

Introduction

WHITEHEAD'S OTHER COPERNICAN TURN

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1. Another Copernican Turn

Whitehead's philosophical heritage is traditionally understood in two ways, first as an endeavor to formulate a "metaphysics" and, second, his 1927 lectures for the renowned Scottish Gifford series, published as *Process and Reality*, are normally taken to be the definitive center and canonical formulation of this metaphysics. While the first claim *is* contested today by contemporary philosophy—maybe metaphysics is nothing but a fancy theory of everything that is either outdated by novel philosophical modes or overcome by physics—the second, we suggest, *must* be contested in light of Whitehead's "later" monographs and essays.

As long as the hermeneutical key to Whitehead's oeuvre remains dogmatically fixated on both, a certain understanding of metaphysics as essentialized from *Process and Reality* and the auxiliary function of the "later" works, any discussion of their *creative impetus* beyond themselves will be dwarfed, neglected, or even denied. Instead of the inevitable "creative advance" that lies at the heart of Whitehead's philosophical claims, we will have created what Whitehead called "a neat little system of thought, which thereby oversimplifies its expression of the world" (RM 50)—and, we suggest, of Whitehead's work as well. Instead, this volume questions both of these presuppositions and opens a discourse on the creative indeterminacy of philosophy in Whitehead and Whitehead's philosophy alike that invites its reader to question any such sedimentation.

In not following the common trail (with only a few visionary exceptions) of fixation on a canonical reductionism and a scholastic self-reassurance of a fixed identity of what Whitehead's work means and where this "essence" is to be found, we also refuse simply to accept Whitehead's own work as ending in a series of afterthoughts on both metaphysics and the Gifford Lectures. Instead of pitying Whitehead's "later" works as simplifications, popularizations, or at best as helpful applications and more or less interesting elaborations of themes already introduced earlier, especially between *Science and the Modern World* (1925) and *Process and Reality* (1929), we propose that it would *also* be possible and meaningful to break with the dominance of metaphysical fixation and a *Process and Reality*-centric perspective; that it is precisely this double-baggage of heritage that has obscured,

underestimated, or even distorted not only the creative program of Whitehead's thought, but also its textual complexity.

In other words, we think that as long as the Whiteheadian universe is observed from a traditional metaphysics and *Process and Reality*-centric perspective, with both taken as the zenith of Whitehead's work and (for some) of philosophy in general, we will miss two exceptional opportunities: on the one hand, to read Whitehead's philosophy against the background of its own contemporary alternatives (e.g., Heidegger, Marxist philosophy, critical theory and timely instantiations of deconstructionist and constructionist companions); and on the other hand, to discover the ingenuity, difference, and originality of the later works with regard to Whitehead's own opus.

Hence, this volume offers a sort of Copernican turn in Whiteheadian scholarship—methodologically and conceptually—by inviting its contributors to observe the Whiteheadian universe from the genuine perspective of Whitehead's "later" works. The aim of this methodological and conceptual preference of the later works is, however, not to invalidate earlier approaches to Whitehead's thought or approaches to Whitehead's work from "earlier" perspectives—e.g., his works before his Harvard period—nor is our implicit inference that the "later" works are *more* authoritative. However, the volume does invite its readers to consider whether, if one *in fact* goes beyond *Process and Reality*, does one find genuine departures from earlier "positions" and, even more importantly, also move *beyond* metaphysics?

Over against the contention that *Process and Reality* is the single, definitive statement of Whitehead's metaphysics with the later as applications of the system developed in *Process and Reality*, the landscape of alternatives explored by the contributors to this book is at least threefold: that Whitehead developed with regards to perspective (not just application), but not with regard to his methodology (as formulated in *Process and Reality* and *Function of Reason*); that Whitehead's metaphysical project only comes fully into view in the later works; and that Whitehead moves beyond metaphysics: into an aesthetics of becoming, a profound philosophical ecology, or a diversified account of the divine, with regard to a theory of civilization. Just as the first space based images of our planet forever changed humanity's understanding of its place in the universe, by shifting the center of perception and understanding of Whitehead's thought to the later works, we might discover many new venues with regard to all of Whitehead's "cosmological" themes: science and philosophy, the status of the divine, the relevance of relativity, the quest for truth and beauty.

2. Reconceiving the Metaphysical Adventure

What is the status of Whitehead's metaphysical claim? In keeping with the framework developed by his primary biographer, Victor Lowe, Whitehead's

works are traditionally divided into three periods, corresponding roughly to his time in Cambridge (1884-1910), London (1910-1924), and Harvard (1924-1947). According to such an account, the “late works” would seem to include all the works written after his arrival in America. Although one could think that such an account has more to do with geography than with the trajectory of his thought, there is a logical coherence to Lowe’s divisions. It was with the shift from his position as English mathematician to that of an American philosopher that he also, and rapidly, shifted thought from space-time-relativity in *The Principle of Relativity* (1922) to a metaphysical account of the refuted development of a mechanistic and materialistic account of physics. Whitehead understood that if he wanted to understand the cultural and philosophical effects of the new physics, relativity theory and quantum mechanics, he needed to address its underlying metaphysical limitations. And, thus, he shifted to a first metaphysical synthesis in *Science and the Modern World*.

This characterization of the late, that is, the American, work of Whitehead has, however, led to the perception that this “metaphysical period” has itself three phases: an early synthesis, a mature position, and a series of popularizing distributions of his thought. In refuting such a perspective, we also contest the thesis that his 1929 magnum opus *Process and Reality* is, indeed, the “end” (aim) of his work thus leaving his “late” thought, especially *Adventures of Ideas* (1933) and *Modes of Thought* (1938), in the shadow of a virtually indiscernible repetition of its earlier paradigm.

Whitehead himself left a rare clue as to how he viewed the relationship between his own works in the preface to *Adventures of Ideas*. While *Science and the Modern World*, *Process and Reality*, and *Adventures of Ideas* “can be read separately,” he notes that they also “supplement each other’s omissions or compressions” (AI vii). Some interpreters see this admission as a hint towards an as explicit justification for taking the later works as more than applications of the system developed in *Process and Reality*, while others understand such an admission as a manifestation of Whitehead’s characteristic insistence on the incompleteness and fallibility of speculative philosophy as such.

Whitehead’s “metaphysical claim” is quite diverse and not without development in his own work. It finds its early conceptual instantiations in *Concept of Nature* (1920) in his metaphysic-critical stance that “we remove the metaphysics and start afresh on an unprejudiced survey of nature” (CN 25) so “that we can think about nature without thinking about thought” (CN 3), but leaves open the endeavor to find in “metaphysics the synthesis of the knower and the known” (CN 28) and in “values of nature ... the key to the metaphysical synthesis of existence (CN 5). It ventures in *Process and Reality* into the famous methodological and seemingly rationalist formulations of “speculative philosophy” as “the endeavour to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted” (PR 3). But it also shows already complexities of self-

deconstruction of any rationalism, e.g., in *Function of Reason* (1929), when Whitehead insists that the “essence of Reason in its lowliest forms is its judgments upon flashes of novelty” so that in embalment of any static system of general ideas that would represent a “stabilized life there is no room for Reason” (FR 20).

In fact, as Whitehead's reflection on the philosophical method and metaphysical conceptualization in his late work demonstrates, he not only doubts the possibility of “that final adjustment of well-defined generalities which constitute a complete metaphysics” instead of a rationalist-constructivist “speculation” on generalities, but instead seeks as the true “topics for philosophic research the always “undiscovered limitations” in our production “of partial systems of limited generality.” Conceptually, such deconstructionist endeavor is accompanied with a new constructivist pluralism, in which “the discordance of system with system” (AI 145) becomes a creative imperative that “limits the business of Logic,” which “is not the analysis of generalities but their mingling.” Whitehead envisions a “discovery of new generalities” as lifting thought “into views [of] new possibilities of combination” (AI 235)—open-ended, creative, indeterminate.

In an important sense, Whitehead's metaphysical adventure has always embodied the effort to move philosophical thought “beyond” metaphysics as it was traditionally conceived—its idealistic legitimation and its empirical refutation. Like many of his contemporaries and their philosophical offspring, with Heidegger Whitehead repudiates metaphysics precisely as the sterile attempt to develop closed systems of apodictic truths. Yet, in conflict with the dominant trajectory of analytic Anglo-American thought and some modes of deconstructive postmodernism on the Continent, Whitehead did not thereby abandon metaphysics, recognizing as delusory the notion that one could entirely avoid all presuppositions concerning the structure and meaning of reality, its experience, and conceptualization. In this way, at least, Whitehead's thought was always beyond metaphysics, not in the sense of abandoning it, but in fundamentally reconceiving of it as an open-ended and fallible effort to formulate (*per impossible*) a universal account of experience.

3. Contemporary Manifold

Whitehead's Copernican turn with regard to metaphysics, we suggest, is not identical with, but related to, the Copernican revolution that is attributed to Whitehead's reversal of Kant and his own famous Copernican revolution of thought, especially in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant's turn was meant to initiate an awakening from a “dogmatic slumber” that is largely identified today with the conceptual grip of metaphysics. While, with Kant, metaphysical thinking is, on its own terms, formulating the real reality of the world, it is, in fact, only a fantasy of the mind in constructing reality out of the sense

perceptions of a chaotic world appropriated by its own measures, its transcendental categories. After Kant, the transcendent reality of metaphysics, that is, its empirical meaninglessness, is nothing but a “transcendental illusion” of the human mind that cannot avoid such essentializations and reduplications of empirical reality in a metaphysical realm of abstract ideas, substances, and entities. Whitehead's own Copernican revolution of Kant, however, intends to revert Kant's “metaphysical claim” or the claim of metaphysical illusion by reverting his idealistic presupposition of what Derrida calls a “metaphysics of presence” that still works through his transcendental categories insofar as they begin with the mere representation of the sensual world in our constructive mind and, hence, the still Cartesian dualistic doublet of empirical and transcendent world, namely, in the form of the transcendental subject, the isolated mind in its apperception of presupposed identity.

Whitehead calls this Copernican turn, from Kantian representation and dualism to physical influx and emergent mental construction, his “critique of pure feeling” (PR 113). Neither is it fixated on the isolated subject of construction that leaves the world in its abyss of the mere phenomenon, nor is it opposing deconstruction to construction. Rather, since it follows Kant's *critique* (the epistemological turn) as an analysis of experience as “constructive functioning” (PR 156) it reverts its dualistic presupposition, the bifurcation of constructive subjectivity and inert reality, into a condescending movement of the world into emergent, but fleeting syntheses of world before any rational grasp or categorical fixation. Since the epistemological isolation of the subject is relieved from its self-indulgent apriori origin, the world is relieved of its mere function to mirror the mind. Epistemology flows back into ontology, cosmology, and physics and metaphysics becomes the expression of the analysis of the construction that is the event of the experience of the world itself. Whitehead's Copernican turn is *metaphysical* insofar as it does not accept the dualistic isolation of any “reality” from the flow of experience—that which in the *pure feeling* of world is the *event* of its happening of its metaphysical structure.

Whitehead's “metaphysical” turn, on this Kantian background, is resonant with Nietzsche's and Heidegger's *critique* of metaphysics instead of pre-Kantian rationalistic or idealistic suppression of the reality of the world as pure becoming (of which being is only a regress into fixation) or of the difference of being as event from the beings as substances. Against both it is led by Whitehead's ontological principle for which there is no “reason” except in the event of experience. Hence, any metaphysical structure is that of a world of becoming of events of experience and the analysis of the experience of events and as events of world; it is not prefigured but experienced. And it is ontological insofar as it discovers the difference of Being as Event (Heidegger's ontological difference) only in the event of becomings; its being is the immanent creativeness of the events themselves (cf. PR 7).

While Whitehead's metaphysical turn is opting for an aesthetics of the non-duality of mind and matter, subjectivity and objectivity, epistemology and ontology, being and becoming, it has in fact overturned the binary structures that, for Derrida, have been the mark of metaphysics—and all metaphysics is one of self-presence of the controlling binary top over the marginal bottom: mind over matter, subject over object, epistemology over ontology, Being over becoming. In fact, in a Derridian light, it becomes obvious why Whitehead did not understand Kant's Copernican turn as a turn at all, namely, because it still reduplicates the controlling self-presence of the (transcendental) subject substituting the primacy of substances over events; hence its epistemological preference is still based on a Cartesian *metaphysical* decision. Like Derrida's *différance*, Whitehead's method of metaphysical non-dualism instigates in fact also an overcoming of any Spinozist substantialism and monism in favor of a pluralism that, together with his new (radical) empiricism has led Deleuze to proclaim himself in the wake of Whitehead's new, open, indeterminate and creativity arousing metaphysical approach.

In fact, in the contemporary landscape of deconstructive dismissal of metaphysics on the lines of Derrida—and still following Heidegger—and the renewed interest in its potency in Deleuze, we find Whitehead's claim to perform a new, a different kind of metaphysics intriguing. And we face at least four directions of such a “metaphysical encounter.” While the post-Heideggerian existentialist and phenomenological approach has led to a severe and unrevised critique of metaphysics in general by employing a universal hermeneutics that revises metaphysical “truth” with interpretation (Vattimo), the phenomenon (Marion), and the suppressed Real (Lacan), its more exclusively language-oriented siblings dismiss it on Nietzsche's account of the laws of power as repressive signification of binarisms (Derrida) and the all-pervasive play of power (Foucault).

Over against such deconstructive approaches, however, a resistant constructive revival of metaphysics has taken place; more hidden at first and in the midst of the ocean of the diffusion of the rationalist remainders of the Kantian divide of Critique and Dogmatism. They might be associated with reinvigorated interests in science (Michel Serres), mysticism (Bataille), and the disappearance of the world (Baudrillard); they are rigorously non-foundational and pluralistic in nature and passionate about this world—over against any transcendent realm of metaphysical entities, alternative realities, or heavenly projections. And insofar as they have become interested in Whitehead again, they have Deleuze as link: his insinuation of immanence and difference, singularity and event, pluralism and empiricism, being *poststructuralist* in nature, became exploited in its *constructivist* implications—the self-construction of the world from events.

This kind of new objective realism within a poststructuralist constructivism as it related to Whitehead, for instance, through the work of Isabelle Stengers and Bruno Latour, is still surrounded by alternative concepts of con-

structivism: the new mathematical constructions of philosophical ontology in Alan Badiou, non-foundationalist and pluralist but outspokenly non-demonstrationist (especially anti-Deleuzian) and objectivist (truth-oriented), but also by an older rationalist constructivism, not unfamiliar in Whiteheadian circles, that opposed deconstruction with construction and interpretation with truth as if “reality” has become a conspirer again and as if constructivism can still be set *against* Kant’s Critique and Copernican turn. It is neighbored by undeconstructed pre-Kantian modes of metaphysics that, be they empiricist or rationalist, still seek to fulfill the Cartesian project of a *fundamentum inconcussum* or, at least, of an Enlightened rationality that follows the anthropocentric humanism of self-sustenance in an insecure world. With Kant’s *First Critique*, they ask as its core question: What is it to be human?

The new modes of deconstructionist and constructivist metaphysics, however, ask a different question: How can we understand a world that allows for novelty to happen (Deleuze), of a world that in thoroughgoing “solidarity” is bound together without human exception, sublimation, or aim? It is a fundamentally *ecological* world, in which metaphysics today—surprisingly or not—asks Whitehead’s questions again: How, in an immanent field of experience, is the event of the world *meaningful*? How, aesthetically, as the question of discordant harmony that saves us from “Anaesthesia” (AI 294) and, politically, as “world-loyalty” (RM 60), can we today be “critical and yet constructive” such that a metaphysics “of adventure, of speculation, of search for new ideas” can “maintain an active novelty of fundamental ideas illuminating the social system”? (MT 174)

4. Cosmology Again

Metaphysics is a strange animal: Classically concerned with reality, substances, universals, and eternity, criticized as idealistic, denounced as foundational, and uncovered as socially stabilizing, reverted to interpretation, process, singularities, and novelty, mutating in its methods and conceptuality—it is still alive, that is, producing new forms of questions vital to cultural, social, and ecological challenges of our time. At its best, it is not only interpreting or cutting through the illusions of the obvious, but also visionary of a future of humanity to come within a world to be defined by it. Even through and after the grand criticisms of Kant, Nietzsche, and Heidegger (and their followers), it retains a guerilla-presence in its denunciations, reversions, and revivals. Maybe metaphysics is one of Kant’s “transcendental illusions” that we cannot flee as we cannot escape Foucault’s power-structures underlying our discourses?

Maybe, however, metaphysics could also be what Whitehead calls an “imaginative leap” (PR 4)—not of a illusionary character, a “phantasy,” but of an “imaginative generalization,” “imaginative interpretation,” “imaginative

rationalization,” or “imaginative construction” (PR 4-5), a “speculation,” that does not repeat the hidden truth of (ultimate) reality, but *creatively generates* reality, truth, and the universal in the event of its happening and by instigating an event of a future that is not preceded and resembled by any pre-given structure of the past just to be discovered. Maybe the best metaphysics can do is “*to promote the art of life*” (FR 4). Maybe this is Whitehead's “other” Copernican revolution: that the importance of Whitehead's metaphysical claim in the context of the contemporary philosophical landscape may well be that it highlights an environmental imperative based on a radically aesthetic impulse that is not about survival per se but about the good life—not just of humanity, but in resonance with the whole cosmos.

The more traditional, *Process and Reality*-centric account of Whitehead's late thought rightly recognizes that his philosophy of organism seeks to turn much of the Western philosophical tradition on its head, seeing as primary not the static maintenance of being, but the creative process of becoming. Yet, we might argue that the full significance of the philosophy of organism only comes into view from the perspective of the later works. Since the *nature* of reality as the dynamic process of becoming, as it is explored in exquisite depth in *Process and Reality*, cannot really be understood without also seeking to understand the very “*meaning of actuality*” (MT 111, italics added), which is the central focus in Whitehead's later works, we find that the “later” do not represent mere applications of a metaphysical “scheme,” but rather initiate the very process by which it can be recognized. Its *insights* only come fully to the fore in the later works when its *importance* is explored. Only there do we learn that the repudiation of “vacuous actuality” (PR 29) that is so central to earlier accounts of Whitehead's philosophy of organism is fundamentally an *aesthetic* and *ethical* protest and creative impulse for novelty. It is here, in these late works, that we learn the *significance* of Whitehead's metaphysical claim that the true “base of reality” is the “sense of ‘worth’, ... of existence for its own sake, of existence which is its own justification, of existence with its own character” (MT 109).

Perhaps another way to view the overall development of Whitehead's thought and, hence, his Copernican turn “beyond” metaphysics—if it is not its use as limit—is to understand it as a process of increasing universality that is accompanied by equally increasing relativity. While the early works, methodologically and conceptually, begin with mathematical studies in universalized geometry (of space-time) and symbolic language as well as the relationship of logical and mathematical language and physical epistemology in the light of relativity theory, the Harvard works blend the pan-physical with the metaphysical perspective. The question of space-time events becomes one of their inner character and value, as well as the mutual process of becoming-subject (mentality) and becoming-object (physicality), of a nexus of intersecting and nested societies and environments of cosmological magnitude in

which humanity is integrated, and thereby deprived of its self-constructed privileged status and appropriately relativized.

The late works, however, in having gone to the limits of universality and relativity now relativize, in their own turn, this universality itself as the *event* of becoming. As metaphysical universality now becomes integrated and relativized into this environmental process, these late works besides and after *Process and Reality*—especially *Symbolism, Function of Reason, Adventures of Ideas*, and *Modes of Thought* (with some of the late articles and lectures)—address this environmental relativity of metaphysics as cultural symbolization, art of life, the generation of civilization, and thought as modes of life. Metaphysics becomes a human activity that addresses the environmental relativity of humanity, its future with the cosmos, and a harmony that issues in perpetual recreation of novelty, not for the sake of novelty, but for the sake of an increasingly civilized life that recognizes, nurtures, and develops the care for the world in its multiplicity of environmental intertwining.

Indeed, over against any rationalist imperialism of metaphysical generality of precedented “reality,” Whitehead envisioned its *limits*: not just of language or the capacities of mind to perceive such generalities, but by a cosmos that is a *creative process of the unprecedented*. This “cosmology” is not just a negative limit that hinders metaphysics to ever be completed (to find the generalities for all “cosmic epochs”), but it is *productive* by the positive impulse to seek novelty beyond all definitions of structured reality of any cosmos. Maybe it is precisely philosophy as “cosmology”—as limitation and productive procedure—that is “beyond” metaphysics? And maybe it is precisely in the “late” works that Whitehead addresses this two-folded limit of metaphysics as social and ecological recourse of a future of the *common* “cosmos”—as an aesthetics of cultural development for which metaphysics plays its role as limit beyond which we have to venture as matter of an “ecological civilization”? One of the most challenging passages to this effect can be found in Whitehead's *Symbolism* (1927):

Thus mankind by means of its elaborate system of symbolic transference can achieve miracles of sensitiveness to a distant environment, and to a problematic future. But it pays the penalty, by reason of the dangerous fact that each symbolic transference may involve an arbitrary imputation of unsuitable characters. It is not true, that the mere workings of nature in any particular organism are in all respects favorable either to the existence of that organism, or to its happiness, or to the progress of the society in which the organism finds itself. The melancholy experience of men makes this warning a platitude. No elaborate community of elaborate organisms could exist unless its systems of symbolism were in general successful. Codes, rules of behaviour, canons of art, are attempts to

impose systematic action which on the whole will promote favourable symbolic interconnections. (S 87-88)

If metaphysics appears as immanent, such as a “cosmology” that has become a general *cultural symbolization* of such an endeavor of novelty and connectivity, it will indeed promote, critique, and envision the structures that initiate and always renew the “good life” in society and environment.

It is the first step in sociological wisdom, to recognize that the major advances in civilization are processes which all but wreck the societies in which they occur: — like unto an arrow in the hand of a child. The art of free society consists first in the maintenance of the symbolic code; and secondly in fearlessness of revision, to secure that the code serves those purposes which satisfy an enlightened reason. Those societies which cannot combine reverence to their symbols with freedom of revision, must ultimately decay either from anarchy, or from the slow atrophy of a life stifled by useless shadows. (S 88)

Viewed through the lens of the later works, then, the deep aesthetic and ethical roots of Whitehead’s philosophy become apparent in such a way that they constitute, so at least we suggest, not only the *significance* of his earlier metaphysical claim, but reveals its true *intention: the initiation of a creative life within the cosmic nexus*. Indeed, in this light, the expansive and insightful discussions of beauty and value that permeate his final books, *Adventures of Ideas* and *Modes of Thought*, and essays, “Immortality” and “Mathematics and the Good” (1941), are seen not as applications or afterthoughts, but as both the non-foundational reason and motivation of his earlier attempts at metaphysical system building—not as closed system, but as perpetual construction of satisfying human and cosmic harmonies. Thus, we think, Whitehead’s later works are not peripheral applications that can be bracketed. Rather, as an attempt to understand the art and adventure of life, they seek to depict the aesthetic wellspring from which it emerges and the beacon toward which it is lured.