

Beyond Metaphysics? Explorations in Alfred North Whitehead's Late Thought
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This volume brings together leading scholars from Europe (Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Spain, and Great Britain) and the United States to engage Alfred North Whitehead's late work. Reflecting on the theme of the volume, "Beyond Metaphysics?", contributors explore the question of whether Whitehead's system is completed with *Process and Reality*, or if instead his metaphysics only comes fully into view in his later works (esp. *Adventures of Ideas* and *Modes of Thought*). The goal is to recognize the differentiation of Whitehead's thought post *Process and Reality* and to learn to measure it on its own terms.

That such an initiative bears on the advancement of systematic philosophy is evident. An appraisal of the systemic (metaphysical or otherwise) status of the late works of Whitehead raises fascinating questions about the relationship between categorical frameworks (like that which occurs in *Process and Reality*), and the experiential grounding and meaning of systematic generalizations (such as occurs in *Adventures of Ideas*, *Modes of Thought*, and other late texts and essays). Whitehead seems to have used his post-*Process and Reality* work to extend and test the synoptic adequacy of the system, and to revise, through such testing, the contours of the system itself. This speaks to the viability of systematic thinking, and hence systematic philosophy, in an age that has been suspicious of totalizing, foundational, or resolutely final metaphysical visions. That systematic thinking is legitimately comprehensive and holistic while also open to- and perhaps demanding of – ongoing revision, is perhaps one of the greatest legacies of process thought. This volume will explore these possibilities in depth through an international conversation of scholars with a wide variety of intellectual approaches to Whitehead.

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ANALYTICAL SYNOPSIS OF PROPOSED CHAPTERS

Part I. Complexity of Life—On Whitehead's Late Metaphysics

“Towards a Metaphysics of Expression” (by Vincent Colapietro)

The renewal of speculative philosophy is a recovery of not only philosophical perspective but also intellectual humility (Can such perspective ever be recovered without the retrieval of such humility?). It is accordingly the opposite of what it might appear to be. Its audacity is as much as anything in its humility. There is, in this endeavor, at least an implicit recovery of humility as an intellectual virtue. The denunciation of our predecessors, not so much their particular doctrines as their animating impulse and overarching ambition, might seem to be the measured judgment of a healthy skepticism. It is, however, anything but this. Such wholesale dismissal is an arrogant judgment of an uncritical skepticism, one unwilling or unable to check its own inhumane presumption. Such skepticism is insufficiently skeptical about its own motives and legitimacy (cf. Peirce).

The renewal of speculative philosophy cannot only be programmatic. It must also be exemplary: it must prove its possibility by exemplifying its power, in a more or less realized expression of its theoretical applicability (PR 3, 6). In other words, it must prove its possibility by *realizing* its objectives, by actualizing itself, in however imperfect or incomplete a form.

Moreover, such renewal needs itself to be renewed. My *philosophical thesis* is just this (or, more accurately, it is not only that such renewal needs itself to be renewed but also that this renewal involves a historically motivated return to the phenomenological bases of our most basic notions), whereas my *hermeneutic thesis* is that we can observe in Whitehead's later thought (in some important respects) a more methodologically self-conscious renewal of his speculative project. It can never be accomplished, once and for all; it must be taken up anew, now and again. In concert with other presentations at this conference (e.g., Christoph Kann and especially Stascha Rohmer), then, I want to highlight how works by Whitehead written after *Process and Reality* (1929) – not least of all, *Modes of Thought* (1938) and, to a less extent, *The Function of Reason* (1929) – are best interpreted as integral parts of his *ongoing* renewal of speculative philosophy.

“Renewing Speculation. The Systematic Aim of Whitehead's Philosophic Cosmology” (Christoph Kann)

In PR Whitehead gives a new and revised exposition of what speculative philosophy might be. His notion of cosmology combines systematisation with universality, which leads him to the basic and well-known intention of bringing “the aesthetic, moral, and religious interests into relation with those concepts of the world which have their origin in natural science” (PR xii). He formulates certain criteria – a speculative system should be coherent, logical, applicable, and adequate – that he does not only apply to his own conception, but which he also uses as a checklist for the evaluation of central positions in the history of philosophy. When Whitehead refers critically to other philosophers, such as Descartes, Spinoza, or Locke, this criticism usually means that their conceptions more or less fail when measured against the named criteria. Insofar Whitehead's systematic aim tends to coincide with a certain kind of historical aim motivated by “the positive value of the philosophical tradition” (PR xiv). While Aristotle's philosophy can easily be conceived as a scheme of thought in some accordance with the mentioned criteria, this is much less so in the case of Plato. Whitehead praises Plato as the “greatest metaphysician” and at the same time he criticizes him as the “poorest systematic thinker”, who “always failed in his attempts at systematization” (AI 166). Nevertheless, philosophy should start from seven basic metaphysical elements to be found in Plato, “The Ideas, The Physical Elements, The Psyche, The Eros, The Harmony, The Mathematical Relations, The Receptacle”. These should be modified and coordinated with the purpose of a “coherent system” not yet realized in Plato (AI 275), but rather emerging in the following tradition characterized as a series of footnotes to Plato.

Whitehead's project starts from a metaphysical conception and is then enlarged towards a scheme of interpretation, which includes all dimensions of human experience. These dimensions dominate works like AI (and MT) as applications, historical illustrations, possible responses to hypothetical questions, or smaller differentiations modifying the conception essentially outlined in PR (and partially in FR). Exploring the question of whether Whitehead's system is completed with PR, we should – despite the fact that from a Whiteheadian view a metaphysical system at any rate remains hypothetical and can never be complete in a strict sense – emphasize the fact that among all his writings only PR is constructed in a systematic manner. Actually, it is PR, where Whitehead's cosmological scheme is established, while the later works supplement this cosmological scheme aiming at approximation to adequacy.

“Beyond Metaphysics? – A Historiographical Approach to Whitehead's Speculative Philosophy” (Dennis Soelch)

Whitehead's highly complex terminology poses one of the greatest challenges for a systematic approach to his innovative organic metaphysics. Thus, critics tend to focus on the categories of PR whenever they deal with his metaphysical agenda, and are apt to regard AI (and to a certain extent MT) as being of little importance for his notion of cosmology. However, Whitehead himself stresses the interrelatedness of SMW, PR and AI, characterizing all the three books as "an endeavour to express a way of understanding the nature of things" (AI, vii). The study of the history of ideas and their impact on civilizations is not to be understood as a separate project, nor does it end with the exemplification of metaphysical concepts. As a genealogical reconstruction of cosmological schemes and their respective limitations it is rather to provide us with an insight into the verbal and cultural dependencies of our own attempts at a speculative interpretation of the world. The systematicity of our own philosophy needs to be considered from perspectives that lie beyond its basic assumptions, and historical interpretations and their "peculiar circumstances of race and of stage of civilization" (AI, 5) can serve as points of orientation. The study of cultural history thus has a methodological intention and should be regarded as a necessary supplement for the metaphysical agenda of PR, which already introduces the "reliance on the positive value of the philosophical tradition" (PR xiv).

The methodological character of Whitehead's analysis of historical developments becomes particularly apparent in his occupation with Plato. The well-known remark that the "safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato" (PR 39) – the culmination of his approach to the history of philosophy – sheds light on his general idea of speculation. By calling his own philosophy Platonic, Whitehead underlines both the chronological and the systematic primacy of Plato, who distinguished seven basic notions or speculative principles, which represent the foundation of any possible cosmology: "These notions are as important for us now, as they were then at the dawn of the modern world" (AI 188). Our task, the task of philosophy, is to constantly adapt and up-date Plato's notions with regard to scientific, religious and cultural growth, the growth of "experience in social organization, in aesthetic attainments, in science, and in religion" (PR 39). Accordingly, I will try to elucidate the common interest of PR and AI, the latter consequently being within the metaphysical agenda, not beyond.

"Critical remarks to the subjectivist principle in Whitehead's metaphysics" (Sebastian Ulrich)

Whitehead's organismic philosophy is in their basic approach a subjectivist philosophy. This assessment is supported by Whitehead's remarks in his late work *Modes of Thought* (see MT 148-169). Whitehead's approach in the development of his cosmology seems nevertheless to be largely objectivist. So it is necessary to ascertain whether he proceeds in accordance with his own methodological principles, particularly the so-called subjectivist principle.

"Before Metaphysics: Modes of Thought as a Prequel to Whitehead's 'Trilogy'" (Clint Combs)

I will argue that a philosophical inflection point (as opposed to a mere stylistic one) distinguishes Whitehead's "trilogy" (*Science and the Modern World*, *Process and Reality*, and *Adventures of Ideas*) from his final book, *Modes of Thought*. Specifically, I will argue that, sometime prior to the 1938 publication of *Modes of Thought*, Whitehead felt the need to revisit, in a new manner, the convergence between that foreign sounding (yet most concrete) element of Whiteheadian reality, the "actual occasion," and that most concrete (now meaning most familiar) starting point for an explanation that he identified in *Modes of Thought* with bodily experience. At issue here are two seemingly different senses of "concrete" -- one metaphysical and one phenomenological. Across all of his philosophical works, Whitehead has consistently affirmed a confluence between these two senses of concrete, arguing that the two coincide precisely because one moment of one's experience is an actual occasion. In his trilogy his method has been metaphysical. What is new in *Modes of Thought* is not a new realization about this isomorphism, but, rather, a new method to demonstrate it. In *Modes of Thought*, unlike his earlier works, Whitehead begins with what is most concrete in the phenomenological sense and uses that starting point to build toward an account of what is most concrete in a metaphysical sense. Seen in this light, *Modes of Thought* is not systematically beyond metaphysics but, rather, before metaphysics.

"Immanence and Incompleteness: Whitehead's Late Metaphysics" (Roland Faber)

Whitehead's last works unfold an interesting paradox that runs through his whole philosophical work. On the one hand, he defines metaphysics as the endeavor to discover the general ideas that are indispensable to the analysis of everything that happens. On the other hand, he warns us to *mistrust* metaphysics because of its defect to always oversimplify our understanding of the world. It is the explication of this *paradox* of metaphysics as its very "metaphysical" *situation* that will guide my analysis of Whitehead's late thought. It appears as a series of ways to engage this paradox that, while *remaining* a paradox that *cannot* be solved, reveals itself as a *series* of deconstructions of metaphysical claims as *essentially incomplete*.

Part II. Depths of Nature—On Whitehead's Late Cosmology

"Beyond Dogmatic Finality: Whitehead and the Laws of Nature" (by Jeremy Dunham)

The debate surrounding the laws of nature continues to be one of the most important and interesting topics for metaphysics because, as Stephen Mumford has recently argued, scientists are no more certain about what laws of nature actually are than philosophers. It is the job of scientists to discover natural laws, but the answer to the question which guides Whitehead's enquiry - 'What exactly do we mean by the notion of the Laws of Nature?' - remains unclear. In this paper I will focus on the discussion of the laws of nature presented by Whitehead in *Adventures of Ideas*. An earlier theory of nature's laws can be collected from the scattered comments found in both *Science and the Modern World* and *Process and Reality*. This earlier theory owes much to the Cambridge Personal Idealist James Ward and scarcely adds to the debate. However, I will argue that that the discussion of nature's laws in *Adventures of Ideas* functions as an interesting development of this theory and adds much of originality. In addition, this development expands well beyond simply being a discussion of the laws discovered by science towards an important discussion of philosophical methodology, a defence of metaphysics and, perhaps most importantly, a defence of systematic thinking - on the condition that such thinking never lapses into dogmatic finality. Whitehead therefore does not offer us a finished theory of nature's laws; rather, he introduces four dominant doctrines all with distinctly different answers to the question: 'what is a law of nature?' First, the doctrine of law as imposed; Second, the doctrine of law as observed succession; Third, the doctrine of law as immanent; and fourth and finally, the doctrine of law as conventional interpretation. His critical discussion of the dominant doctrines of the laws of nature is aimed towards showing how the first three doctrines should not be seen as working in strict opposition. Each doctrine is what Whitehead calls a 'working hypothesis' each with its own successes and its own failures. Whitehead then, I will argue, attempts to reunite these theories so that they can 'grow together' producing a new 'working hypothesis' with a 'wider sweep'. This veritable concrescence of theories in turn must not be seen as a final theory but one which must be critiqued and developed on its own terms. Finally, I will conclude this paper, with an examination of Whitehead's final recorded comments on nature's laws, recorded by Lucien Price in his *Dialogues*, in which he suggests that the analogy with laws should perhaps be rejected altogether.

“Time and Temporality: from Whitehead to quantum physics” (Joachim Klose)

The question which has to be answered concerning Whitehead's metaphysics is whether his system is completed with *Process and Reality* [or whether his metaphysics only comes fully into view in his later works (esp. *Adventures of Ideas* and *Modes of Thought*)]. It will be argued that his main ideas are already fully developed in *Process and Reality*. Especially regarding the concept of time - and Whitehead asserted that one has to philosophize only about space and time - the change of its understanding took already place during his writing of *Science and Modern World* in 1925.

“Contingency and Whitehead's Metaphysics of Experience” (Helmut Maaßen)

The key notions in Whitehead's thought in *Process and Reality* and his later writings remain the same despite the fact that novelty and contingency are key elements in his metaphysics. The old notion of the law of nature, causality and freedom have to be refined. Pure chance is the ingression of reality into human experience. It is possible therefore to play and get thrilled and surprised by play. To think that there are rules which govern 'pure chance' would not only take the fun away from play, but also be in contradiction to every day experience as much as to a philosophical system, such as the one of James, Peirce and Whitehead.

“The Web of Life and the Constitution of Human Identity: Rethinking Nature as Main Issue of Whitehead's Late Metaphysics” (Regine Kather)

In 1934 a small book with the title 'Nature and Life' was published. It deals with the relation of matter and mind in living beings and the limits of the method of science. In this respect its intention still hits the main arguments of 'Process and Reality' and of 'Concept of Nature' (1919). In this early philosophical book Whitehead had argued, that metaphysics has to embrace the known object as well as the knowing subject. 'Process and Reality' goes a decisive step further, because Whitehead now develops a scheme of categories which are the result of the insights of different methods, of science, aesthetics, ethics and even religion. Though Whitehead elaborates by means of these categories a new synthesis of matter and mind, of efficient and final causation, and of determination and freedom, his considerations remain very abstract. First in 'Concept of Life' he applies these concepts on a very concrete issue: living beings. At least in this respect we can observe a continuity of Whitehead's thinking from his early to his late writings. Only by transcending the methodological frame of science a new concept of nature can be developed which implies a new self-understanding of humans.

During the last three hundred years the relation of humans to nature, of body to mind, and of matter to spirit was dominated by dualism or reductionism. Following Descartes and the program of modern reductionism, all material objects, living beings included, have to be explained scientifically. Consequently humans cannot understand themselves at the same time as part of nature and as beings endowed with reason. Beyond this nature has no intrinsic value.

But in the meantime it became visible that this concept has to be overcome. The theory of evolution and modern ecology has demonstrated that humans are with their body and with their intentions part of the web of life. Whitehead was one of the first authors who discussed the evolution of completely new forms in nature philosophically. Science, so the argument, reveals only a limited perspective on life. It has to be completed by qualified feelings, intentions, and the capacity of self-determination. In terms of modern epistemology: the perspective of the third person has to be completed by the perspective of the first person. But if so, mind and matter belong together in every being, though they can interact in different degrees of complexity. Though human mind is able to rational understanding, it is by no means completely different from the mind of lower beings. Humans, as Whitehead argues, are part of the web of life which is constituted by a multitude of different entities. Identity is based on the relation of every entity to a multitude of other beings which have existed in the past and which are coexisting in presence. If mind is part of nature as a whole, humans can understand themselves as part of nature and as beings endowed with reason at the same time. This point of view changes the basis for ethical argumentation. The separation of being and ought, which is the result of an empirical concept of being, has to be overcome. Nature has an intrinsic value which has to be respected by humans who can recognize it. In this respect Whitehead's argumentation converges with that of Max Scheler and Hans Jonas who also argue for a metaphysical concept of nature. Especially on the background of modern environmentalism several authors refer to Whitehead's cosmology as an important source for an ecological ethic. "Whitehead has made it possible to think of nature as having intrinsic value and being an appropriate object of love; Cobb, one of the modern Whiteheadians, demonstrated the potential of integrating Whitehead and traditional Christianity to build an environmental ethic." (R.F.Nash: *The Rights of Nature*, University of Wisconsin 1989, 107) My paper therefore will focus on the different steps of argumentation which finally lead Whitehead to a new concept of nature and of human identity, and beyond this on the impulses of his late work for a modern philosophy of nature.

“On Value and Values in Later Whitehead (Or – Where did all the eternal objects go?)” (Michael Halewood)

This paper addresses the question of value in the work of Whitehead and more specifically whether his later works produce a new or different concept of value from that of *Process and Reality*. The paper starts with a very brief history of the role and status of value in social theory and its separation from the concept of fact (especially in the neo-Kantian tradition). The paper then argues that Whitehead attempts to bridge the conceptual gap between fact and value in different ways in his later texts. In *Process and Reality* it is eternal objects that take on the role of explaining the status of value qua potentiality and logical variability, even though they themselves are unnameable. In *Adventures of Ideas* Whitehead moves from the metaphysical to an account of how value has developed and been deployed (in Western 'Civilization'). In the final section of this work he suggests (perhaps in distinction to *Process and Reality*) that certain ultimate values will and can come about and can be named. However, I will suggest that this attempt to account for the becoming of real values is not in itself sustainable. Hence it is in *Modes of Thought* that Whitehead attempts to once and for all account for the status of value, in the simplest, yet most profound terms. That is to say, this paper argues that whilst *Modes of Thought* does not 'add' anything to the Whitehead's metaphysical framework, it does represent a shift in emphasis and a distillation of value in Whitehead's work to a concern with the future, the past and that there are other things.

Part III. Evocations of Culture—On Whitehead's Late Aesthetics

"Re-Centering Process Thought: Recovering Beauty in A. N. Whitehead's Late Work" (Brian G. Henning)

In his brief preface to *Adventures of Ideas* Whitehead provides a rare window into how he conceived of his own work. "The three books – *Science and The Modern World*, *Process and Reality*, *Adventures of Ideas* – are an endeavour to express a way of understanding the nature of things.... Each book can be read separately; but they supplement each other's omissions or compressions" (vii). If I am correct, one of the most important concepts in process thought is virtually absent from Whitehead's magnum opus, *Process and Reality*. I suggest that the single most important omission remedied by *Adventures of Ideas* is the claim that beauty is the one self-justifying aim of the universe, that "The teleology of the Universe is directed to the production of Beauty" (AI 265). The goal of this brief essay is to defend the view that process thought, particularly process ethics, will be more adequate and applicable if it is "re-centered" around the concept of beauty.

"The Self-Evidence of Civilization" (Stascha Rohmer)

In my paper I want to show that Whitehead's philosophical thinking is not completed with *Process and Reality*. On the contrary I would like to point out, that his metaphysics comes fully into view in his later works, especially in *Adventures of Ideas* and in *Modes of Thought*. I would like to demonstrate this in his work *Modes of Thought*. In my opinion, Whitehead's opus magnum *Process and Reality* is first of all a philosophy of nature – however *Modes of Thought* demonstrates the relevance of Whiteheadian process – thought for the philosophy of culture and the understanding of the notion of civilisation. In my opinion, one could misunderstand Whitehead's late work completely if one would assume that it represents solely a summary of Whitehead's main opus *Process and Reality*.

"Provocative Expression: Transitions In and From Metaphysics in Whitehead" (Jude Jones)

This paper revisits the ontological conditions of transition in terms of the notions of "provoking" from AI and "expression" in MT in order to recast my "intensity" based reading of W's metaphysics and then to consider where beyond metaphysics these moments of bona-fide system-development may lead Whitehead and his readers.

"Solomon's Dream, or the Question of Trust in the Efficacy of Fine Action" (Isabella Palin)

It is argued that from *The Function of Reason* and into *Adventures of Ideas* Whitehead is dealing with the socio-cosmological problem of our trust in the persuasiveness of ideals, or, as he formulates it, our "reliance that fine action is treasured in the nature of things". Solomon's prophecy, referred to in *The Function of Reason*, is interpreted as exhibiting this intuition and as indicating a possible conceptual requirement for dealing with it, namely, that God's purpose (intensity of satisfaction) become the World's problem, or that the World "save" God. Finally a few indications are given as to how, in *Adventures of Ideas* and *Modes of Thought*, Whitehead conceptually deals with the new socio-cosmological issue.

"Citing the Paradox: Probing the Systematization of Whitehead as Philosopher Subject" (Deena Lin)

When approaching the work of Alfred North Whitehead, we enter into the difficult task of trying to make sense of the totality of his work, and such an agenda on our part is yearning to systematize fragments of a life. The system Whitehead provides in *Process and Reality* (PR) is one that is a cohesive whole all its own, but when we look at his later works there seems to be either what could be described as a poetic system that trumps any systematization, or that all he

provides are examples of the implications of his system within the confines of concrete reality. In this chapter I intend to argue that any approach on our part must cope with Whitehead's peculiar systematic embrace of the unknown, for this peculiarity is novelty itself, for what is truly novel has not been naturalized within what we have already realized is possible. In this sense, Whitehead's metaphysics of experience, whether it be systematic or poetic, should not be approached as an absolute in itself, rather it should be perceived as an infinite well from which we may gain a further understanding of how we construct our reality, and the realities of other's experiences. In the end, Whitehead was a complex man, and this inevitably comes to fore when we try to respond to his work as a whole. The disturbances that arise when we approach the totality of his work is his life, and this can never be unearthed without constantly recognizing the errancy in such an approach.

“Self-enjoyment and Concern” (Steve Shaviro)

In the eighth chapter of *Modes of Thought*, Whitehead describes "life" as a matter both of "self-enjoyment" and of "concern." These are the terms of a contrast that resonate with many others in Whitehead's philosophy (e.g. space and time, atomicity and relation, actual entity and eternal object, and on and on). If there is a specificity to Whitehead's late writings, it has to do with the way that these writings begin precisely at the point where *Process and Reality* ends: with the conversion of oppositions into contrasts. Such an aesthetic conversion is envisioned at the end of *Process and Reality*; in the later texts, it is realized and unfolded. The "patterned contrast" between self-enjoyment and concern addresses the demands made upon philosophy both by Levinas and other thinkers of the ethical, and by the recent group of thinkers known as "speculative realists" (Quentin Meillassoux, Graham Harman, and others), but gives these demands a different sort of resolution. Whitehead acknowledges the ethical claims outlined by Levinas, but without accepting Levinas' claims for the absolute transcendence of the Other. And Whitehead gives us a metaphysics that, as the Speculative Realists demand, is non-anthropocentric and does not subordinate everything to a primordial correlation between thought and its objects, but without thereby endorsing Meillassoux's claims for the absoluteness of contingency, or Harman's claims for the absoluteness of objects beyond all relation. Rather, Whitehead proposes an aesthetics of existence in which the claims of concern and of self-enjoyment manage to co-exist.

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