

The Ontology of Process Philosophy in Follett's Administrative Theory

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ABSTRACT

The importance of ontology to social theory is emerging in a variety of fields associated with political theory, including public administration. This article explores the ontological underpinnings of Follett's theory of governance, including both political and administrative theory. The observation of similarities between Follett's concepts and those of Whitehead's process philosophy led to the discovery that they were indeed contemporaries who mutually influenced one another's work, with Follett focusing on the social and Whitehead focusing on the physical. This article interprets and analyzes their key principles, finding a shared ontology that understands becoming as a relational process; difference as being related, yet unique; and the purpose of becoming as harmonizing difference. Together, these concepts prefigure a political form that can be called Follettian governance—facilitation of a way of living together through a relational process of becoming unique individuals, collectively engaged in an ongoing process of harmonizing differences through interlocking networks, to progress as both individuals and a society.

Mary Parker Follett's theory of governance is reflected in a variety of emergent public administration theories, particularly those designated by Stout (2006, 2009a, 2010) as sharing the logic of the Collaborative Tradition, what Stivers called "the Arendt-Follett model of government" (2008, p. 116), and what Catlaw referred to generically as "self-governing or self-conducting of conduct" (2007, p. 15). To summarize, the collaborative tradition's logic breaks away from representational governance through either elected representatives or expert administrators, basing itself on radical ideals of direct democracy. Human beings are considered socially situated individuals with an innate social bond that enables collaboration. Because the source of legitimacy lies with

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affected individuals, the political authority and scope of administrative action is shared among all mature individuals. Indeed, taken to its logical conclusion, the administrative role as a permanent social position held by particular individuals would disappear entirely, being replaced by a function to be fulfilled according to the needs of the situation. Groups of affected individuals would employ a phenomenological form of collaborative decision making in which intersubjective agreement is achieved through communicative action in fluid interworking. Thus, all participants play a co-creator role in governance, which is conducted through deeply nested and linking groups of affected individuals.

However, given the existing institutions of representative democracy and the administrative state, most theoretical discussions carve out a transitional role for public administrators as facilitators, educators, and emancipators. The collaborative logic described is carried out only to the degree possible within existing institutions, which places this transformative role in competition with the roles of elected representatives and expert administrators. While also present in writings of American founders (e.g., Thomas Jefferson) and early scholars of public administration (e.g., Follett, Jane Addams), these recommendations can be found in many emergent public administration theories (see, e.g., Box, 1998; Catlaw, 2006; Catlaw & Jordan, 2009; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2007; Farmer, 2005; Hummel, 1998; Jun, 2002; King & Stivers, 1998; King & Zanetti, 2005; Ramos, 1981; Stivers, 2000, 2002a, 2006, 2008; Stout, 2010; Thayer, 1981; Zanetti, 1997).

The need for a philosophical foundation for any theory of public administration has been duly noted (see, e.g., Box, 2008; Catlaw, 2007; McSwite, 1997; Waldo, 1984). Ontology is the broadest philosophical foundation for theory in that it describes understandings of reality and the nature of existence. Ontology is important to public administration because it frames presuppositions about all aspects of life, including the social and political. In fact, the term *political ontology* has been used to describe complex assumptions about the nature of the human being, identity, and social life in particular (Catlaw, 2007; Howe, 2006). The relation between the two components is reflexive: Political form implies specific ontology, and ontology implies political form. Waldo suggested, "Any political theory rests upon a metaphysic, a concept of the ultimate nature of reality" (1984, p. 21). Political philosophies adopt specific ontological assumptions, offering prescriptions for political forms. These political forms become primary venues for social action, thus reproducing that which is assumed. Similarly, ontology suggests the logical possibility of only certain political forms. In this way, political ontology depicts both what is and what should be. In short, ontology shapes how we go about living together, and its worldview directly affects public policy (Christ, 2003). Therefore, political theorist Robert Cox asserts that "the first task of a contemporary political theory is to declare its ontology" (1995, p. 36).

Ontologies typically stem from philosophy, religion, and physics. The study

of the nature of existence has recently been extended by contemporary social and political theory, which have turned away from unthinking adoption of the positivist philosophical commitments that characterize modern Western culture, both critiquing that ontology and offering affirmative modifications or alternatives (White, 2000). In this process, social practices of all types are being deconstructed to understand the types of entities presupposed and the assumed nature of their being, as well as to question the appropriateness of those philosophical commitments and associated values to desired social outcomes. Following from such critical inquiry, ontologies are beginning to confront one another, even in terms of nuances within the dominant culture (see, e.g., Brigg, 2007; Pesch, 2008).

A panel at the 1999 American Political Science Association conference and a follow-up journal symposium in *Administration & Society* launched an important dialogue on ontology in public administration, focusing primarily on the relationships between Arendt and Heidegger (Farmer, 2002). These essays made problematic the prevailing individualist ontology that imagines being-in-the-world as fundamentally separate from everything and everyone else (Hummel, 2002), as well as the notion of representation of either a political or expert nature (Stivers, 2002b). If we are isolated individuals who must generate social space before any type of political relation is possible, how do we create it in the first place? Furthermore, if we are worlds unto ourselves, then representation is deeply troublesome—how can anyone represent another?

While preliminary discussion in the symposium is encouraging, it by no means fully elucidates answers. Nor have subsequent articles and books by these and other public administration theorists exhausted the topic. For example, there is some discussion in the assumed ontological condition of the subject in Lacanian psychoanalysis (Catlaw, 2007; Catlaw & Jordan, 2009; McSwite, 2006), a call for an alternative to the ontology of *representation* (Catlaw, 2007, p. 2), a proposal for *enchanted materialism* (Howe, 2006), adoption of “Heidegger’s ontology [of] Being-with” (Stivers, 2008, p. 92), and a description of what has been broadly labeled *relational ontology* as opposed to the predominant “individualist ontology” (Stout & Salm, in press) based on the work of Follett and Alberto Guerreiro Ramos.

However, the question remains: What exactly is the alternative ontology that fits a directly democratic, collaborative approach to governance? We agree that “the challenge that commands attention for public administration is to begin conceiving the social relations and subsequently governing structures and practices that are rooted in a different political ontology” (Catlaw, 2005, p. 471). What ontology would help us “*practice critical theory*” (King & Zanetti, 2005, p. xviii)? “From the point of view of someone in public service, which view of reality helps us to find meaning in public life?” (Stivers, 2008, p. 93). This article seeks to contribute to an answer.

Scholars are looking for an alternative ontology because the Newtonian/Cartesian universe inhabited by self-interested, atomistic individuals does not logically fit prescriptions for collaborative practice. We respectfully suggest that the alternatives proposed thus far are lacking in two fundamental ways. First, not all describe an ontological position that fully fits the collaborative approach. Neither the ontological condition of the post-Lacanian subject nor the aesthetic mutual appreciation of enchanted materialism addresses the concept of innate relatedness. While Heidegger's understanding of *being-with* addresses relatedness, it does not fully accommodate an understanding of the dynamic process of *becoming* (Shaviro, 2009). Nor does Heidegger (or even Follett) reach beyond social reality to explain a non-Cartesian universe.

It is this last issue that points to the second deficiency: Positivist ontology provides explanation for all aspects of reality, not just the human elements. Limiting discussion to philosophical explanations of the human experience of reality as opposed to an explication of its ontological necessity leaves the rationale open to considerable challenge. To simply say "we have to start at bedrock and *assume* that we are all already connected, just as we have assumed in the past that we were not" (Stivers, 2008, pp. 93–94) is insufficient explanation. The supposition of disconnection is undergirded by a fully explicated system of positive science in both its physical and social branches; it is defended by "the verdict of science" (Waldo, 1984, p. 21). To blithely replace that assumption with another without a similarly complete explanation lacks the robustness required to do so convincingly. We must explain not just our understanding of human or social reality but also how we understand its physical and nonphysical attributes. In other words, to withstand positivist critique, more is required.

Thus the goal of the larger inquiry to which this article contributes is to locate and elucidate a robust philosophical, religious, and physical foundation for collaborative systems of governance. We agree that Waldo's (1984) broader project remains unfinished and that public administration's recent focus on postpositivist and postmodern epistemologies have deflected attention from "an inquiry that would have linked a fundamental conception of reality (ontology) with a specific epistemological position . . . with a distinctive form of the political" (Catlaw, 2007, p. 11). While Catlaw did a terrific job of linking representation with positivism and liberal democracy, this same task remains for linking not-representation with not-positivism (e.g., phenomenology, social construction, etc.) and collaborative governance. To explicate fully and defend an alternative political form of direct democracy as opposed to representative democracy, we must go beyond epistemology to the underlying ontology. We must show why such a political form is logically necessary based on the nature of all aspects of reality.

Toward that end, this article identifies key principles from Follett and illustrates how the principles of process philosophy from Alfred North Whitehead

can provide a robust ontological foundation for her political and administrative theory. This discussion adds to a growing literature on both political ontology and the application of Follett's work to public administration, social work, and business management. While the connection between these two scholars was identified independently based on their parallel ideas, historically they did come into contact with one another as contemporaries and, more specifically, through Follett's friend and academic mentor, Ella Lyman Cabot (1866–1934), who drew from Whitehead's thinking (Kaag, 2008). While the three were all at Harvard, Follett's (1892–1898) and Cabot's (1889–1906) studies at Radcliffe do not coincide with Whitehead's teaching post (1924–1937). Although they may have attended Whitehead's lectures—Follett makes reference to “Professor Whitehead” (Follett, 1995b, p. 275) in her later writings (see, e.g., Follett, 1995g, p. 217)—it is more accurate to say that the three participated in the “Cambridge intellectuals” (Kaag, 2008, p. 148), a group that also included Charles Peirce, William James, and Josiah Royce—all of whom clustered around American pragmatist philosophy during the Progressive Era.

According to her biographer, Follett worked with Richard Cabot in 1926 to organize the Follett-Cabot Seminary, a “year-long graduate seminar . . . [that] was an outgrowth of Follett's persistent desire to find corollaries among different academic disciplines” (Tonn, 2003, p. 428). Participants in this seminar represented almost every social science department and included Whitehead. During her own lecture to the seminar, Follett discussed the evolving situation and reciprocal relating, emphasizing that “Professor Whitehead, with his conception of an organism as a structure of activities that are continually evolving, had got ‘nearer the heart of the truth of this matter than anyone has yet’” (Tonn, 2003, p. 433–434). Whitehead's feelings appeared to be mutual, suggesting that in the matter of defining justice, “I trust Miss Follett and Plato together” (Tonn, 2003, p. 436). But because so many of Follett's writings were lost after her death (Tonn, 2003), it is difficult to substantiate the relationship much further. Therefore, our focus here is on the similarity of their substantive ideas rather than historical genealogy and speculation about who influenced whom.

APPROACH TO INQUIRY

Using an interpretive approach (White, 1992; White & Adams, 1994) to content analysis, this inquiry reviewed key writings of Follett to explicate her ontological assumptions. It then explored the basic principles of process philosophy, as first articulated by Whitehead and as later developed by contemporary process scholars, in the hopes that this line of thinking could provide a coherent ontological basis for Follettian governance and the collaborative tradition of public administration theory, serving to both strengthen and extend its philosophical foundation and prescriptions for practice.

Interpretation of the two sets of texts used “a back-and-forth process known as the hermeneutic circle” (Balfour & Mesaros, 1994, p. 560) to “guide the search for and interpretation of relevant details in the text, which lead to the revision of hypotheses, and then to reinterpretation, further search . . . additional interpretation, and so on . . . to the point of producing a reading of the text that fits all important details into a consistent, coherent message” (Balfour & Mesaros, 1994, p. 560). This sense-making approach relied heavily on logico-meaningful analysis as developed by Sorokin (1957). This approach to categorization identifies “the central principle (the ‘reason’) which permeates all the components, gives sense and significance to each of them, and in this way makes cosmos of a chaos of unintegrated fragments” (Sorokin, 1957, p. 14). Thus, Follett’s and Whitehead’s texts were analyzed in search of a central principle to unite them; a principle that might offer “the appropriate unification of the fragments into a whole according to their logical significance or their logical cobelonging” (Sorokin, 1957, p. 14).

During interpretation, three themes emerged from the two sets of literature: (a) the nature of becoming, (b) the nature of difference, and (c) the purpose of becoming. Each of these ontological principles are discussed in the work of Follett, followed by the work of Whitehead. An analysis draws out the similarities among these sets of ideas, and conclusions illustrate the potential usefulness of process philosophy as an ontological foundation for Follettian governance and the collaborative public administration theories that employ her principles.

THE WORK OF FOLLETT

Follett was born in Quincy, Massachusetts, in 1868 and studied economics, government, law, and philosophy at Radcliffe College (Harvard University), graduating *summa cum laude* in 1898, after which she left academic pursuits for direct action. Indeed, Follett held the American pragmatist view that philosophy should be put directly to work in society. She began as a voluntary social worker in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston in 1900, starting a long career of research and consultation in the settlement house movement, municipal league reform efforts, industrial labor relations, management theory, and government advising.

With the 1995 reprinting of her collected management essays (Graham, 1995), the 1998 reprinting of her 1918 political theory book, *The New State*, and the publication of Tonn’s (2003) in-depth biography, there has been somewhat of a renaissance of Follett’s ideas, even resulting in her inclusion as a founder of the field in general public administration textbooks and readers (see, e.g., Fry & Raadschelders, 2008; Shafritz, Hyde, & Parkes, 2004). This renewed interest is evidenced in a growing literature on the application of Follett’s work to public administration (Cunningham, 2000; Evans, 1998;

Fox, 1968; Maddock, 2006; Morse, 2006; Morton & Lindquist, 1997; Nickel & Eikenberry, 2006; Snider, 1998; Stever, 1984; Stivers, 2006; Weinberg, 1996), management theory (Aupperle, 2007; Boje & Rosile, 2001; Buzzanell, 2006; Calas & Smircich, 1996; Domenec, 2007; Eylon, 1998; Fry & Thomas, 1996; Gehani & Gehani, 2007; Johnson, 2007; McLarney & Rhyno, 1999; Mendenhall, Macomber, & Cutright, 2000; Novicevic, Harvey, Buckley, Wren, & Pena, 2007; O'Connor, 1996, 2000; Parker, 1984; Ryan & Rutherford, 2000; Salimath & Lemak, 2004; Schilling, 2000; Zeitsma, 2002), and social work (Selber & Austin, 1997). Here, we outline key philosophical principles that undergird both her political and administrative theories.

THE NATURE OF BECOMING: INTERWEAVING

For Follett, individuals and the situation within which they interact are co-created in an ongoing process of mutual becoming she calls interweaving (Follett, 1919). Throughout her writing, Follett is concerned with the reflexive manner in which individuals and the situations in which they are engaged mutually affect one another in a complex, systemic process of reciprocal influence. By *the situation*, Follett means the actual context in which real people are engaged—the environment and all the factors it holds, including physical, institutional, and human aspects. Follett calls the process the *circular response*; the process through which “we are creating each other all the time . . . in the very process of meeting, by the very process of meeting, we both *become* something different” (1995f, pp. 41–42, emphasis added). “It is I plus the-interweaving-between-you-and-me, meeting you plus the interweaving-between-you-and-me, etc., etc. . . . out to the *n*th power” (Follett, 1995f, p. 42). For Follett, the circular response is a more accurate depiction of the ontological condition in which related individuals interact with one another and the environment that surrounds them, shaping all in a formative, generative process.

However, the circular response is not directed in any particular fashion—it simply happens. To utilize the circular response as an opportunity for individual and societal betterment, this naturally occurring process can be engaged more consciously. Follett uses a variety of terms that depict this process: *integration* (Follett, 1919, 1924, 1995b, 1998), *interpenetration* (Follett, 1919, 1924, 1998), *coadaptation* (Follett, 1998), *synthesis* (Follett, 1998), and *harmonizing* (Follett, 1998)—all drawing on Hegel’s (1977) term *intersubjectivity* while differentiating it as a unifying process as opposed to a static unity as conceived by Hegel. All of these terms focus on the relation and interactions among groups of individuals and the environment in practices like “politics, economics, and jurisprudence” (Follett, 1995f, p. 38). “The genuine social will, or community, is always a moment in the process of integrating” (Follett, 1919, p. 580). “We should work always . . . to take account of that reciprocal adjustment, that in-

teractive behavior between the situation and ourselves which means a change in both the situation and ourselves" (Follett, 1995c, pp. 85–86).

In sum, Follett envisions the individual-in-society as something constantly being made and remade. The human being is an evolving, relational individual, "always in flux weaving itself out of its relations" (Follett, 1919, p. 577). Indeed, this integrating process is "the essential life process" (Follett, 1919, p. 576).

NATURE OF DIFFERENCE: THE INDIVIDUAL IN SOCIETY

Building on the principles of circular response and integration, Follett offered new definitions of both the individual and society and how the two concepts relate. While Western philosophy perceives individuals as separate from one another and conceptualizes society as separate from the individual, Follett asserts that neither can exist without the other, as both are in a constant process of co-creating. An individual cannot exist outside of the social process; rather, an individual exists "in the ceaseless interplay of the One and the Many by which both are constantly making each other" (Follett, 1919, p. 582). Through this co-creating process, "the fallacy of self-and-others fades away and there is only self-in-and-through-others" (Follett, 1998, p. 8).

Conversely, society cannot exist without the individual, for it is through the integrative process of unifying that society is co-created by individuals in relation with one another. In this view, an individual's existence is dependent upon a relationship to society as a whole. "The interplay constitutes both society on the one hand and individuality on the other: individuality and society are evolving together from this constant and complex action and reaction" (Follett, 1995d, p. 255). Participation in the whole is not a choice, it is a given. However, society is not simply individuals aggregated to create a whole: "Collective responsibility is not a matter of adding but of interweaving, a matter of the reciprocal modification brought about by interweaving" (Follett, 1995b, p. 198). Individuals are not connected simply because we act in proximity to one another; our connection is much more fundamental than that, as everything interweaves in its becoming.

Follett emphasizes that participation in the integrating process of society does not infer homogenization. In fact, individuality can only be perceived in a social context. "My individuality is difference springing into view as relating itself with other differences" (Follett, 1998, p. 63). In human groups, "the essence of society is difference, related difference" (Follett, 1998, p. 33). Difference is expressed through varying perspectives, preferences, understandings, experiences, and ideas. Follett (1995c) noted that these differences can create conflict and disharmony, which can make living together difficult, thus lessening social progress if handled poorly. However, through collaborative process, difference and conflict generate opportunities for personal fulfillment and social progress. Indeed, "this is the reality for man: the unifying of differings" (Follett,

1919, p. 588). It is not uniformity that is achieved but rather harmonization and integration through interpenetration or ongoing co-adaptation. “The test of our progress is neither our likenesses nor our unlikenesses, but what we are going to do with our unlikenesses. Shall I fight whatever is different from me or find the higher synthesis?” (Follett, 1998, p. 96). Thus, “the urge to unity is not a reduction, a simplification, it is the urge to embrace more and more, it is a reaching out, a seeking” of difference (Follett, 1919, p. 583).

This creation of societal harmony out of individual difference is an important piece of Follett’s administrative theory. In her discussions of what she called *creative process* (Follett, 1919) and *constructive conflict* (Follett, 1995c), she argued that wherever possible, synthesis should be used to resolve conflict because “only integration really stabilizes” the situation (Follett, 1995c, p. 72). Synthesis is the reaching of a solution “in which both desires have found a place, that neither side has had to sacrifice anything” (Follett, 1995c, p. 69). Through integrative group process, individuals confront diverse interests and desires, which leads to a reevaluation of one’s own interests and values, and ultimately a new solution is co-created that unifies those diverse interests and desires—a solution that is something greater than the original ideas of the individuals. This process is more effective than domination or compromise, which do not lead to lasting harmony.

Follett further explored the implications of integration in her discussions of power and authority. The process of integration generates a certain kind of power and authority, what she calls *power-with* and *the law of the situation*: “If there is an interactive influence going on all the time between you, power-with may be built up. . . . If both sides obey the law of the situation, no *person* has power over another” (Follett, 1995e, p. 107). Instead, it is the situation that holds authority, allowing each person to play an appropriate role given the context in a “self-generating process” (Follett, 1995a, p. 154). It is a “jointly developing power, the aim, a unifying which, while allowing for infinite differing, does away with fighting” (Follett, 1995e, p. 118). Power, then, becomes a generative force created through collaboration, which, in turn, serves to unify individuals in groups, rather than pitting them against one another.

THE PURPOSE OF BECOMING: PROGRESS THROUGH COLLABORATION

All combined, the nature of becoming and the nature of difference led Follett to identify the purpose of human social life as “*the will to will the common will*” (Follett, 1998, p. 49). In short, it is the desire to co-create: “the ever-continuing creating where men are the co-creators” (Follett, 1998, p. 103). An individual’s “sustenance is relation and he seeks forever new relations in the ceaseless interplay of the One and the Many” (Follett, 1919, p. 582). It is only through relation that we are able to meet and confront difference, thereby participat-

ing in the “creative experience” (Follett, 1924, p. 377), that unifying process of integration, which is “an irresistible force compelling every member” of a group (Follett, 1998, p. 83). It is the generative process of life: “What then is the law of community? From biology, from psychology, from our observation of social groups, we see that community is that intermingling which evokes creative power. What is created? Personality, purpose, will, loyalty” (Follett, 1919, p. 577) as well as “power, [and] freedom” (Follett, 1919, p. 579). This generative power urges us on, “from the amoeba and its food to man and man, as the release of energy, the evocation or calling forth of new powers one from the other” (Follett, 1924, p. 303). For “synthesis is the principal of life, the method of social progress” (Follett, 1998, p. 97). Through it, we achieve “the progress of individual or race” (Follett, 1951, pp. 173–174).

It follows that to generate the greatest amount of power or the most creative experience, we must be sure “that full opportunity is given in any conflict, in any coming together of different desires, for the whole field of desire to be viewed” (Follett, 1995c, p. 76). The greater the differences brought into integration, the higher the level of synthesis achieved through the process, the greater the individual and social progress.

THE WORK OF WHITEHEAD AND PROCESS PHILOSOPHY

In this study, we focus our attention on the writings of Whitehead, the founder of process philosophy, as well as further developments by contemporary scholars, including John Cobb, Jr., and David Griffin. Whitehead (1861–1947) was a native of England and began his academic career there, teaching at Cambridge University and the University of London. He later taught for some time at Harvard University. Although much of his early career was focused on mathematics and logic, he later focused on philosophy. It was during this time that he developed his philosophy of the organism, which later became known as *process philosophy* (Irvine, 2010). Much of Whitehead’s process thought was written and developed in the 1920s, with the seminal work, *Process and Reality*, being published in 1929 (Irvine, 2010). Process philosophy understands, fundamentally, “the flux of things [as] one ultimate generalization around which we must weave our philosophical system” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 208).

Writing around this expansion of pre-Socratic ideas of change or flux as the only constant (e.g., Heraclitus), Whitehead developed a philosophy of organism with many important implications for political theory and public administration.

While modern liberalism was in Whitehead’s day a rather diffuse movement, what its proponents all shared was a common aim to reconcile individuality and sociability through a theory of human nature. . . .

Process philosophy, too, is concerned with a proper understanding of individuality and sociability, and this, not only as a feature of human nature, but of reality as a whole. (Morris, 1991, pp. 9, 11)

Here, we discuss the most basic assumptions of process philosophy that pertain to individual and social human life.

THE NATURE OF BECOMING: CONCRESCENCE

The foundation of process philosophy lies in a world composed of *actual entities* in a constant state of becoming. The source of becoming is described as *eternal objects* that are “the pure potentials of the universe; and the actual entities differ from each other in their realization of potentials” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 149). As explained by Shaviro (2009), these eternal objects exist as “Pure Potentials” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 22) or “potentials for the process of becoming” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 29) that can only be expressed in the physical world through actual entities that include them in their moments or occasions of expression. During this process, “potentiality becomes reality; and yet retains its message of alternatives which the actual entity has avoided” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 149). While all eternal objects are potentially expressed by an actual entity, that which is chosen provides a sort of order or particular character that helps define occasions of becoming in terms of the “qualities” and “relations” expressed (Whitehead, 1978, p. 191). Yet, they are not deterministic in the sense of Platonic forms or other universals that exist beyond or a priori to that which is experienced. Eternal objects can only be conceived based on how they are expressed by actual entities.

Concrescence is Whitehead’s term for this process of “becoming concrete” (Cobb & Griffin, 1976, p. 15). At the microcosmic (unobservable) level, individual expressions become concrete as actual entities. Actual entities are “the final real things of which the world is made up . . . drops of experience, complex and interdependent” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 18). At the macrocosmic (observable) level, the many actual entities are part of “the process in which the universe of many things acquires an individual unity in a determinate relegation of each item of the ‘many’ to its subordination in the constitution of the novel ‘one’” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 211). We understand this use of the term *subordination* to mean modifying, as in the whole of an individual and the whole of creation, the One is constituted in an ongoing process of individual becoming among the Many. For Whitehead, “the process of experiencing is constituted by the reception of objects [entities] into the unity of that complex occasion which is the process itself” (Whitehead, 1978, pp. 229–230).

The process of concrescence is affected by three things: infinite potentiality (novelty), past experiences as actual entities, and the experience of being an actual entity in relation with other actual entities. Across time, bonds—or

prehensions—form among these aspects of becoming. This means there are prehensions in which “eternal objects obtain ingression into actual entities” (Sherburne, 1966, p. 235). There are also prehensions in which “the new occasion [entity] draws the past occasion [entity] into itself” (Cobb, 2008, p. 31). Finally, there are prehensions by which one actual entity becomes objectified in another, thus mutually influencing one another as they “enter into each other’s constitutions” (Whitehead, 1978, pp. 148–149).

To recapitulate, the process of becoming (concrecence) occurs as actual entities uniquely express: the potentiality in the universe, the characteristics of those eternal elements instantiated, the experience of prior occasions, and the impact of the other actual entities to which they are connected. In this way, actual entities are not only the product of but also the input to the ongoing process of becoming. All of existence can ultimately be broken down into actual entities in the process of concrecence. This process is the ontological principle: “Every condition to which the process of becoming conforms in any particular instance, has its reason either in the character of some actual entity in the actual world of that concrecence, or in the character of the subject [actual entity] which is in process of concrecence” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 24). In other words, all objects, including human beings, by virtue of their building block actual entities, are participants in the process of creating the world. Participation is, therefore, not an option—it simply is. Everything and everyone are related in mutual influence with the eternal objects and actual entities that precede and surround them.

THE NATURE OF DIFFERENCE: SOCIETIES OF ACTUAL ENTITIES IN RELATION

Actual entities are strictly individual events that do not endure through time. “They arise, become, and reach completion. When the becoming is completed they are then in the past; the present is constituted by a new set of occasions [entities] coming into being” (Cobb & Griffin, 1976, p. 19). However, what endures is the society of temporal or spatial prehensions. In this way, actual entities are perceived as one thing in time and space as individual objects—molecules, cells, trees, human beings, and so on. This enduring prehension creates sufficient similarity to the previous moment that we are able to perceive actual entities as material, discrete beings or things, when in reality they are a host of actual entities in an ongoing process of becoming in relation to both eternal objects (infinite potential and order) and all other actual entities.

Actual entities are microcosmic and are not experienced in day-to-day activity. What is experienced are “macrocosmic entities of everyday experience—men, trees, houses,” which “are groupings of entities termed *nexūs* (plural of *nexus*)” (Sherburne, 1966, p. 230). These are the particular type of prehension that bring the past actual entity into the new actual entity in a manner that allows them to be perceived as more or less the same. For

example, we do not see aging on a day-to-day basis, or the slow erosion of a rock cliff. This similarity across time and space is created through a process of transmutation that creates an "identity of pattern in their ingredient eternal objects" (Sherburne, 1966, p. 247). This pattern enables us to perceive the microcosmic at the macrocosmic level. This pattern could be likened to the manner in which DNA orders complex organisms.

When these patterns or bonds are formed across time and space or temporal and spatial prehensions, they form what is called a society—a special type of nexus "that enjoys social order—one that exhibits characteristics in each generation of actual entities that are derived from prehensions of previous generations" (Sherburne, 1966, p. 231). The key characteristic of a society is that it is self-ordering; "that it is self-sustaining; in other words, that it is its own reason" (Whitehead, 1978, p. 89). However, societies are more than simply a collection of entities with a common characteristic. "Thus, a society is, for each of its members, an environment with some element of order in it, persisting by reason of the genetic relations between its own members" (Whitehead, 1978, p. 89).

There are several types of societies, each with its own characteristics. An enduring object is the simplest kind of society, one that is "a purely temporal society, a mere thread of continuous inheritance containing no two actual entities that are contemporaries" (Sherburne, 1966, p. 220). A more complex kind of society is a structured society. This kind of society "consists in the patterned intertwining of various nexūs with markedly diverse defining characteristics. . . . This structured society will provide the immediate environment which sustains each of its sub-societies" (Whitehead, 1978, p. 103). Structured societies can vary in their complexity and intensity, concepts discussed below. Finally, a corpuscular society is a kind of structured society in which the "subordinate societies constitutive of it are all strands of enduring objects" (Sherburne, 1966, p. 216).

Through transmutation, we perceive not actual entities of the microcosmic level but instead societies of actual entities at the macrocosmic level—a rock, a tree, or a human, for example. As a result we perceive a world of apparent stasis, in which it is possible to view one whole as existing over time, rather than the innumerable actual entities of which it is composed, entities in a constant process of becoming. It is because of transmutation and the existence of societies in all of their various forms that we can perceive a physical world in an apparent stasis.

Neither the unique expression of pure potentiality at the microcosmic level nor the distinctness of perceived experiences at the macrocosmic level mean that actual entities, societies of actual entities, or any other grouping are actually separate. Indeed, process philosophy asserts the contrary: "Connectedness is the essence of all things" (Morris, 1991, p. 71). "It is not first something in itself, which only secondarily enters into relations with others. The relations are primary" (Cobb & Griffin, 1976, p. 19). However, these relations operate at a microcosmic level that is not perceivable by the physical senses. This

interdependence is an “ontologically given characteristic. We cannot escape it” (Cobb & Griffin, 1976, p. 21).

One way that this connectedness occurs is the shared expression of eternal objects described as corpuscular societies (Sherburne, 1966). Transmutation carries forward a particular type of ordering that causes actual entities to combine in a manner similar to other societies, while still being unique. This ordering could be likened to DNA, which instructs cells to similarly aggregate in complex organisms to make a tree as opposed to a human being. Yet, biological beings created through natural processes are not clones of one another but rather are different in a manner that is evident at the macrocosmic level. However, the similarity exists at a deeper level in that all of creation is an expression of eternal objects, which could be described as the building blocks of existence, and experience and all eternal objects are related to one another (Root, 1953).

THE PURPOSE OF BECOMING: ENJOYMENT

The purpose of concrescence—of life—is enjoyment, for “to be, to actualize oneself, to act upon others, to share in a wider community, is to enjoy being an experiencing subject” (Cobb & Griffin, 1976, pp. 16–17). The purpose of an individual entity cannot be considered separate from the purpose of other entities in the world; experience is the “self-enjoyment of being one among many, and of being one arising out of the composition of many” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 145). Thus, in considering the enjoyment of any single actual entity, we must also consider the enjoyment of other entities.

Intensity leads to greater enjoyment, which is the ideal result of the process of concrescence. Maximized intensity is achieved through the incorporation of *novelty* and the experience of *contrast*. “The actualization of novel possibilities generally increases the enjoyment of experience; for the variety of possibilities that are actualized in an experience adds richness to the experience, and the element of novelty lends zest and intensity of enjoyment” (Cobb & Griffin, 1976, p. 28). Thus, novelty comes through the prehension of potentiality from eternal objects. Whitehead noted that “intensity of feeling due to any realized ingression of an eternal object is heightened when that eternal object is one element in a realized contrast between eternal objects” (1978, p. 278).

Contrast can also be experienced either within a society in the sense of complexity of actual entities, or among societies in the sense of diversity. “Roughly speaking, more complex actualities enjoy more value than simpler ones” (Cobb & Griffin, 1976, pp. 63–64). As more contrasting actual entities are drawn together in the process of concrescence, the intensity felt by the resulting society increases. This contrast can also come from diversity among societies of actual entities that differ from one another.

Intensity by itself, however, is not enough to create the most enjoyment for an entity. Societies, and the entities of which they are composed, must also

find *harmony* that maximizes the enjoyment not only of their own experience but also that of the society of which they are a part; the diverse elements must be properly integrated so that maximum enjoyment is produced. Harmony is achieved by prehensions that draw forward past actual entities into the current actual entity and that enable actual entities to mutually affect one another.

For experience to be enjoyable, it must be basically harmonious; the elements must not clash so strongly that discord outweighs harmony. Also, for great enjoyment there must be adequate intensity of experience. Without intensity there might be harmony, but the value enjoyed will be trivial. Intensity depends upon complexity, since intensity requires that a variety of elements be brought together into a unity of experience. (Cobb & Griffin, 1976, pp. 64–65)

Thus, diversity is important to the maximization of enjoyment, but is only positive and enhancing if different entities and societies can be harmonized. Whitehead (1978) used music to illustrate. Two voices singing different but complementary notes offer to the listener a simple enjoyment without much intensity. As the diversity of voices increases to a three- or four-part harmony, the intensity of the sound also increases; as diversity and complexity increase in a way that creates harmony, intensity and enjoyment increase. Consider also the sound a piano makes when a child strikes multiple keys at random. While diverse notes may be sounding together, they are not harmonized, offering a large amount of contrast without much value. Through the harmonizing of diverse entities in the concrescence of a new entity or society, intensity and, ultimately, enjoyment are increased. As the second example shows, however, diversity for diversity's sake is not enough; diverse entities must be integrated so that they produce—through prehension—complex, harmonized actual entities. The more diverse and complex the harmonized entities, the more intense and, ultimately, enjoyable the experience.

DISCOVERING THE SIMILARITIES

The Nature of Becoming: A Relational Process

Follett's cornerstone concept of interweaving matches the foundation of process philosophy: concrescence. Interweaving is a concept that connects Follett's ideas of circular response, integration, and interpenetration—the ways in which individuals mutually affect one another's ongoing development. Concrescence is the complex process of becoming that includes the various prehensions described by Whitehead. In essence, the two are describing the nature of existence (as a socially situated self or as an actual entity) as an ongoing process of becoming. Whitehead provides a microcosmic explanation of creation (becoming concrete) and a macrocosmic explanation of individuation

(becoming perceivable), while Follett is describing a macrocosmic explanation for the becoming of individuals in social groups.

Specifically, during concrescence, actual entities integrate data from several sources: previous actual entities, contemporary actual entities, and both the pure potential and patterned character of eternal objects. Through this integration, a unique actual entity comes into being, an entity that is completely new and different from any of the constituent elements. Furthermore, these actual entities unify in various configurations, or societies, across time and space that can be perceived by the senses as particular objects but that are actually in an ongoing process of becoming. Similarly, during Follett's process of circular response, individuals interact and mutually influence one another, thereby creating something new that is more than a simple aggregation of the parts. Thus, in both concrescence and interweaving, entities at all scales (subentity, entity, and groups of entities) mutually influence one another in an ongoing relational process. Just as actual entities become through prehensions of the eternal objects, past actual entities, and current actual entities to which they are connected, so do individuals become through circular response with their own (past) experiences in relation with their contemporaries in a given situation.

The Nature of Difference: Related Yet Unique

Both Follett and Whitehead described the inherent relatedness of co-creation in a manner that does not deny individuality. For Follett, the ontological principle is that individuals are always in society and engaged in the ongoing process of co-creation—the making of the “self-in-and-through-others” (Follett, 1998, p. 8). Neither can be disaggregated from the other. However, this relatedness does not connote sameness or agreement. Indeed, it is through relatedness that difference becomes evident. Each individual is a unique expression of the various interweavings experienced in becoming. These distinctions represent our “related difference” as human beings (Follett, 1998, p. 33).

Similarly, in process philosophy, actual entities and the societies composed of them cannot exist independently or completely separate from other actual entities nor can eternal objects exist separate from the experienced world. Nothing transcends the whole, and all within the whole are connected—“relations are primary” (Cobb & Griffin, 1976, p. 19). However, each actual entity is a unique expression, and each society is a unique composition. Thus, the ontological condition is one of interdependence and interconnectedness, not sameness.

The Purpose of Becoming: Harmonizing Difference

Rather than seeing difference as a problem, both Follett and Whitehead saw it as the source of individual and human progress and enjoyment. In short,

if there were no difference, there would be no purpose for social process, no means for individual or social progress and growth, and no source of enjoyment. In fact, the greater the difference, the greater the opportunity will be for creating harmony and the greater the pleasure and progress will be.

For Follett, differences in perspectives, preferences, and ideas are inevitable. If we perceive these differences as a source of necessary conflict, then individual and social progress can stagnate, because conflict among related parts creates problems. However, if we see these differences as an opportunity for integration and synthesis, the process of harmonizing differences, or “constructive conflict” (Follett, 1995c), creates individual and social progress—what Follett sees as the power of co-creating. Indeed, as more viewpoints are included in that process, the resulting progress is greater. Thus, difference is good, but it can be a problem if perceived and responded to inappropriately.

In Whitehead’s philosophy, difference is necessary for maximum enjoyment by actual entities and, ultimately, for the societies composed of them. In fact, there must be sufficiently intense difference for enjoyment to be experienced. Difference can be achieved through either novelty of expression or contrast with previous or other expressions. Accordingly, complex societies of actual entities experience greater enjoyment. However, too much contrast can create chaos—just imagine the result of too much novelty across time disrupting the appearance of a thing in unpredicted patterns.

Thus, while both scholars celebrate difference, both also note the importance of unifying or harmonizing difference. Without harmony, progress and enjoyment cannot be attained. Differences, then, must be harmonized in the process of becoming and the social processes of living. Both also see this harmonizing process as producing something beyond a mere sum of the parts—what is now commonly referred to as synergy. Thus, both the individual and the group progress in ways that can only be created together.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICE

Based on this overview of key principles and analysis of similarities in thought, we feel it is fair to say that process philosophy provides a coherent ontological foundation for Follettian governance and related theories of collaborative and participatory administrative practice. If we reread Follett with this understanding of a relational ontology of becoming that embraces difference and seeks harmony, then her prescriptions for political and administrative practice are not only quite logical but necessary. In sum, this relational ontology of becoming prefigures an experiential epistemology and a process-oriented administration that would not enforce predetermined values (in the sense of a priori forms of being) but instead replace them with a determining process (in the sense of becoming and learning) that seeks harmony as opposed to dominance. We need not enforce relatedness through order; it already exists.

This ontology causes us to think in relational terms as opposed to contractual terms. The world is not inhabited by disaggregated individuals who have to enter into externally ordered relation; it is composed of related individuals who seek out one another to experience novelty and contrast. What we *can* do is consciously direct relatedness toward integration. This ontology's embrace of difference enables us to transform our understanding of conflict as a social problem into conflict as an opportunity for a self-organizing, constructive, unifying, harmonizing, synthesizing process that generates shared power and progress. In fact, this ontological shift is perhaps the key differentiation with liberal philosophy—rather than assuming conflict is a problem for social order, it is seen as creating the opportunity for individual and social progress. Administration thereby moves from a permanent social role of authoritative director of order to a fluid social function of facilitating the harmonization of differences.

Together, these concepts negate the notion of representation, because while there is similarity based on relatedness, each expression of becoming, each individual within society, is unique and cannot be replicated. No particular configuration can be held up as the right or proper expression of pure potentiality. Nor can any particular moment of expression be held as a static, authoritative point of balance. Therefore, ongoing participatory practice among complex networks of relationships becomes the necessary form through which harmonization of difference occurs—what Follett described as deeply nested and networked federalism, grown from “an infinite number of filaments” that “cross and recross and connect all my various allegiances” (Follett, 1998, p. 312).

These concepts are the basics of what can be called Follettian governance—facilitation of a way of living together through a relational process of becoming unique individuals, collectively engaged in an ongoing process of harmonizing differences through interlocking networks, to progress as both individuals and a society. However, as exemplified by the conductorless Orpheus Symphony Orchestra (Seifter & Economy, 2001), those who “conduct” this process are chosen based on what is needed at the moment—we must “depersonalise” (Follett, 1995d, p. 128) the role of facilitator in accordance with the law of the situation and thereby open the role to all participants in a self-organizing process of governance, one that is “located in every space, actualized through every interaction” (Catlaw, 2007, p. 14).

For Follettian governance to become a reality, the political and administrative theorists promoting her approach (or one similar to it) must come to terms with the full implications of attempting implementation. Pragmatically, we must develop a common language that both expresses the concepts comprehensively while bringing them into contemporary nomenclature. For example, the term *harmonization*, while meaning the difficult process of integrating difference to live together, in today's world sounds Pollyannish or

utopian in nature. If theorists promoting these concepts can develop shared terminology to express the processes of this form of governance, momentum would be easier to build.

More important, the underlying ontology demands a fully reconceptualized system of governance that is in fundamental tension with existing systems of political representation and expert-led governance. Suggesting that we can temper these systems with a little bit of relational ontology is faulty logic: Process ontology is antithetical to positivist ontology. We cannot “leaven self-contained individualism with ensemble individualism, for once we enter the framework of the former, we have already defined our terms in ways that contradict their very essence within the framework of the latter” (Sampson, 1988, p. 21). The two ontological positions cannot coexist without ongoing competition for supremacy of one over the other. Similarly, representative governance cannot coexist with self-governance without inherent discord: When not in agreement, one must dominate the other.

If a relational approach to governance is ontologically necessary, then non-relational systems will ultimately fail. However, given the strength of belief in the adoption of ontological positions, it is more likely that ontologies will continue to compete for primacy. If public administration theorists wish to form some type of vanguard to foster a revolutionary transformation to collaborative governance (Stout, 2009b), we must find the courage to lead the way to a necessarily and essentially different ontology. We must discover “*the will to will the common will*” (Follett, 1998, p. 49).

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