



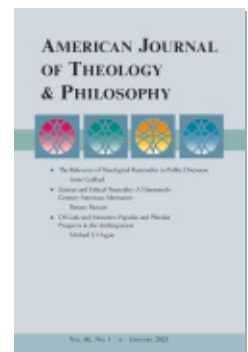
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*The Harvard Lectures of Alfred North Whitehead, 1925–1927:
General Metaphysical Problems of Science* ed. by Brian G.
Henning, Joseph Petek, and George Lucas (review)

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setbacks in expanding freedom, justice, and electoral participation for former slaves, the Higher Law Ethos remained, “submerged under new intellectual and political movements” (259). Transcendentalists helped lay the groundwork for radically different engagements with the world, creating new theories and methods in science and philosophy, inspiring the environmentalist movement, fueling the opposition to the violence of capitalism and imperialism, encouraging the wider acceptance of social pluralism, and emboldening civil rights activists of the late twentieth century. Much of these developments took shape because of those who brooked no compromise with slavery.

Some readers may inquire as to the continued presence of the Higher Law Ethos in American society. How should we distinguish it from popular reactionary uprisings that use similar higher law rhetoric? Systems of dependency and discrimination have continued in American history. Those who experience alienation, marginality, terror, violence, exploitation, and cultural otherness as daily occurrences seem to be in accord with a Higher Law Ethos when they courageously and directly confront conditions that block the ascendancy of Reason. Wirzbicki’s book should encourage readers to consider ways in which citizens might revive a Higher Law Ethos.

The Harvard Lectures of Alfred North Whitehead, 1925–1927: General Metaphysical Problems of Science. Edited by Brian G. Henning, Joseph Petek, and George Lucas. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2021. lxii + 511 pp. \$210.00 hardcover; \$210.00 eBook. (Reviewed by William J. Meyer, Maryville College)

This tome adds a valuable contribution to the painstaking scholarly effort to reconstruct the development and totality of the works of Alfred North Whitehead. Carefully guided by the able editorial hands of George Lucas, Brian Henning, and Joseph Petek, Edinburgh University Press is engaged in a massive and invaluable enterprise to publish a critical edition of all of Whitehead’s writings: lectures, essays, letters, articles, and books. This present work is the second published volume of Whitehead’s lectures at Harvard. Whereas the initial set, published in 2017, addressed Whitehead’s first year (1924–1925), this book contains his lectures from the following two academic years (1925–1927).

To begin, one is awed by Whitehead’s prodigious work-ethic. First, his lectures for his annual yearlong Philosophy 3b course on Philosophy and Science were not merely an expository account of various problems and views, which is a worthy endeavor in its own right, but rather were his own ongoing constructive

effort to formulate and solve various philosophical problems underlying and related to the study of the natural sciences. Second, he lectured every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday at both Harvard and Radcliffe (where he generally gave the same version of his Harvard lecture) from October 1st to May 25th, including even the Saturday after Thanksgiving. In addition, he led graduate seminars on Friday afternoons (notes from some of these are included in the present volume) and hosted students at his home on Sunday evenings. During holiday breaks, summers, and occasionally during the academic term, he would also give guest lectures at various institutions across the country and beyond. Harvard certainly got its money's worth out of Alfred North Whitehead. Indeed, as Harvard President Abbott Lawrence Lowell commented in December 1926 when Whitehead's initial five-year appointment was quickly converted to permanent faculty status, "everybody appreciates that [Whitehead] has been an enormous benefit to the University, for he has been a great stimulus. We shall certainly want him for more than five years" (xxvi).

Whitehead's lectures are reconstructed based on multiple sets of notes from students and faculty attending his classes. In the initial volume (1924–1925), the reader benefitted from synoptically seeing and comparing three complete sets of notes (two from Harvard and one from Radcliffe) over the course of the entire academic year. But given the fact that this second volume covers two full academic years (1925–1927) and contains ten sets of partial or mostly complete notes (including some by Charles Hartshorne), the editors had to make a difficult and pragmatic decision, namely, to publish one set of notes for each lecture and to subsume the variant versions to the footnotes. As the editors themselves remark, "This second volume of Whitehead's Harvard lectures was a much more complex and challenging book to edit than the first . . . For some lectures we have as many as five different student accounts, and for others only one, or none at all" (xxv). Though one initially misses the benefit of the synoptic approach, one soon adjusts and makes extensive use of the detailed footnotes for comparison, clarification, and elucidation.

Substantively, one begins to see the more mature thought of Whitehead coming into full focus in these 1925–1927 lectures. Whereas the initial set (1924–1925) were perhaps a bit more transitional from his earlier work in England, here in this volume one begins to see the outlines and terminology of Whitehead's more developed metaphysics, such as his use of the term "concrecence" (207, 230) and his use of the phrase "eternal objects" (333). In fact, it was during the winter term of 1927 that he received and accepted the invitation to deliver the Gifford Lectures in 1928 at the University of Edinburgh, which would become *Process and Reality*. Nevertheless, one still discovers in these lectures some vivid and apt descriptions that Whitehead apparently did not

continue to use. For instance, he describes his approach as “organic empiricism” in contrast to the more isolated or freeze-frame tendencies of modern empiricism (e.g., Hume). Whereas Hume and much of modern empiricism sought to isolate particular experience from its larger context in the world as a whole, as if one can understand a part without understanding its relations to the larger environment, Whitehead’s “organic empiricism” insists that “all generality is compiled within the particularity of this real world . . . [A]ll knowledge is grounded in the evidence in the particular occasion” (8–9; 50–52, and 61). For Whitehead, each particular occasion includes within itself organic relations to the world as a whole. Thus, the abstract universals are implicitly embedded within the concrete particular. The concrete particular is not an isolated occasion—disconnected from others—as it is in Hume. As Whitehead puts it, “facts are not departmental. All your departments [are] in some relation” (87). Likewise, oriented by his organic empiricism, Whitehead characterizes his approach as a form of “new rationalism” or “reformed rationalism” in contrast to the mathematically oriented rationalism of Descartes and others (195, see also 183–85, 191, 205).

Related to these terminological phrases, one is struck in these lectures by Whitehead’s continual and insightful insistence on the fundamental importance of metaphysics for fully understanding any and all parts of experience. Whereas the predominant modern assumption is that one can fully address and understand different philosophical subjects (epistemology, ethics, logic) without regard for underlying metaphysical questions, Whitehead incisively argues to the contrary. For example, in his seminar on logic in spring 1927, Whitehead states: “Logic can’t be treated apart from metaphysics” (371). For, in order

[t]o deal with the job of logic properly, [one] must take some general view of universe and show how what you call a proposition, what it is.

If you don’t go into metaphysics, you assume an uncritical metaphysics . . . Every scientific man in order to preserve his reputation has to say he dislikes metaphysics. What he means is he dislikes having his metaphysics criticized.

. . . Metaphysics ought not to be neglected [just] because can’t find agreement. Must ask how do these first principles fit into the universe. How, the universe being what it is, are you able to explain there are such things as propositions? If [you] don’t do that, so much reasoning presupposes crude Cartesian metaphysics. Mental world, physical world. Some say if assume know physical world, needn’t assume mind. Nor for minds on their side need you assume matter. Crude metaphysics (bifurcation). Comes from not really putting minds up to metaphysics (375).

In contrast, Whitehead explains how “a proposition is a complex unity. One entity analyzable into many component elements.” Indeed, “your actual entity is an organism which builds itself up” out of the many (375).

Overall, one might say that the thrust of Whitehead’s criticism of Western thought is that it has wrongly assumed that reality at its core is simple and self-contained, whether it be expressed in Euclid’s geometry (“A point is that of which there is no part”; 306) or Descartes’s notion of substance (“a substance is on its own—individuality has its own separate independence”; 201). Over the course of his lectures and seminars, Whitehead analyzes and critiques such notions in depth. For instance, Euclid’s notion

[e]xpresses idea you have got to look for a world in undifferentiated simplicity and space [is] made up of external relations of points . . .

This Euclidean sentence is deathblow to organic theory of nature if taken as fundamental to geometry—Nature must then seek simple entities in external relationships to each other . . .

Now we [instead] want to invert that whole point of view and say the foundation of the physical geometry has got to start with voluminous entity which is complex and made up of its relations to other voluminous entities (306, 307).

At root, Whitehead argues, influential thinkers such as Euclid and Descartes have confused an abstraction, such as a point or the notion of a substance, with the concrete actuality of the world, which is necessarily always integrative and complex. In short, they have committed “the fallacy of misplaced concreteness” (127). “When you talk about space,” Whitehead observes, “you have already made an abstraction about the relation. You’ve got rid of the concrete universe altogether . . . Our language has [wrongly] presupposed the [Euclidean] language of geometry. We look on the space as already there, and the real concrete fact coming in and occupying this abstraction! We think of the table as in the space, not of the space as in the table” (127).

This error of taking an abstraction to be the true nature of reality became ingrained in Western thinking and language, Whitehead suggests, in the “subject-predicate form of proposition” (201). Instead of viewing the “subject-predicate mode of speech” as a useful abstraction in the form of an elliptical “contraction” or shorthand, the subject-predicate proposition unfortunately came to be viewed as metaphysically true (203). It assumed that the subject is a singular and self-contained entity—qualified by an attribute, for example, *Socrates is mortal*. The “[a]ssumption that there’s a definite metaphysical fact underlying the ‘is’ is wrong. Solidarity of the universe requires that every proposition should include some form of reference or other to the general background constituted by every other element in the universe. Can’t get away to atomic proposition

in which (there is) merely mortality and Socrates. Fact that if Socrates dies he must be buried should warn you there's something more" (202).

This something more points to the need for an organic metaphysics, a philosophy of organism as Whitehead will later call it in his Gifford Lectures. What such an organic conception requires is that one recognize and affirm individuality—not in self-contained isolation—but, rather, in relation to and solidarity with the rest of the universe. "Must construe solidarity of universe in sense which makes it consistent with individual independence of each real entity. If you forget there's a multiplicity of real entities and at same time a solidarity, which is what you mean by real world, [you] fall into a trap" (204). At one point in his lectures, Whitehead even proposes that Isaac Newton, at his best, glimpses "this organic view of nature." For example, Newton's Third Law properly construed ("to every action there is always an equal and opposite reaction; or the universal actions of any two bodies are always equal and oppositely directed") is dealing with "forces," even though he does not explicitly use that term. What is implied here, Whitehead offers, is "even a greater principle that of reciprocal influence. Two actual entities must be considered as being part of a greater organism" (412).

It is such nuggets of insight and engaging reflection that are scattered throughout these two years of lecture notes. This volume is undoubtedly a valuable resource for any serious student or scholar of Whitehead, and a must for any library collection devoted to philosophy and science. In sum, one cannot overstate the significant contribution of Edinburgh University Press in undertaking this substantial Whitehead project; for it is creating a critical mass and synergy among Whitehead's works that will, one hopes, generate an abundant flowering of Whitehead scholarship in the twenty-first century—a century desperately in need of intellectual moorings amidst vast change, disruption, and turbulence.

Affect and Attention After Deleuze and Whitehead: Ecological Attunement. Russell J. Duvernoy. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020. 228 pp. \$110.00 hardcover; paperback \$24.95. (Reviewed by Keith Robinson, University of Arkansas at Little Rock)

Russell Duvernoy's new book *Affect and Attention After Deleuze and Whitehead: Ecological Attunement* can be seen as a further contribution to the growing body of work that articulates some of the central ideas and authors in continental philosophy with key concepts and thinkers from the process tradition. Published in the *New Perspectives in Ontology* series with Edinburgh University