

Roland Faber, Brian G. Henning, Clinton Combs, eds.
Beyond Metaphysics? Explorations in Alfred North Whitehead's Late Thought.
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Among A.N. Whitehead's many works, *Process and Reality* is often held to be the fullest and most complete expression of his philosophical thought. *Beyond Metaphysics? Explorations in Alfred North Whitehead's Late Thought* challenges this assumption, or at the very least treats it as worthy of critical reflection. In addressing questions surrounding the status of Whitehead's later work the overall book actually does a good job illustrating just how philosophically advanced Whitehead's thought actually is.

The book is loosely divided into three parts: Part 1, 'Complexities of System, Life, and Novelty'; Part 2, 'Depth of Nature, Order, and Organicity', and Part 3, 'Evocations of Value, Beauty, and Concern'. While all of the papers here are worth reading, I will highlight a few of the more notable ones in each section to try to convey the general flavor and depth of the overall collection.

Part 1 opens with Vincent Colapietro's 'Towards a Metaphysics of Expression'. Colapietro sees Whitehead's later work as a renewal of his speculative project, and hence as an expression of the ideas, principles and methodological conditions outlined in *Process and Reality*. For Colapietro, Whitehead's work is a living philosophy that can never be statically complete, but must undergo a process of periodic, hermeneutic renewal. Colapietro sees the later works as serving to test, and hence reaffirm the adequacy and applicability of the experiential conditions it takes as basic, as well as remaining attuned to the ever-evolving conditions of the world as such (14). We see the same theme repeated, with slightly different emphasis, in Christoph Kann's 'Renewing Speculation: The Systematic Aim of Whitehead's Philosophical Cosmology'. Kann does an admirable job outlining the 'nature and aim' of speculative philosophy, with particular emphasis on the important role that Whitehead's methodological 'criteria' play in his vision of speculative inquiry as a continuous process of 'generalization and revision' (33-40). Kann also sees Whitehead's later work as the renewed expression of the dynamic methodological conditions outlined in *Process and Reality*.

Clinton Combs' 'Before Metaphysics: *Modes of Thought* as a Prequel to Whitehead's "Trilogy"' continues the same theme, but with an interesting twist. Combs reads *Modes of Thought*, not merely as an expression of *Process and Reality*, but as an attempt to present or perform a phenomenological investigation of the concrete grounds of experience. Where *Process and Reality* presents a complex speculative, metaphysical system that is to be evaluated 'by how well it accounts for experience,' Combs sees *Modes of Thought* as an attempt to uncover or disclose the concrete grounds of experience as such (85). Understood in this sense, *Modes of Thought* is not itself a metaphysical work, nor does it carry us beyond Whitehead's metaphysics (as some might

suggest), but is instead a work 'before metaphysics' (88).

Part 1 closes with Roland Faber's excellent article, 'Immanence and Incompleteness: Whitehead's Late Metaphysics'. Faber defends four major theses: 1) Whitehead's late work is a deconstruction of the traditional idea of metaphysics that reveals any and all metaphysics to be essentially incomplete; 2) metaphysical incompleteness is expressed as cultural incompleteness, where reason must always operate from a condition of cultural and historical immanence (with all the fallibility conditions that follow from such immanence); 3) given the fundamental universality of process, all metaphysical claims will be marked by a 'transcendental incompleteness'; and 4) Whitehead's late works are explorations of the paradoxes associated with the metaphysical aim at 'rational comprehensiveness' and the transcendental incompleteness that follows from the universality of process (92-102). This is, in effect, another attempt to rethink Kant's 'transcendental illusion', but in a way that sees the fate of reason as an expression of the very character of the world in which it finds itself situated.

In the opening article of Part 2, 'The Organism of Forms in Later Whitehead', Robert J. Valenza argues that Whitehead's later works can be read, at least in part, as an attempt to resolve a 'prominent, thorny problem' in Whitehead's metaphysics that has its roots in a 'certain deficiency' in his mathematics, namely, a problematic attachment to 'a kind of substance ontology of forms' (115). Put simply, Whitehead's speculative attempt to make process universal makes such notions as subsistence, endurance, immutability and so on, philosophically problematic. According to Valenza, Whitehead attempted to resolve this problem through his category of 'eternal objects', but Valenza argues that this failed. Valenza sees Whitehead's later works as a further attempt to resolve this problem by recasting objects and relations in a more 'significant reciprocity' such that 'one cannot speak of reality without simultaneously invoking both poles simultaneously' (119). Valenza sees Whitehead's later work as resolving this problem 'with great elegance, if only informally' (111).

Jeremy Dunham's 'Beyond Dogmatic Finality: Whitehead and the Laws of Nature' focuses largely on Whitehead's conception of nature and its laws. Building upon the ideas of evolutionary cosmology found in C. S. Peirce and James Ward, Dunham sees Whitehead's latter work, and most especially *Adventures of Ideas*, as an attempt to work out some of the methodological implications that might follow from accepting an evolutionary metaphysics. Of central importance is Dunham's claim that the fallible, provisional character of our speculations entails that metaphysics itself 'must always be in a process of development' (126).

Regine Kather's superb article, 'The Web of Life and the Constitution of Human Identity: Rethinking Nature as the Main Issue of Whitehead's Late Metaphysics' again takes Whitehead's philosophy of nature as its main focus, but with another important and insightful twist. Starting with the distinction between scientific and philosophical cosmology outlined in Whitehead's early *Concept of Nature*, Kather claims that Whitehead's later work is an attempt to address the question of nature with a special view to the conditions of life (and the inner life of organism). Where scientific cosmology aims

to construct a model or theory of nature as object independent of its observer, philosophical cosmology or metaphysics should be aimed at constructing a model or theory of nature that embraces both 'subject *and* object', encompassing the characteristics of knowers as well as objects known (181-2). Since the knower is both a subject and an object, speculative metaphysics should be based not only upon the externally observable evidence, but also upon the internal experiences of subjects, e.g. 'the act of knowing, feeling, and perceiving' as well as the 'aesthetic dimensions, ethical values' and so on, that are essential, first order conditions of subjectivity per se. Kather rightly points out that the dichotomy of subject and object results in a problematic schism between the two. She suggests that one of the main functions of Whitehead's later works is to overcome this schism by focusing on the broader question of life in nature, as she takes Whitehead to hold life as a kind of bridge between the dichotomous distinction between subjects and objects. Kather's treatment of the role and place of life in Whitehead's later work is intriguing and insightful, and should be of interest to anyone who is curious about this difficult, highly important, yet often neglected aspect of Whitehead's work, as well as to the question of life in general.

Part 3 opens with Brian G. Henning's 'Re-Centering Process Thought: Recovering Beauty in A. N. Whitehead's Late Work'. Henning's central thesis is that beauty is the 'central category of Whitehead's system', and that it is only in *Adventures of Ideas* that the central place of beauty in Whitehead's system is made clear (201-4). Part of Henning's mission is to show why process ethics has been largely neglected, particularly as it relates to environmental ethics. He claims that process ethics can be recovered and rejuvenated only if properly re-situated as a kalocentric ethics that is aimed primarily at the production of beauty.

Stascha Rohmer's 'The Self-Evidence of Civilization' sees Whitehead's later work as the final fruition of his earlier efforts. According to Rohmer, the main tenor of the later works is to highlight or bring into focus those aspects of experience that are neglected or overlooked by the natural sciences. Rohmer claims that Whitehead's later work presents a broad phenomenological examination of the conditions of experience as well as an 'epistemology of civilization' that is much broader in scope than the perspectives offered by the special sciences (224).

Michael Halewood's excellent article, 'Fact, Values, Individuals, and Others: Towards a Metaphysics of Value', provides an in-depth treatment of the notion of value in Whitehead's work. Halewood contends that Whitehead does not offer a description of values (as is commonly supposed), but a general 'metaphysics of value' (228). According to Halewood, Whitehead's system is aimed at incorporating value, not as a collection or category of 'static things (nouns)', but more as a verbal 'activity of valuation' (231). Halewood goes on to argue that it is 'the sense' of value that is most important in Whitehead's work, a 'sense' is akin to an 'axiological intentionality' (my phraseology) or constitutive concern that is captured in the simple phrase 'something matters' (244). Halewood sees *Adventures of Ideas* as the attempt to test the axiological scheme outlined in *Process and Reality*, and he sees *Modes of Thought* as attempting to disclose the one fundamental importance of the axiological standpoint 'something matters' as a

constitutive condition of experience (and being) as such.

Steven Shaviro continues the discussion of value in 'Self-Enjoyment and Concern: On Whitehead and Levinas'. Shaviro also does an admirable job outlining what he takes to be some of the more radical and often overlooked aspects of Whitehead's work, namely, the important notions of 'concern' and 'self-enjoyment'. Shaviro contrasts Whitehead's more complex ethical/axiological position with Levinas' claims regarding the primacy of ethical responsibility and the 'call of the Other' (255). Shaviro argues that where Levinas' more 'reactive' notion of responsibility is too 'one-sided and reductive', Whitehead offers a far more balanced and comprehensive account of valuation that places aesthetic enjoyment on an equal footing with ethical responsibility.

This is a good collection that will appeal to anyone interested in the philosophy of Whitehead or in process philosophy in general. Those with an interest in metaphysics, and speculative metaphysics in particular, will also gain by reading this book, as will those interested in axiological issues concerning the nature of ethical or aesthetic value.

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