



Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) had, and still has, significant impacts in mathematics, physics, biology, sociology, evolutionary theory, education, philosophy, and cultural studies. He was a well respected member of the British Royal Society of Science, and interacted with some of the great thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Rudolf Carnap, Albert Einstein, Sir Arthur Eddington, Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Talcott Parsons, some of whom were his colleagues and students. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Whitehead published a unique series of ground-breaking philosophical works such as *Science and the Modern World*, *Process and Reality*, *Adventures of Ideas*, and *Modes of Thought*. Through these works he developed a fresh philosophical account of the world (from philosophy of science to philosophy of religion) in dialogue with, and criticism of, the Western tradition of philosophy between Plato and Kant and its foundations. He responded to developments in modern science, such as relativity theory and early quantum theory. This response was only paralleled by thinkers like Nietzsche or Hegel and contemporaries like Heidegger. In Whitehead's remarkable breadth, married to deep scholarship, he not only would be claimed as a most original source for "process philosophy," but even more for contemporary and living philosophers, such as Sir Karl Popper, Gilles Deleuze, and Bruno Latour, as well as eminent scientists like Ilya Prigogine. Whitehead stands on the origins and boundaries of the great divide between analytic and Continental philosophies and contemporary trials of communication.

Polarizations and exaggerations abound in philosophy as much as they do in politics or any other realm of discourse. One of the inestimable boons of Alfred North Whitehead's

philosophy is his ability to recognize both truth and exaggeration in either term of an opposition, and make a penetrating argument for a novel position that creatively synthesizes the strength of the opposing positions. To be sure, this synthesis is never a facile compromise, but a creative *advance* that is coherent, valuable, and imaginative. Whitehead's method for doing philosophy is not based on dogmatic metaphysical certainties, nor is it a standardless relativism, both of which have serious weaknesses. Instead, Whitehead advocates an ongoing process of imaginative speculation tempered by the facts of experience, science, and thought. This gradual refinement has led to a number of provocative models: of God, human freedom, religious diversity, the ecosystem, human purpose, and fundamental physics (to name a few). These ideas are not only intellectually important, but can instigate positive social change.

All this explains why many young researchers are turning to Whitehead in order to study questions in many different fields (as disparate as management, sociology and philosophy). This return to Whitehead is timely because, like so many great philosophical works, his thought has taken time to settle and be well-understood. Now, though, we have an emerging understanding of the "revolution in metaphysics" and the new thought-schemes suggested by Whitehead. Alongside practical applications of his discoveries, it is possible to begin to understand Whitehead in a wider context, beyond restrictions to (but without disregard for) "process philosophies" and in dialogue with the wealth of contemporary philosophies.

In this way, Whitehead's *work contributes to a renewal of philosophy by displacing the antagonisms between so-called "analytic" and "continental" streams of philosophy*. For example, Whitehead's "process naturalism" offers the potential to develop hitherto unexplored links between those philosophers working within contemporary analytic philosophy who can be

said broadly to have taken the “naturalistic turn” (Davidson, McDowell) and those philosophers in the continental tradition who are working at a critical distance from phenomenology but in a direction that engages with non-reductive forms of naturalism (Bergson, late Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze). In ways largely unrecognized in contemporary philosophy, Whitehead has a foot in both of the main 20<sup>th</sup> century traditions and thus offers unique resources for thinking across the analytic-continental distinction that continues to divide contemporary philosophy.

Although much of professional philosophy in America is driven by investments in these traditions with their commitments to specific methodologies, one of the foremost objectives of the *Contemporary Whitehead Studies* series, co-sponsored by the Whitehead Research Project, lies in exploring the potential that Whitehead’s work offers for bridging these differing philosophical traditions.

The Whitehead Research Project (WRP)<sup>1</sup> is dedicated to the research of, and scholarship on, the texts, philosophy and life of Alfred North Whitehead. It explores and analyzes the relevance of Whitehead's thought in dialogue with contemporary philosophies in order to unfold his philosophy of organism and its consequences for our time and in relation to emerging philosophical thought. Of particular interest is the investigation into the emergence of Whitehead's philosophy in the context of British and American pragmatism, its complicated relation to Continental philosophy and the analytic tradition, the relevance of his thought in the discourse of post-modern paradigms of deconstruction and post-structuralism, and its creative impulse for developing process philosophies. Additionally, following Whitehead's own inclination to reach beyond European modes of thought, WRP seeks to extend its horizon of

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the initiatives of the Whitehead Research Project, visit its website: <<http://whiteheadresearch.org>>.

research by fostering similar conversations with strains of Indian and East Asian thought, thereby exhibiting *de facto* mutual influence—e.g., with the Kyoto School of Buddhist philosophy.

In encouraging a fresh and bold approach towards the ever-expanding possibility suggested by Whitehead's written material, both published and unpublished, WRP is committed to the continuing adventures of his ideas across disciplines. In doing so, the mission of WRP follows Whitehead's impulse to understand the distinct endeavor of philosophy “to conceive the infinite variety of specific instances which rest unrealized in the womb of nature” (*Process and Reality* 17) and “to maintain an active novelty of fundamental ideas illuminating the social system” (*Modes of Thought* 174). In its broader aim to understand and further civilization, philosophy “is seeking, amid the dim recesses of [our] ape-like consciousness and beyond the reach of dictionary language, for the premises implicit in all reasoning.” This endeavour is “dangerous, easily perverted. So is all Adventure; but Adventure belongs to the essence of civilization.” (*Adventures of Ideas* 295).

*Contemporary Whitehead Studies* (CWS)<sup>2</sup> is an interdisciplinary book series that publishes manuscripts from scholars with contemporary and innovative approaches to Whitehead studies, that is, Whitehead's philosophy and Whitehead's text (as a whole), by giving special focus to projects that:

- explore the connections between Whitehead and *contemporary Continental philosophy*, especially sources, like Heidegger, or contemporary streams like poststructuralism,

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<sup>2</sup> For information on submitting a manuscript for consideration in *Contemporary Whitehead Studies*, visit <<http://whiteheadresearch.org/research/cws/>>.

- reconnect Whitehead to *pragmatism, analytical philosophy* and *philosophy of language*, as a matter of source and recourse for an understanding of the tradition out of which Whitehead formulated his philosophic concepts or as a matter of engagement in areas that have excluded Whitehead,
- explore *creative East/West dialogues* facilitated by Whitehead's work,
- explore the *interconnections of the mathematician with the philosopher* and the contemporary importance of these parts of Whitehead's work for the dialogue between sciences and humanities,
- *reconnect Whitehead to the wider field of philosophy, the humanities, the sciences and academic research* with Whitehead's pluralistic impulses in the context of a pluralistic world,
- address *Whitehead's philosophy (and, per example, of philosophy per se) in the midst of contemporary problems* facing humanity, such as climate change, war & peace, race, and the future development of civilization.