a spark of the divine fire within the human being (Tsanoff 2015, 112). This conception of "reason" was an important anticipation of what would later become the guiding theme of objective idealism, which had tremendous influence on Harris's work. A remaining challenge for the Stoics and

objective idealists alike, is that of reconciling conceptions of teleology (or purpose) and causal determinism in nature.

Aristotle (384–33 BCE) provided a characterization of matter that gave rise to the basic thesis of “substance metaphysics”, which further blossomed into a plethora of analytic accounts that have traditionally been opposed to process philosophy. Nevertheless, many of Aristotle’s conceptualizations also helped lay the foundation for and increased the sophistication of process thought today. One notable contribution in this regard includes his classification of changes (*Kinēsis*) as including generation, destruction, alteration, and locomotion. This classification rests on a sophisticated doctrine of “potential” versus “actual” features attributed to some continuous substances that could come into and go out of existence in predictable ways. His approach to such prediction largely depended upon an understanding of purpose in nature and formal order in its constituents, that is, the *scala naturae*.

In his *Categories*, Aristotle claims that *form* (*eidos*) makes something the type of thing it is by permitting and sometimes facilitating the changes it undergoes. Thus, he takes the form of an entity in question to be the “principle” of that being’s unity, not the summation of its parts. Aristotle maintained that temporal order depends upon a prior order that holds between stages of a change. He claims that “change is the actuality of that which potentially is” (*Physics*, Bk 3, Ch. 1). By this Aristotle appears to mean that any change depends upon something existing prior to the change that holds the potential to be in the end state after the change (Coope 2009, 43). Hence, he argues that it is the aim of a thing and the stages of that aim that both account for a being’s organization at any given stage and give rise to time itself.

Aristotle (1957) distinguished four types of causation, the first two being associated with a scientific conception of material interactions, whereas three and four have led to a great deal of debate in philosophy of science today:

- *Material*—influences by a material composition that bring about a particular resulting phenomenon (e.g. the clumpiness of clay).
- *Efficient*—influences by one object upon another in causal chains that result in a particular phenomenon (e.g. a potter moulding the clay).
- *Formal*—the organizational force that brings about a particular phenomenon (e.g. the form of a statue constraining its parts).

- *Final*—the purpose (or *telos*), for which some cause is done (e.g. the intention of the potter to form the clay into a statue).

Such an account of causation was deeply opposed to the atomistic views of Aristotle's time and was to become crucially important for Harris's later arguments against the reductive empirical theories of the early twentieth century. From early in his philosophical career at Rhodes University (1925) under the guidance of A.R. Lord, Harris was first subjected to these and many other ancient theories (Harris 2015, ff. 36). As evidenced by his detailed analyses of ancient and early modern theories in his *Fundamentals of Philosophy* (1969), Harris took to heart the long-standing traditional problems concerning reason, ontology, and the nature of causation. Consequently, he was ever mindful to contextualize his solutions within the historical debates surrounding these problems.

Along with most other process philosophers today, Harris faced the challenge of establishing a consistency between accounts of formal and final causation on the one hand and the theories of the natural sciences on the other, which typically recognize only efficient causation. In the current literature, avoiding reductivism typically involves appeals to *emergence*: the material generation of an irreducible property, relation, process, or function that arises at the level of a system-as-a-whole. As will be a recurring theme below (particularly Chap. 5), Harris provides extensive arguments from emergence for formal and final causation that are essential to his metaphysics.

### 1.1.2 Spinoza

Though not a process ontologist himself, Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) provided systemic accounts of nature, mind, and knowledge that have been invaluable for Harris's system. Spinoza's philosophy signified a radical break from Rene Descartes's (1596–1650) widely accepted view that mind and matter constitute two separate substances in nature. Central to Spinoza's philosophy was the thesis that "substance" is both sufficient in itself (ontologically independent) and conceived through itself (conceptually independent) (Spinoza 2002, ff. 217). A central aim of Spinoza's system is that of distinguishing between our knowledge and the nature of substance. For Spinoza, this singular Substance is identified with God or the *infinite idea of nature*, while the

diversity of phenomena in nature and our conceptualization of it is analysed in terms of *modes* and *attributes* of this Substance.

In his *Ethics*, Spinoza proposed that “mode” means the affections or modification of Substance that appear to occur through something other than Substance and by which it is conceived. Modes are thus ontologically and conceptually dependent upon Substance and are instantiated by all the ways things appear in the world. Spinoza introduced the idea of an “attribute” as that which the intellect perceives of Substance and constitutes its essence. Hence, attributes are posited as the properties that compose the singular Substance of nature. Though he claimed that there were infinite attributes, Spinoza maintained that only material extension and thought are available to the intellect. While attributes and their Substance depend upon one another, modes conceptually and ontologically depend upon their attribute. Importantly, while modes may be considered contingent insofar as their essences neither involve nor exclude their existence, those that do exist are necessitated by the essential attributes of Substance. Though he rejected teleology, Spinoza argues from analogy with geometric figures that this is because everything that is possible is made actual by the whole (E IP17; 33).

Harris published three texts on Spinoza’s philosophy: *Salvation from Despair* (1974), *Spinoza’s Philosophy an Outline* (1992), and *The Substance of Spinoza* (1995). Although Harris agreed with a qualified version of Spinoza’s pantheistic thesis and found many of his arguments relevant for contemporary moral and political debates, my interest is only with Harris’s appeals to Spinoza’s understanding of the relation between nature and mind. For Spinoza, the more perfection or reality a substance has, the more attributes it has, which meant that contrary to Descartes, a substance can have any quantity of attributes according to its degree of perfection, so it is possible for the thinking substance to be extended. As will be discussed at length in Chap. 6, Harris has argued: “Spinoza’s theory of body-mind relation is in effect an identity theory, and not, as is usually held, a theory of parallelism. Body and mind are one thing viewed in two alternative ways: as a mode of extension or as a mode of thought” (1973, 82). He claims that Spinoza’s conception of modes and aspects provides a framework for a non-reductive account of mind, which may be identified with the dynamic body as a whole (the relation being that of matter to form).

For Spinoza, the *conatus* (or self-preserving aim) of mind is that of acquiring adequate ideas in an effort to free oneself from the illusory passions. Though total completion of this task is not possible for any one life

because only Substance is determined to act by itself alone (E ID7), individuals can purportedly achieve a significant increase in freedom by aiming at truth. Harris claims this consists in elucidating “the comprehensive and systematic coherence of the whole” (1995, 5). Harris’s sustained argument has been that by identifying the idea and extension of nature with nature itself, Spinoza anticipates theories advanced by Hegel and Collingwood. The key difference being that the latter philosophers recognized that “Substance” must be qualified as a particular kind of process; one which links a coherence *theory of knowledge* and *dialectical evolution*:

Further development of the implications of the nature of Substance reveals that it differentiates itself into a scale of forms—infinite attributes, infinite modes, finite things that follow from it of necessity in infinite ways (modes) [...] all governed and determined by the same principle of order inherent in the attribute. (1995, 13)

### 1.1.3 *Hegel*

German philosophers such as G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831) and F.W.J. Schelling (1775–1854) attempted to establish a view of nature in which mind was fundamental. Growing out of Immanuel Kant’s (1724–1804) tradition of *transcendental* idealism, these later idealists were at pains to overcome the distinction advanced in his *Critique of Pure Reason* between the *phenomenal* realm of conditioned experience and the unknowable *noumenal* realm of things in themselves (1998). These post-Kantian idealists dealt with Kant’s challenge by developing phenomenological methods that focused upon the knowable appearance of the world and our capacities for reflective reasoning. This approach helped inspire the later phenomenological tradition and was invaluable in the development of Harris’s system.

Hegel (1977) maintained that understanding reality required that we understand the genesis of consciousness as a process within nature, which he called the dialectic. This he considered a gradual self-awareness of the whole of being, that is, an evolution towards Absolute (*Begriffe*). This is described as a “concretization” because as thought becomes increasingly self-aware, it more fully manifests the process and conditions of its own becoming. This process was later articulated within the following triadic structure:

1. *Thesis*—presuming a realism about one’s object, the moment of its particularity (multiplicity, abstractness, and externality) explicitly becomes the object of thought’s immanent self-reflection. In so doing, what was initially considered an adequate representation of infinite thought is revealed to be an incomplete, finite object.
2. *Antithesis*—a realism about thought’s object is suspended, which results in both self and idea being sceptically divided from their object (the world) via negation. Consequently, the *concept of being as a whole* is polarized.
3. *Synthesis*—finite determinations are understood as phases within a total movement. This movement is conceptualized as being governed by a principle of order that reveals the interdependence and unity of prior oppositions (e.g. self-object).

For Hegel, the inner movement of reality is the process of God coming to self-realization in and through the evolution of the universe and living beings. More specifically, Hegel argued that when fully understood, reality is the *Concept* being thought by God as manifested in a person’s comprehension of this process as an enactment of wisdom. Just as humans continually correct their concepts of reality through a dialectical process, so God is said to become more fully manifested through the dialectical process of becoming. Ultimately, Hegel maintained that recognizing the dialectic within one’s own mind permits a translation from the structure of our ideas (logic) to the essential features of nature (ontology), thereby identifying the former in the latter.

Though nearly every part of his system was in some way influenced by Hegel’s work, Harris published two texts specifically devoted to his philosophy: *An Interpretation of the Logic of Hegel* (1983) and *The Spirit of Hegel* (1993). In the former (1983) Harris summarizes dialectical logic thus:

True explanation, or proof, in dialectical logic, is nothing more nor less than the tracing out of the development of the Concept (or whole) itself—its self-specification. It is the process of self-explication of the system of the real, and explanation is seeing, or finding the proper place of each phase and item in the light of the whole and its principle of order. (171)

Crucial for later discussions, Harris’s assertion that the function of “explication” is that of *clarifying the relations among phases* will take on

increasing significance as we work towards his solution to the problem of consciousness. In his latter (1993) text, Harris expounded upon the essential insight from Hegel's line of reasoning that had guided much of his professional career, maintaining that dialectical evolution could be paired with modern sciences to provide a (monistic and process ontological) solution to the mind-body problem:

The soul, and subsequently the mind, are presented as successive phases of integrating, idealizing activity, the effect of which is the attainment of progressively higher degrees of organization and diversified unity. What is unified and idealized is primarily the organic process of the body, for body and mind are not two substances in external relation, but one in which different dialectical phases of concrete organization are manifested. (173)

Harris's greatest development and criticism of Hegel has certainly been an update of compatible scientific theories, but Harris remained committed to the idea that Hegel's core thesis provided the best way to systematize the natural sciences and solve long-standing metaphysical problems. To this end, Harris spent much of his career in dialogue with physicists, biologists, and psychologists to work out the most empirically secure interpretation of *dialectical evolution*, broadly construed. While Harris's resulting conception of evolution may provide a unique means of naturalizing mind, contra Harris, I argue that this reasoning does not entail objective idealism. Rather, I contend that if guided by pragmatist reservations and contemporary phenomenological insights, following Harris's own reasoning opens the way towards a much more fruitful research programme than either he or Hegel could clearly foresee.

#### 1.1.4 *Pragmatism*

The formation of pragmatism developed through conversations among a small group of American philosophers in Cambridge. Chief among them were Charles S. Peirce (1839–1914), William James (1842–1910), and later John Dewey (1859–1952). While their respective visions of the philosophy differed in pronounced ways, I claim that at least the following currents of pragmatism are consistent with one another and may provide crucial developments within Harris's system.

A scientist and mathematical genius, Peirce was so influenced by the development of modern biology and the German idealists that he posited a triadic evolutionary process as primary to both phenomenology and nature:

- *Firstness*—signifies the qualitative immediacy characteristic of anything *in itself*.
- *Secondness*—highlights an irreducible relational opposition.
- *Thirdness*—references the network of *connections* in and through which any experience acquires its defining properties.

However, Peirce rejected Hegel's grand conclusion about our capacity to apprehend the whole of nature via Reason and proposed the pragmatist maxim: we should consider what practical effects we can conceive the object of our belief to have and then our conception of those effects is the whole of our conception of the object. A realist about science, he maintained that we work at our best when engaging in a cooperative community to overcome common problems. By extension, he claimed that truth is to be understood as the result of an endless investigation (1931, 5.565); that which is fated to be ultimately agreed upon by all investigators (1931, 5.407). Thus, he supported *fallibilism*, which holds that no questions are unanswerable, no answers are absolutely true, no formulations are final, and no level of examination is ultimate (1931, ff. CP 1.141). By implication, inquiry is never complete and so we ought to question the *habits* of thought and action, so as to keep our *inquiry* moving forward.

A philosopher and psychologist, William James developed the pragmatist epistemology, in which truth was not abstract, objective, or pre-established in rationalist principles, but a context-dependent aspect of human cooperation. He maintained that “we carve out everything”, just as we identify constellations to serve human purposes. For James, neither do we create our truths out of nothing, nor is truth independent of human thought. He embraced the humanistic principle that we cannot weed out the human contribution and his metaphysics of process was endorsed on the basis that reality unfolds in and through human participation. Consequently, James maintained that there is no real distinction between unknown reality and the knowing consciousness; nor between objective matter and subjective mind. Reality, he claimed, is ultimately “pure experience”, which is *neutral* between *subjective* phenomena and *objective* material events (1976).



Counter his analytic contemporaries, psychologist John Dewey developed his theories of mind and nature upon a Hegelian metaphysic. Specifically, it was Hegel's organicism, dynamism, and interrelated conceptions of reality that Dewey found so appealing for their ability to fuse subject and object (Dewey 1981, 6–7). Dewey drew upon conceptions of a reflex arc developed in laboratory experiments to reject both theses of mind-as-substance and contemporary scientific projects that reduced mind to brain states. He anticipated modern dynamic field theory by maintaining that mind is a range of dynamic interactions between organism and world. Taking life to be fundamental, he proposed the term “situation” to denote the ongoing feedback loops of development that exist between organism and environment, which he believed to constitute the very becoming of reality. For Dewey however, this view of the mind was framed as a realist, naturalistic, non-reductive, and emergentist process metaphysics.

Following these original founders, pragmatists have been deeply critical of metaphysics insofar as it is a pursuit of insight into reality itself. More recently, Putnam (2002) has been credited for making clear what metaphysical claims are being rejected: (1) there is a definite class of objects and properties that exist mind- and discourse-independently; (2) the world can, in principle, be truly and completely described by means of a single true theory, from a “God’s-Eye View;” and (3) truth is to be understood as a non-epistemic relation of *correspondence* between propositions, sentences, and so on (i.e. the ultimate truth-bearers) and the non-linguistic items of the world itself. Instead, pragmatists have endorsed metaphysics as an inquiry into the fundamental, historically changing, and reinterpretable features of the *human world*. Following Kant, Pihlstrom (2011) claims pragmatism posits that the world emerges in and through our inquiry and world-categorizing practices. Metaphysics is thus reconceived as an examination of the basic features of a humanly categorized reality and the practice-embedded conditions necessary for us to be able to experience an objectively structured world.

Thus, process philosophy has been consistently endorsed by pragmatists since its original formation and has historically served as a unique bridge between process thought and phenomenology. “Temporality is, therefore, a fundamental feature of the world we live in, even if *nothing* is ‘fundamental’ in the metaphysical realist’s sense” (Pihlstrom, 95). Accordingly, the basic nature of reality must be understood as a constant flux of evolution, one which is somehow continuous with our

world-constructing activities. As Pihlstrom (2011) argues, this creates what can be called *transcendental* pragmatism: “if we cannot expect metaphysics to deliver a view of the world in itself, we must carefully consider how exactly we humans contribute to ‘constituting’ the world, to ‘structuring’ it into what it is for us” (98). Pihlstrom further recognizes that this is consistent with a methodological appeal to phenomenology in the service of uncovering the (transcendental) conditions of respective experiences, habits, and inquiries. If we cannot take a view from nowhere, we must always include the limitations of our knowledge and the habits that inform it within our metaphysical analyses. As Putnam (2002) holds, there are no value-independent facts and no fact-independent values. This renders an inherent connection between metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics and implies that *all are latent in our habitual inquiry of the world*.

Though Harris did not write at length about the pragmatist works, their developments in philosophy of science and metaphysics are important here for three central reasons. First, because the past decade has witnessed a sudden outpouring of works dedicated to linking embodied cognitive science with pragmatism and I find that although the process metaphysical insights that lay therein have not yet been adequately developed, the results are already compatible with Harris’s system. Second, although James’s conception of *pure experience* is inadequate on its own, I argue that the metaphysical notion of “*neutral monism*”, to which he appealed provides perhaps the most important adjustment to Harris’s system. Finally (in Chap. 8), I argue that many of Harris’s realist conclusions about consciousness and reality are best maintained if they are subdued by the above epistemic reservations of contemporary pragmatism. The resulting system, I maintain, remains consistent with the pragmatist themes of linking phenomenology, epistemology, ethics, and metaphysics into a non-reductive schema, but Harris’s work provides a far more rigorous paradigm across the natural sciences than has hitherto been endorsed by the proponents of pragmatism.

### 1.1.5 *Whitehead*

Alfred North Whitehead’s (1861–1947) metaphysics grew out of a career steeped in logic, mathematics, and theoretical physics, the results of which rendered one of the most complex and revered process philosophies of the modern age. First working with Whitehead’s ideas during his early research at Oxford, Harris found Whitehead’s “philosophy of organism” to

provide some much-needed scientific and logical rigor for the earlier philosophical systems he most admired. Nevertheless, he ultimately maintained that to the extent that Whitehead had succeeded, he had merely revised Hegel's arguments concerning dialectical evolution, while his idiosyncratic terminology appeared burdensome and unnecessary.

Whitehead's greatest philosophical work *Process and Reality* (1929, 1978) was written for the 1927 Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh. Counterintuitively, there are no items in Whitehead's ontology called "processes". Rather, process refers to the way in which the basic things, "events" come into existence and cease to exist. Conscientious of Zeno's paradox, Whitehead argued that there must be a becoming of continuity, but no continuity of becoming. This implies that events have no proper parts (i.e. atomism) and temporal instances are mere abstractions. Though, events must come about all at once, Whitehead admits that we can perform "genetic" analyses concerning the antecedents of a given event, which can occur in and reveal stages of its "becoming". This genetic analysis became the central method of Whitehead's system and relied upon an appeal to *internal relations*, that is, that events are what they are because of their relations to one another.

For Whitehead, every new event is generated from its own universe (an "ingression"), which is comprised of two domains: (1) all "*eternal objects*", ideal kinds or universals outside of space-time; and (2) all concrete events that are accessible to or "*prehended*" by the new event, which are necessarily restricted by the speed of light and thus occur in its backward light cone. As Simons explains, the genesis of events is deliberately described in quasi-psychological terms as *striving* to come into existence (or *concrecence*) by *surveying* all eternal objects via *conceptual prehension* (2009, 186). Events select among the eternal objects and all other events in the universe which should be *ingressed* in virtue of their *feeling* and the decision is made based upon the sum of negative and positive prehensions regarding a particular manifestation.

Whitehead's (1929, 1978) concepts of the "society" serves as an anticipation of what Harris would later propose as the "unifying principle" (introduced in Chap. 2). For Whitehead, the "society" meant any (becoming) actual occasion (or interrelated *nexus* of entities) serving as a (layered) environment that influences the becoming of its constituent events. Importantly, the members or occasions of a "society" exist in virtue of the *laws* of their society and bring their laws into being (ff. 91). Whitehead posited a supreme category of *creativity* on the basis that no two events

ingress the same universe, but that each comes to be in a unique and creative way. By implication, what Whitehead calls the basic cell of *becoming* may have different epochs, each with their own laws or spatiotemporal dimensions. Whitehead's genetic analysis is thus ecological in the sense of treating each event as an organism in interdependent relation with its environment. Because his cosmology is composed of a hierarchy of *perceptions* (beginning with its pre-conscious analogue of prehension), Whitehead attributes sentience to everything down to electrons, which means he is ultimately a panpsychist. Within this schema, consciousness is a late phase and God is the ultimate concrescent "*event*" *within* nature.

For Harris, the above struck him as easily reducible to a variant of Hegelian idealism. Although Whitehead does not provide an explicit account of the method of process, Harris claims that what he does reveal is evidently dialectic in form. In his effort to preserve realism, Whitehead avoids a logical account of process, but Harris claims, he posits the stages of concrescence as that of an organic development, which Hegel called *Geist* (1993, 253). Harris claims that Whitehead's conception of the process of concrescence occurs through the transition from one "epoch" to the next via prehension, while the principles involved are the same throughout:

The phases are those of dative ingression, conformal physical feeling, conceptual feeling, and comparative feeling. The first two are virtually one, for conformal feelings are simply the veridical prehensions of the data. So we have a Hegelian triad: first immediacy, then distinction and differentiation, and finally articulated synthesis. (1993, 254)

In its final draft, Harris explains that the thesis he had developed at Oxford "had argued that the concept of evolution could build a bridge between traditional Idealism and Realism" (2015, 176). He goes on to say that towards this end, reading Spinoza through Whitehead's works provided a framework that ruled out reductionist and dualistic depictions of mind. While, in a later work he elaborates how reading Hegel through Whitehead revealed a way of positing an idealism in realist terms:

In his mature thought, as we have seen, Nature is the process of concrescence throughout which principles of definiteness, the objects of conceptual prehensions, which are the germ of mind, are everywhere immanent [...] and this mentality develops until it emerges as consciousness, which attains

its ultimate and complete realization in the consequent nature of God. So Whitehead's philosophy reconciles the Realism and the Idealism of his day. (1993, 256)

While Harris embraces Whitehead's methodological appeal to internal relations and appreciates his conception of creative evolution, he diverged from Whitehead's philosophy in numerous ways. Principally, Harris endorses both cosmological and biological teleology, while Whitehead rejected it. We find further disagreement when considering the topics of universals and the very conception of concrescent reality. For Whitehead, universals are "eternal objects" located in the mind of God, who is an actual entity. According, the divine actuality primordially orders the eternal objects into ideal patterns arranged in a hierarchy of complexity. For Harris however, it can be said that there exists only one universal and that it is enacted through the whole of physical evolution—what he believed could unite abstract and concrete domains. Contrary Whitehead, for Harris the universals identified by thought are understood as shadows (so to speak) of a unified process that constitutes ultimate reality. While the universe-as-a-whole is construed as *organic*, Harris rejects the notion that individual occasions may be deemed either sentient or atomic. For Harris, sentience (just as consciousness) is an accomplishment of a system that has achieved a sufficient level of organization.

### 1.1.6 *Gestalt Psychology*

At the end of the nineteenth century there were many complex discussions concerning the nature of consciousness (e.g. Brentano, Russell, and Husserl) and the necessary methods for studying it (e.g. Wundt, G.T. Fechner, and James). Though many of these researchers read and learned from one another initially, over time each diverged from one another and inspired their own approaches to philosophy and psychology. These included analytic philosophy, pragmatism, phenomenology, and eventually behaviourism. By the 1950s behaviourist psychology had reached its peak and managed to reject the disciplines of idealism and phenomenology as idle introspection. Proponents of behaviourism, such as John Watson and Wilhelm Wundt distrusted the methods of introspection under the assumption that it led to self-absorption and arbitrary observations. By the late twentieth century these schools were hardly communicating anymore, having been entrenched within their own tradition and preferring to argue amongst themselves.

Harris was certainly unusual among philosophers in the early twentieth century for not only dedicating himself to studying both analytic and phenomenological philosophies of mind, but for also making a concerted effort to follow the contemporary research in psychology. Though he appreciated the increasing rigor of scientific psychology, Harris found the philosophical assumptions of the early twentieth-century empiricists deeply inadequate for understanding the natures of consciousness and reality. Specifically, gestalt psychology provided an important logic crucial in bypassing the behaviourist programme and developing Harris's own philosophy of mind.

The main figures of gestalt psychology were Max Wertheimer (1880–1943), Wolfgang Kohler (1887–1967), and Kurt Kafka (1887–1941). Proponents rejected the hitherto accepted Cartesian framework that mind, and matter were *separate substances* (dualism), as well as the theory that experiences were essentially *bundles of sense data* (atomism). Gestalt theory began as an effort to establish organizing principles of experience, whereby meaning and understanding are established not in isolatable increments, but as immediate *forms* that appear within human perception. “Gestalts were not imposed on experience by the mind but were discovered in experience. Gestalts were objective, not subjective [...] physically real, natural self-organizations in nature, in the brain, and in experience, all of them isomorphic to one another” (Leahey 2000, 272). Originally guided by six principles of experiential organization, gestalt psychology introduced concepts that were radical at the time and developed an empirical research programme whose ripple effect can still be seen in phenomenology and cognitive science today.

Following gestalt psychology, Harris maintains there is an isomorphism between phenomenal and physiological wholes and so we ought to look for “laws of organization [...] not physical forces but dynamic principles governing the way in which phenomena group themselves into patterns and parts are drawn together into wholes” (1965, 393). Although it would be more accurate within Harris's system to exchange “isomorphism” with “homeomorphism”, the connection between gestalt theory and Harris's metaphysics is so significant that one could summarize his work as an *effort to establish the underlying process, by which such wholes are generated within phenomenology and across all the natural sciences*. Nevertheless, Harris encountered disagreements within the gestalt theory as well.