

BEYOND METAPHYSICS?

Explorations in Alfred North
Whitehead's Late Thought

Edited by
Roland Faber
Brian G. Henning
Clinton Combs



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Introduction

WHITEHEAD'S OTHER COPERNICAN TURN

Roland Faber and Brian G. Henning

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contested today by contemporary philosophy—maybe metaphysics is nothing but a fancy theory of everything that is either outdated by novel philosophical modes or overcome by physics—the second, we suggest, *must* be contested in light of Whitehead's "later" monographs and essays.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 impossibile*) 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 apprehension 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 concentering movement of the world into emergent, but fleeting syntheses of world before any rational grasp or categorial 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.

Part One

COMPLEXITIES OF SYSTEM,
LIFE, AND NOVELTY

One

TOWARD A METAPHYSICS OF EXPRESSION

Vincent Colapietro

Philosophy can never hope finally to formulate these metaphysical first principles [or ultimate generalities]. Weakness of insight and deficiencies of language stand in the way inexorably. Words and phrases must be stretched towards a generality foreign to their ordinary usage; and however such elements of language be stabilized as technicalities, they remain metaphors mutely appealing for an imaginative leap. (PR 4)

1. The Renewal of Speculative Philosophy

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, without the surprisingly rare ability to perceive what we encounter, and quite apart from our presumptions to know (i.e., our *knowingness*)? It is, accordingly, the opposite of what it might appear to be. Its audacity is as much as anything *in* its humility. There is paradoxically, in the bold experiments defining speculative philosophy, at least an implicit recovery of humility as an intellectual virtue.¹ In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead underscores both facets of such philosophy: “Speculative boldness must be balanced by complete humility before logic, also before fact.” He immediately adds: “It is a disease of philosophy when it is neither bold nor humble, but merely a reflection of the temperamental presuppositions of exceptional personalities” (PR 17). The critics of speculative philosophy tend to fixate on what they take to be the reckless boldness and, indeed, intellectual irresponsibility of those who engage in this manner of theorizing. That is, they tend to miss what a speculative philosopher such as Whitehead stresses—the abiding need for intellectual humility.

Indeed, the radical doubts that some might have about speculative philosophy likely conceal a theoretical arrogance rather than intellectual humility. 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, however, 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 (Peirce 1992, 1, 235). A healthy, orienting skepticism is always more cautious and specific about the force and scope of its doubts.

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. Put yet otherwise, it must be an example of what it aspires to achieve: if the will is not to exceed the deed, it must be the act (or deed) itself. The prolegomena to any future speculation must be more than a catalog of likely pitfalls. It must be the methodologically self-critical exercise of our capacity for speculative thought. But *why* exercise this contested capacity, especially when other pressing intellectual tasks abound, *why* (to state the matter even more polemically) indulge our theoretical fancy?

C. S. Peirce goes so far as to suggest that “metaphysics is the Paris of the intellect: no sooner do the most scrupulously severe reasoners find their feet on this ground than they give the loosest reins of license to their logic” (Peirce 1979, 182). But he also insists: “Whether we have an antimetaphysical metaphysics or a pro-metaphysical metaphysics, a metaphysics we are sure to have. And the less pains we take with it the more crudely metaphysical it will be” (Peirce 1992, 108). Wonder conspires with the exigency for an orientation toward the world to propel us toward framing some vision of the cosmos, however crude and unacknowledged. The most important question confronting the human mind here is, accordingly, not *why* should we exercise our speculative imagination, but *how* we should do so.² Like the pragmatists, Whitehead sets out from and returns to the world as an arena of action, a sphere whose contours, constitution, and components are disclosed through the ongoing struggles of situated actors (or implicated agents) to realize various purposes.³ The exercise of our agency compels us to frame some account of the spheres of our engagements and endeavors. Thus, the task and renewal of speculative thought is inescapable.

Moreover, such renewal needs itself to be renewed. My *philosophical thesis* is just this. More precisely, 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 basis of our most basic notions. My *hermeneutic thesis* is that we can observe in Whitehead’s later thought (at least, in some important respects) a more methodologically self-conscious renewal of his speculative project.⁴ He is aware that this task can never be accomplished, once and for all; it must be taken up anew, now and again. In concert with other articles in this volume (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 lesser extent, *The Function of Reason* (1929)—are best interpreted as integral parts of his *ongoing* renewal of speculative philosophy. Such a re-

newal involves giving more or less systematic expression to the ordinarily dumb certitudes of our conscious experience. One of the most salient features “of the primary mode of conscious experience is its fusion of a large generality with an insistent particularity” (MT 4). This generality is intimately connected to the intelligibility of such experience, while this particularity is bound up with our sense of the irreducible uniqueness and incomparable singularity of what is concretely encountered in experience. The task of assemblage demands turning, time and again, to the fusion of such generality and particularity, thereby renewing our efforts to do justice to the disclosures of our experience.

2. Modes of Thought: A Paradigm of Renewal

In particular, I want to highlight the methodological self-consciousness expressed or articulated in *Modes of Thought* (cf. Kann), taking this self-consciousness to be itself an expression of an awareness of an irreducibly vague background forever eluding an adequately systematic articulation (cf. Charles Taylor). This methodological self-awareness gives voice to a *sense of importance*—the importance of a vast, vague, unmeasured and indeed immeasurable context in which we are enveloped and implicated. No matter how adequate is any experiment in speculative philosophy, thus any *essay* in systematic expression, especially when judged against the stultifying influence of inherited schemes, inadequacy is inescapable. Hence, in giving voice to the irreducibly vague notion of importance (and doing so at the very outset of his renewed effort to ground his speculative venture in philosophical assemblage), Whitehead is, in effect, bearing witness to the vast, vague, and largely incomprehensible context providing the background against which meaningful utterances and (among these) the most precise formulations stand out.⁵ He moves decisively toward what James called “the re-instatement of the vague to its proper place” (James 1890/1981, 246; see Gavin 1992), but at the same time Whitehead appears to have pulled back from the full force of the implications of his own later insights. To adapt the language of his philosophy of education for describing the development of his philosophy, we might say that the culminating stage of generalization must always be a return to the inaugurating stage of romance. As such, we at this stage must be attentive to the dangers of the intervening phase of precision, as these emerge and insinuate themselves in the culminating phase.

Indeed, if we take *Modes of Thought* seriously—thus, if we read this work not as a summation of prior achievements but as a renewal of speculative adventure—the stage of generalization in Whitehead’s development is nothing less than one of romance. Moreover, he is in this and other later works attentive to the dangers of adhering too narrowly to ideals of clarity and precision. But, when celebrating in the Epilogue to MT the kinship of

philosophy to poetry, Whitehead concludes by aligning philosophy with “mathematical pattern” (174) rather than what might be called *phenomenological evocation*. This might constitute a failure of his, however slight, to follow out the implications of his own thought.

Indeed, the kinship of philosophy to poetry might be even deeper than Whitehead suggests. While the main difference between poetic and philosophic utterance is other than where he locates it (“Poetry allies itself to metre, philosophy to mathematical pattern” [MT 174]), both forms of utterance are, first and foremost, *evocative*. Their function is to call us to what has called to the speaker or writer for acknowledgment and expression. In a more expansive treatment of Whitehead’s later thought, then, I would aim to show, at the very least: (1) what Whitehead identifies as philosophical assemblage is primarily a phenomenological evocation designed to counteract the systematic occlusions of alternative systems or categorial schemes; (2) a less hesitant reinstatement of the vague than that encountered in Whitehead’s later writings is one of the most important trajectories of these writings themselves (while driving in this direction, they stop short of what Whitehead’s own insights require); and (3) a more developed theory of symbolism than anything found anywhere in his works is needed for doing justice to the evocative function of philosophical discourse, especially in its recurrent phase of philosophical assemblage but also in the systematic articulation of the implications of what is arguably *the* defining operation of speculative philosophy—*descriptive generalization* (PR 10). What I have to say here should hence be heard as a preliminary study of this more expansive treatment.

Allow me thus to return to my substantive (as distinct from my hermeneutic) thesis, though stated somewhat differently. The renewal of speculative thought hence enjoins us to return, time and again, to the disclosures of what we cannot help identifying as primary experience.⁶ The return to such experience is, at once, a vital movement *within* speculative philosophy and an irrepressible impulse *beyond* any historical realization of the speculative drive. In a sense, it might even be an uncontrollable impulse beyond speculative philosophy or, more radically, articulate thought itself (cf. MT 174). In philosophy no less than poetry, the limits of expression—at least, a sense of approaching or confronting such limits—might be reached from within the categorial schemes or other expressive ventures generated by a sustained effort in the direction of luminous expression. Our most adequate articulations are perhaps always accompanied by the Jamesian sense of “ever not quite” (or “ever not yet”).

For honest inquirers, this sense is never inert. It is always propulsive, for it propels them back to “the rough ground” of their everyday experience and shared practices (Wittgenstein 1953, #107; cf. PR). Whereas in the later Wittgenstein the movement back to the rough ground appears to mark a break with speculative thought, in the later Whitehead it clearly signals a renewal of the *project* of such thought. In particular, phenomena of communication or

expression are especially relevant here. They need to be recovered in their full force and deeper implications, if speculative thought is to be recovered. In *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead is rather explicit about this. Plato's Receptacle is, upon his interpretation, "the doctrine of the immanence of Law, derived from the mutual immanence of actualities." Whitehead immediately adds: "It is Plato's doctrine of the medium of intercommunication" (AI 134). He continues, "The modern cosmologies are all detailed variations of the great types [originally formulated in the classical epoch]. ... They revolve round the diverse notions of Law, the diverse notions of the communication between [or among] individuals, and the diverse notions of the mediating basis in virtue of which such communication is attained" (135).

The notions of communication here are already speculative ones, but they are, as such, derived from the primordial experience of communicative agents. Such experience occurs not only between agents but also relates to whatever they encounter in experience (including what they encounter *as* factors caught up in processes of intercommunication [cf. James]—e.g., the bird fleeing at the likely sound of a predator). Our experience of things is that they communicate their presence and import to us, though not necessarily in a clearly audible or immediately intelligible manner.

The history of cosmological speculation serves the cause of speculative thought, not least of all by making available to us in explicit form the pivotal conceptions around which such theoretical adventures inevitably revolve. But the derivative status of these pivotal notions also comes into sharp focus by means of historical narrative, for any searching account of these influential conceptions must encompass their derivation from not only antecedent conceptualizations within this or that specialized discourse, but also from the primordial experience of situated actors implicated in shared practices and, therein, entangled in historical affairs.⁷ In any event, methodological self-consciousness, as exemplified by Whitehead, encompasses historical self-consciousness.

Of all the innumerable topics on which we might focus in our efforts to assemble the requisite materials for a cosmology rooted in well placed concreteness, those systematically denied or disfigured by the dominant habits of philosophical thought to the demonstrable disadvantage of those entombed in these intellectual habits are the ones that we most need to evoke. The force of their evocations needs to resound in our discourses about the cosmos and our status in the universe. The extent to which the philosopher (like the poet) is primarily responding—often simply by way of acknowledgment—to the call of the world,⁸ the specific ways in which some of the more salient features of the experiential world call for recognition needs as much as anything else to be highlighted here. The acute sensitivity of the poet, nowhere more observable than in the radical receptivity of the poetic temperament to the call of the world as much as to the sounds of language (cf. Ponge), has a counterpart in

the nuanced receptivity of the speculative philosopher, at least in the Whiteheadian sense.

The renewal of speculative thought confronts anyone committed to this project with both questions regarding the “materials” to be assembled and ones regarding the *form* in which these materials are to be articulated. The work of systematic articulation cannot, however, be separated from that of philosophical assemblage, just as the work of such assemblage is inherently (thus, inescapably) critical. Such articulation gathers within itself the energies of assemblage and proves its value by formulating, as integral parts of its systematic elaboration, descriptive generalizations having nothing less than evocative power (the power to call our attention to otherwise overlooked dimensions of our world). In brief, systematic elaboration is a continuation of philosophical assemblage: it fails to attain *its* objective if it fails to bring before us the experiential world in a more luminous light than rival schemes can do. In addition, the assemblage of materials is of a piece with the critic of abstractions (such assemblage being integral to such critique): it is, indeed, arguably the principal means by which specific examples of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness are exposed as such. The dialectic of phenomenological assemblage and systematic articulation is, accordingly, a defining feature of speculative philosophy in the Whiteheadian sense. Hence, it deserves additional attention.

“System is,” Whitehead insists, “*important*. It is necessary for the handling, for the utilization, and for the criticism of the thoughts that throng our experience” (MT 2; emphasis added).⁹ Speculative thought must assume systematic *form*. That is, it requires an intricately detailed and coherently elaborated form. The very importance of intelligibility, as disclosed in the various modes of human experience,¹⁰ drives toward systematic expression of a self-expansive character, this *drive toward such expression* being possibly revelatory (or disclosive) of what reality, at bottom, *is*.¹¹ In assuming systematic form, speculative thought is able to discharge its critical function.¹² Whatever its kinship to poetry, such thought must go beyond intimation and allusion.

Whitehead is, however, equally insistent that, “before the work of systematization commences, there is a *previous task*—a very necessary task if we are to avoid the narrowness inherent in all finite systems” (MT 2; emphasis added)—i.e., in all historical realizations of the speculative impulse, including Whitehead’s own monumental achievement. He identifies this task as *assemblage*. Assemblage is primary, systematization derivative and, hence, in a sense, secondary.¹³ Indeed, we seem warranted in claiming that the *importance* of assemblage is primary, that of system derivative and secondary. But the primary stage of systematic philosophy is one to which philosophical inquirers must return, time and again: it is “unending.” All that can ever be achieved in our experiments in assemblage is “emphasis on a few large-scale notions, etc.” (MT 2). Such emphasis amounts to nothing less than the identification of what is important for *any* philosopher to take into account. This

task is a historically situated and (to no slight degree) motivated undertaking, for everything needs to be taken into account.¹⁴ What most needs to be taken into account is, accordingly, what has been unduly overlooked or stressed by the dominant currents of contemporary thought, especially as these bear the debilitating influence of past thought. Being alive *in* the present practically means being alive *to* the present, especially to its inevitably inchoate and largely unacknowledged impulses.

The example of William James is, consequently, worthy of being recalled here. For, he is Whitehead's own exemplar of a philosopher attuned to what is historically (but not merely contemporaneously) important. The *importance* of James for Whitehead is as much as anything else James's keen sense of importance for the systematic articulation of that sense. While James's mind was, in Whitehead's judgment, "adequately based on the learning of the past," Whitehead stresses, "the essence of his greatness was his marvelous sensitivity *to* the ideas of the present" (MT 3; emphasis added). The example of James here is very pertinent since, in Whitehead's judgment, James "systematized; but *above all* he assembled" (emphasis added). Indeed, a deep and abiding suspicion animated the work of James, including his own recurrent efforts to cast his painstaking assemblages into systematic form. Whitehead captures this when he notes, James's "intellectual life was one [protracted] protest against the dismissal [or disfiguration] of experience in *the interest of system*" (ibid.; emphasis added). The interest of system is legitimate and indeed inescapable, especially when it is strenuously denounced, but it is, in the end, subordinate to other intellectual interests, especially when such interests are explicitly identified and (insofar as this is possible) harmoniously integrated in an ongoing effort to civilize experience. Even the most sensitive, multifaceted attempts to civilize human experience can themselves never escape degenerating into a debilitating inheritance.

The James to whom Whitehead was so strongly drawn is a thinker whom Whitehead in his later thought both follows and somewhat betrays. On the one hand, Whitehead turns back, with the cultivated naiveté (Dewey 1937/1987, 1) of the trained artist, to the phenomenological bases of his elaborately detailed formulations but, on the other, his drive toward system and precision marks a break with James.

For, in this phase of his development, we can hear Whitehead's evocation of not only the primordial experiences in which our theoretical abstractions must be rooted, but also the *irreducibly vague* background against which all precise claims assume their arresting forms and fulfill their defining functions. But, we also see Whitehead drawing back to some degree from the implications of his own thought. He nonetheless offers, at the very least, suggestions worthy of being carried farther than he does.

While Whitehead in *Adventures of Ideas* calls our attention to phenomena of communication, he, in *Modes of Thought*, focuses on expression. Expression provides, in my judgment, a better basis for a heuristically fruitful

descriptive generalization (PR 10; cf. Kann), though the two sets of phenomena are not ultimately separable.

If we begin to develop the implications of Whitehead's assertions about expression, we are prompted to acknowledge that we are not the only expressive beings in the universe. Whether or not we are the only consciously communicative beings, we are certainly *not* the only diffusely and intelligibly expressive ones.¹⁵ Expression does not necessarily trace its origin to the higher forms of conscious mentality, as do obviously certain forms of responsible utterance or conscientious communication. It is better approached, if only initially, in terms of functionality as opposed to intentionality: Whatever fulfills the function of expression *is* expressive, regardless of whether or not it is describable in terms of what are ordinarily taken to be *intentional* predicates. Indeed, expression is so pervasive and manifest, in such diverse contexts and myriad forms, that we seem justified in taking expression to be characteristic of nothing less than being (cf. John E. Smith). To be is *either* to possess the capacity to press outward, at the very least leaving some discernible or intelligible trace of having been (for however brief a duration), *or* actually to press outward in such a way is to make a difference of largely indeterminable significance, at least in the immediate present. In brief, being is bound up with expression, so much so that expression, at least in an informal sense, constitutes nothing less than a category.

To the charge that such a claim is anthropomorphic, I am disposed to respond by insisting that all reflection attempting to go beyond the commonplace must inevitably be metaphorical in form. In addition, I am inclined to insist nothing *a priori* or nothing in the nature of such reflection precludes the power or appropriateness of metaphors drawn from the sphere of human activity or experience. Indeed, even reflection that is simply committed to doing justice to the commonplace—that is, aiming at enabling us to see what stares us in the face (cf. Wittgenstein)—must have recourse to metaphor.¹⁶

Expression presupposes importance (MT 20). Moreover, importance is intertwined with actuality or what might be more aptly called factuality. An unprejudiced account of the empirical world demands recognition of matters of importance no less than matters of fact. In our very assemblage of the matters to be integrated into a system, some of the more salient connections between matters of importance and those of fact are already part of our description. While the identification of what is meant by a matter of fact or, more simply, a fact cannot take the form of a definition (cf. MT 6-8), such identification must, in a single stroke, *mark off* from all other basic notions (or phenomena) this one and *gather together* this one with that from which it is primarily differentiated. Thus, the identification of what is meant by a matter of fact entails a differentiation from a matter of importance wherein the intimate connection—arguably the underlying equivalence—of importance and factuality is brought into sharpest focus. Matters of fact *are*, at bottom, matters of importance, though in certain phases of cultural development the equivalence

becomes not only obscured but also denied—denied in such a way that the one is taken to exist in isolation from the other. The tyrannical reign of factuality has unleashed ruthless assaults on importance, assaults cumulatively resulting in the trivialization of the very category (or notion) of importance. Importance has paradoxically ceased to be important. Factuality devoid of significance is alone, from the perspective being considered, judged to be significant. Here as elsewhere, any mode of thought unable to accord a place for what it instantiates or exemplifies is fatally flawed in that it is categorically neglectful (as a scheme of categories it leaves out of account what it itself exemplifies).

In presupposing the basic notion of importance, a highly generalized conception of expression also presupposes the dialectical interplay between matters of importance and those of fact. At an even more basic methodological level, the phenomenological task of assemblage and identification is, in Whitehead's project, a prolegomena to the inescapable task of systematic expression. Too many expositions of Whitehead, however, obscure the methodological or heuristic lessons to be learned from his example, perhaps even more than his explicit methodological pronouncements or his precisely formulated technical conclusions. Hence, my aim here has been to exhibit more fully than is typically done Whitehead's exemplarity, especially in reference to the work of philosophy, as one that is adequately envisioned and properly animated.

There is nothing idiosyncratic in this endeavor, for it drives in the direction of highlighting some of the most basic emphases in Whitehead's carefully articulated undertakings, not least of all his arresting characterization of philosophical discourse as a critique of abstractions. Whitehead never denies the value and indeed indispensability of abstraction, though the inherent dangers of this ineluctable drive (the drive to frame abstractions but also to elaborate more or less abstractly their implications and intersections) are always near the very center of his concern. The attainment or recovery of concreteness is always the result of a critique—a critique of abstractions. The philosophical critique of abstractions encompasses a metaphysical critique of those abstractions on which the theoretical imagination has fixated, elevating them to the status of nothing less than the paradigms of concreteness. Philosophy cannot help but be the critique of abstractions (though it might be more than such a critique). In order to carry out this critique in a conscientious, thoroughgoing, and systematic manner, this critique must extend to those designata that especially the most influential philosophers have identified as the exemplars of concreteness.

What presses outward toward whatever envelopes it, in such a way as to call forth a series of responses, is, in effect, an affirmation of importance. Whether or not it is an instance of self-enjoyment, it is quite plausibly an assertion of self-importance or, at least, an exercise of self-insistence. The importance of any finite actuality in its apparent insularity is, however, negli-

ble. But, the importance of the isolated unit is, in most (if not all) respects, illusory. The expanding range of possible expressions is, however, anything but illusory. It is indicative of the emerging possibilities of creative intelligence, thus expressive creativity. The growth of these possibilities is itself indicative of a more rudimentary and pervasive tendency in a truly creative cosmos (one in which disruptive novelty and irrepressible creativity are among its defining features. For Whitehead, at least, the monism of importance needs to be squared with the pluralism of expression.

3. Conclusion: Creative Intelligence and Expressive Creativity

As I just noted, expression presupposes importance. In turn, intelligence and the work of understanding presuppose the *growth of expression* into reflexive and recursive as well as ever more expansive and encompassing forms. Among other things, this means an explicit and detailed account of expression itself (such as we find in Whitehead's writings). That is, intelligence is more or less bound to provide such an account. Given the growth and, hence, transformations of intelligence—inseparably connected to this, and given the emergence and consolidation of novel forms of expression, human and otherwise—we are also bound continually to revise this account. For Whitehead, at least, intelligence becomes in the case of humans “the organ of reaction to novel situations” and also “the organ introducing the requisite novelty of reaction” (MT 25).

Intelligence might be conceived as the offspring of importance and expression, grown to a degree of maturity beyond anything previously attained. So conceived, intelligence is to be measured not so much in terms of the consolidation (far less the systematization or formalization) of its actual achievements as by its drive toward as yet unarticulated possibilities.¹⁷

The theoretical deployment of intelligence is no less adapted for adventure than the practical use of this capacity. Each form of intelligence is, at bottom, nothing less than a capacity to respond to the call of a dramatic situation in which human ingenuity might make a decisive difference—if only by assembling a series of reminders (cf. Wittgenstein 1953, #127) by whose light we might inhabit the earth less violently and engage each other more humanely (cf. AI). The dramatic situation into which theoretical reason is thrown, time and again, frequently concerns the pressing need to give eloquent voice to the dumb certainties of everyday life, in opposition to the brilliant feats of explaining *away* such certainties by one or another influential tradition or thinker. While the consciousness of the drama into which theoretical reason is ineluctably thrown depends upon a historical narrative (or narrative understanding) of our actual situation, the response to this situation involves, more often than not, attending with artistic sensitivity to the pervasive features of our experiential world (it is, in other words, closer to lyrical consciousness

than narrative understanding). The renewal of speculative thought is rooted in the certainties of primordial experience, while such experience flows from the diverse forms of our situated agency. The systematic articulation of such certainties proves its worth above all by fulfilling the evocative function of poetic utterance or something intimately akin to such utterance (cf. Colapietro 2004). This function is inextricably linked to attuning us more finely and fully to the world, above all else, as an arena of action. But *action* here should not be taken in any narrow sense. Indeed, it encompasses those modes of comportment responsive to experiences of awe, wonder, or reverence as much as those “practical” exertions to transform the physical world.

As much as anything else, this function attunes us to the intimations of intelligibility gracing the surface no less than inscribed within the depths of nature, as the natural world is disclosed in and through the experience of living beings (especially reflexively and articulately intelligent ones). These intimations suggest meaning is more pervasive and primordial than its conscious apprehension by our linguistic consciousness. “The meaning of life is,” Whitehead suggested, “in doubt” (MT 148). Of even greater importance, the life of meaning is in danger. Is it possible to clarify the meaning of life without at the same time affirming the life of meaning, the adventure of ideas? In turn, is it possible to affirm the life of meaning without granting a central place to expressive drives precisely as basic notions? Along with Peirce, James, Dewey, Langer and others in his adopted country, Whitehead imagined that the clarification of the one (the meaning of life) required an affirmation of the other (the life of meaning). Moreover, Whitehead along with such allied thinkers located this life, more than anywhere else, in the ongoing exchanges of intersecting agencies. That is, exchanges destined to reconfigure the fields of expression in which such agencies encounter, challenge, undermine, sustain, and facilitate one another. The life of meaning is, in short, nowhere more vibrantly present than in the interplay of expression. Whatever else they are, what we encounter in experience are media of expression, not least of all self-expression.¹⁸ Finally, the adventure of ideas is as much a re-discovery of the commonplace as it is a venture into the utterly unknown. A. N. Whitehead’s later thought, especially as put forth in *Modes of Thought*, discloses nothing less than this. It is not merely a summation of prior achievements, but truly a renewal of speculative thought in an evocative form, one emphatically conceived by him to be akin to poetic utterance.

NOTES

1. In a lecture delivered in 1935 to graduate students at Harvard and Radcliffe, later included as the Epilogue to *Modes of Thought*, Whitehead recalled: The assemblage of William James, Josiah Royce, George Santayana, and George Herbert Palmer “is a group of men individually great. But as a group they are greater still. It is a group of adventure, of speculation, of search for new ideas. To be a

philosopher is to make some humble approach to the main characteristics of this group of men” (MT 174). As boldly speculative as each one of these philosophers, he was also humble before the disclosures of reality in and through experience.

2. In “The Nonspeculative Basis of Metaphysics,” Edward Pols argues: “Theory especially scientific theory is of immense importance in human affairs: there are, after all, so many things that we can know only indirectly. But if it should be the case, as I think it is, that all indirect knowledge whether philosophic or scientific is both based upon and enframed by direct knowledge, then it must surely be the philosopher’s chief function to work towards deepening our direct knowledge.” I however take the task of assemblage to aim at just this. It is, moreover, one thing to identify as “philosophy’s chief task” the deepening of our awareness of basic notions and the primordial experiences in which they are root, quite another to take this to be philosophy’s *sole* task.
3. “Whatever is found in ‘practice’ must lie,” Whitehead insists, “within the scope of the metaphysical description. When the description fails to include the ‘practice,’ the metaphysics is inadequate and requires revisions. There can be no appeal to practice to supplement metaphysics, so long as we remain content with our metaphysical doctrines. Metaphysics is nothing but the description of the generalities which apply to all the details of practice” (PR 13). Later in this opening chapter to what is his most monumental achievement, he writes of philosophy: “Its ultimate appeal is to the general consciousness of what in practice we experience. Whatever thread of presupposition characterizes social expression throughout the various epochs of rational society must find its place in philosophic theory” (PR 17).
4. This certainly might seem odd to suggest, since the opening chapter of PR is so detailed and developed in comparison to the more or less scattered methodological pronouncements to be gathered from MT. Indeed, these pronouncements *are* far less developed and integrated than those encountered in PR. Even so, the indispensable work of philosophical assemblage is accorded in MT a much more prominent place than it is in earlier works.
5. In *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead calls attention to the efforts of the Romantic poet William Wordsworth to evoke a sense of the world at odds with the emerging consensus among influential thinkers in his own time: Wordsworth “alleges against science its absorption in abstractions. His consistent theme is that important facts of nature elude the scientific method. It is important therefore to ask, what Wordsworth found in nature that failed to receive expression in science.” Whitehead is quite explicit about his motive for pressing this question: “I ask this ... in the interest of science itself.” Indeed, he is concerned to issue in this work “a protest against the idea that the abstractions of science are irreformable and unalterable” (SMW 83). Even so, the voice of poetry deeply informs this protest, for the protest of such poets as Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley animates and directs Whitehead’s conception of philosophy as a critique of abstractions (see, e.g., SMW 18, 87, 142). Even if he contends that scientific intelligence is not inherently condemned to commit the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, his own efforts to reform and alter the dominant form of scientific ideology (“scientific materialism” [SMW 17]) owed much to the impassioned

protests of the Romantic poets against science as such. As a critique of abstractions, philosophy “completes” them by directly comparing them “with more concrete intuitions of the universe, and thereby promoting the formation of more complete schemes of thought” (SMW 87). In this task, the philosophy is aided by the poet (for “the testimony of great poets is [here] of great importance”). The testimony of the poets expresses (to use Whitehead’s own word) “deep intuitions of mankind penetrating into what is universal in concrete fact” (SMW 87). This is nowhere more important than in evoking a sense of the whole in which we are enveloped, by which we are sustained, though about which our thought and expression must always be in great measure vague and indirect. Wordsworth in particular expressed, in Whitehead’s judgment, a sense of nature as being the field of enduring permanences carrying within themselves a message of tremendous significance” (SMW 87). For this philosopher, this poet “dwells on that mysterious presence of surrounding things, which imposes itself on any separate element that we set up as an individual for its own sake.” That is, Wordsworth for Whitehead “always grasps the whole of nature as involved in the tonality of the particular instance” (SMW 83).

6. In philosophy no less than in poetry, “there is reference to form beyond the direct meanings of words” (MT 174). The function of such reference is, however, to evoke “direct insight into depths as yet unspoken” or unexpressed. Near the conclusion of the last chapter (or lecture) of MT, as distinct from its Epilogue, Whitehead asserts: In these lectures I have not entered upon systematic metaphysical cosmology. The object of the lectures is to indicate [to point out] those elements in our experience in terms of which such a cosmology should be constructed” (MT 168). That is, the entire work might be read primarily as a contribution to philosophical assemblage and (if I am correct) to the phenomenological evocation so central to (indeed, constitutive of) philosophical assemblage.
7. In *How Philosophy Uses Its Past*, John Herman Randall, Jr., offers important insights regarding these matters, insights both supporting and completing those of Whitehead. For example, he contends, “metaphysical criticism” is “that fundamental kind of criticism which appeals from some intellectual formulation to experience as actually lived or enjoyed [or *had*] ‘directly’ or ‘immediately.’ In such metaphysical criticism, the philosopher criticizes some formulated scheme of understanding, some ‘abstraction’ from the encountered world, some distinction that has grown into a ‘dualism,’ by appealing to a fuller and richer ‘experience’ to the world actually encountered in all the varied ways in which men [and women] do encounter it in their various human enterprises” (Randall 1963, 37–38). Randall stresses that, “the appeal to ‘experience’ is never the first step in philosophizing. In any concrete enterprise of experience, the concept of ‘experience’ is not the starting point, not a ‘datum,’ but an instrument of criticism” (Ibid. 42). The starting point is rather “some codified experience of nature already won, some understanding already achieved of nature.” In the process of making this critical appeal to experience, theorists “acquire an enlarged and deepened conception of experience itself” (Ibid. 43).
8. Whether or not the call of the world is best interpreted as a *provocation*, as Whitehead suggests in *Adventures of Ideas*, is, however, another question. My own inclination is to argue that the language of provocation is more misleading than il

luminating in evoking what is involved here. Indeed, my preference is for the language of evocation, rather than that of provocation.

9. The *importance* of system is an example of what Whitehead is exploring in the opening chapter of *Modes of Thought*. But the importance of systematic expression is itself rooted in a more or less dumb (or inarticulate) sense of importance, thus a guiding sense of salience and relevance.
10. “The chequered history of religion and morality is the main reason for the wide spread desire to put them aside in favour of the more stable generalities of science. Unfortunately for this smug endeavor to view the universe as the incarnation of the commonplace, the impact of aesthetic, religious and moral notions is inescapable. They are the disrupting and the energizing forces of civilization. They force mankind upwards and downwards” (MT 19; cf. PR).
11. Throughout this paper, I will be connecting the ultimate notion of importance to the equally basic notion of expression. This is simply an initial instance of this deliberate emphasis.
12. “Systematization is the criticism of generality, etc.” (MT 3).
13. “Philosophy can exclude nothing. Thus it should never start from systematization. Its primary stage can be termed *assemblage*” (MT 2).
14. “Philosophy can exclude nothing” (MT 2). But, this makes selection and emphasis themselves all the more important (see, e.g., MT 18 19).
15. “Expression is the diffusion, in the environment, of something initially entertained in the experience of the expressor. No conscious discrimination is necessarily involved; only the impulse to diffuse. The impulse is one of the simplest characteristics of animal nature. It is the most fundamental evidence of our presupposition of the world without” (MT 21).
16. In the opening chapter of *Modes of Thought*, the one devoted to “Importance,” Whitehead calls attention to “a permanent difficulty of philosophic discussion” “namely, that words must be stretched beyond their common meanings in the marketplace” (MT 12; cf. PR).
17. The “final unity of animal intelligence,” allegedly exemplified in human beings, is “the organ of reaction to novel situations, and is the organ introducing the requisite novelty of reaction” (MT 25).
18. Perhaps Whitehead’s pansychism might be altered, with the emphasis falling on self expression rather than self enjoyment. Such a metaphor might be more apt than the one on which he and his most loyal disciples insist.