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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AI: Whitehead, Alfred North. [1933] 1967. *Adventures of Ideas*. New York: The Free Press.
- CN: Whitehead, Alfred North. [1920] 1995. *The Concept of Nature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ESP: Whitehead, Alfred North. 1948. *Essays in Science and Philosophy*. New York: Philosophical Library.
- FR: Whitehead, Alfred North. [1929] 1958. *The Function of Reason*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- MT: Whitehead, Alfred North. [1938] 1968. *Modes of Thought*. New York: The Free Press.
- PR: Whitehead, Alfred North. [1929] 1978. *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*. Corrected edition. Ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne. New York: The Free Press.
- RM: Whitehead, Alfred North. [1926] 1996. *Religion in the Making*. New York: Meridian Books.
- S: Whitehead, Alfred North. [1927] 1985. *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect*. New York: Macmillan.
- SMW: Whitehead, Alfred North. [1925] 1967. *Science and the Modern World*. New York: The Free Press.

INTRODUCTION

BRIANNE DONALDSON

Our minds are finite, and yet even in these circumstances of finitude we are surrounded by possibilities that are infinite.

— Alfred North Whitehead

It is now widespread to find anthropocentrism—the view that human beings are the center of the natural world—criticized. In fact, systemic environmental destruction, as well as the contemporary use and abuse of animals, seems to require that it be criticized. But once anthropocentrism is critiqued—ontologically, theoretically, or as a cultural construction—how do we continue to think and act among our planetary multiplicity?

Alfred North Whitehead’s process-relational philosophy describes the fundamental components of this multitude as “actual occasions.” These creative and responsive processes—or events—were, for Whitehead, the “final real things of which the world is made up” (PR 23). Actual occasions are characterized by becoming rather than being, feeling rather than rational thought, creativity rather than determinism, and interrelation rather than atomistic individuality. In this way, Whitehead resisted the classical bifurcations that allowed the split of mind and matter, nature and culture, human and animal, animal and plant, bodies and ideas. He sought a common world in which to approach all things in existence.

Whitehead first developed his notion of bifurcation in his early philosophical text *The Concept of Nature* ([1920] 1995), and he carried it throughout his subsequent work addressing various oppositional splits such as perceiver/perceived, God/world, and actuality/potentiality, among many others. The authors in this volume identify many crucial bifurcations, drawing inspiration from Whitehead’s work, but also pulling from other philosophical, cultural, and experiential sources. The volume itself represents an attempt to overcome a number of detrimental bifurcations.

Primarily, the essays examine the violent ruptures separating humans, animals, plants, and environment. Yet, the investigation is anything but a detached academic analysis. In meaningful ways, each author is deeply invested in mending the bifurcation between theory and practice, and between academic reflection and action in the world. These essays are not only meant to help us think differently about our creaturely entanglements, but also to provoke imaginative re/forms of personal and political action, fresh arrangements of contrast and beauty, and more risky experiments in ethical responsiveness.

Additionally, the authors here engage with many traditions and disciplines. Several authors resist any clean bifurcation of science and religion as well as the split between secular philosophy and religious insight, moving beyond straw-man arguments of reason versus faith to offer deeply empirical engagements with religious naturalism, non-theistic frameworks of relationality, immanent concepts of transcendence, as well as shamanistic, ecofeminist, and ecotheology practices of embodied exposure and co-creativity with animals, plants, and habitats.

Further, authors dissolve the bifurcation of the rational west from the mystic east through critical engagement with several Indic traditions, especially Jainism and Advaita Vedānta, in addition to the Chinese worldviews of Daoism and Confucianism. Finally, the breach between philosophical structure and experiential art is held together by several authors who examine the role of art and aesthetics in shaping past and current attitudes towards “nature,” while articulating the potential of visual art, performing art, art theory, architecture, and poetics for informing radically alternate futures.

This volume resists one additional bifurcation: the gap between teachers and students. Each essay in this collection is paired with another, and a graduate student and/or scholar-activist offers a short synthesis of the two essays, highlighting themes, productive dissonances, and adding their own evaluative twist to the pairing. Beyond their astute analyses, these respondents also contributed the titles for each of the six parts of this volume, which aids in grouping the essay pairings and synthesis-responses into six bifurcations: (1) metaphysics and morality, (2) beauty and judgment, (3) responsibility and transcendence, (4) conflict and imagination, (5) unity and divergence, and (6) solution and dissolution. The order of these six parts is flexible and I hope readers will roam freely between them. The synthesis-responses provide tempting and informative snapshots of the longer essays. Those who are new to Whitehead’s process worldview may

want to start at the end where Luke Higgins offers one of the clearest introductions to process thought—and its context in the history of western science, religion, and philosophy—that I have encountered and which may prove useful for reading the other essays.

In Part I: *Metaphysics and Morality*, Daniel Dombrowski and Rebekah Sinclair examine the role of hierarchy from very different perspectives. Dombrowski provides a reverse approach to environmental ethics that takes the moral patiency status of nonhuman animals and organisms as its starting point. He articulates a Whiteheadian-inspired pragmatic hierarchy-with-continuity that demands greater reflection and consistency in order to negate socially-conditioned forms of gratuitous violence. Rebekah Sinclair rejects all stabilized hierarchies, drawing upon poststructural interlocutors such as Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, and Gayatri Spivak who inform her reading and critique of Whitehead, enabling her to articulate the need for multiple changing hierarchies that do not depend on the categories of species distinctions. Clinton Combs zeroes in on each author's different definition of "individual" and "species," suggesting points for clarification, and helpfully brings in Lynn Margulis's topsy-turvy account of bacterial evolution to further problematize taxonomical hierarchies.

In Part II: *Beauty and Judgment*, Sandra Lubarsky and Meijun Fan explore the role of beauty as an ethical perspective rooted in deep attentiveness to the inviolable creativity of ecological individuals and environmental systems. Lubarsky examines Whitehead's claim that the universe aims at the production of beauty, alongside Leopold's conservation ethic. From there, she quickly dispenses with sustainability paradigms that aim merely to "sustain" first-world standards or to sustain the split between scientific fact and aesthetic value, by crafting a vision of sustainability that pursues well-being in the forms of vitality, freedom, and intensity for wider communities of life. Fan offers a comprehensive analysis of the classical Chinese view of plants and its relevance for cultivating ecologically sensitive societies. Fan's explanation of key Chinese terms and texts enlivens an alternative cultural perspective regarding the intrinsic value and beauty of all entities who pursue their own aims and ends. Brian Orser neatly distills several distinct perspectives on beauty within each author's work, and focuses on two particular forms, namely "beauty-ugly," meaning the fluctuations of aversion/attraction based on subjective assessment, and "beauty-as-wholeness," meaning a tranquil appreciation of beauty as an entity's development in relation to its own path and potential.

In Part III: Responsibility and Transcendence, Brian Henning and Brianne Donaldson differently attempt to undermine frameworks of domination and violence. Henning contrasts the prescriptive hierarchy of Aristotle's "great chain of being" with the more nuanced descriptive hierarchies of Whitehead and ecofeminist author Karen J. Warren in order to defend crucial differences of degree among life forms while also undermining any normative logic of domination. Donaldson shows how both the process worldview and the Indic tradition of Jainism posit Ultimate perspectives such as immortality and omniscience respectively that function as immanent lures to be integrated within each entity's self-development toward wider modes of co-feeling, while minimizing obstructive violence and loss. Rob Overy-Brown highlights overlapping themes of welcome and responsibility in both authors' work, and brings in Emmanuel Levinas and Slavoj Žižek to propose a mediating "Third" that may be necessary to arbitrate between conflicting interests when ideals of responsibility fail.

In Part IV: Conflict and Imagination, Susan Armstrong and George Shields identify specific weaknesses in dominant ethical theories by positing more comprehensive commitments to the natural world. Like Henning, Armstrong leans on Whitehead and Warren to explore the value in certain hierarchical approaches, and she puts these authors into conversation with Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of species in order to affirm "species-neutral ethical judgments." Shields engages the work of environmental philosopher Clare Palmer alongside process theologian Charles Hartshorne to excavate process resources that extend inviolable rights-of-existence to the "nonhuman" community. Justin Heinzekehr concisely pinpoints each author's revolt against ethical irrelevance, while simultaneously asserting a strong case for relational value that must push beyond the adjudication of conflicting interests to imagine scenarios that transcend conflict.

In Part V: Unity and Divergence, Donald Crosby and Jeffery Long examine fundamental principles of creativity and multiplicity that support radical nonviolence within the planetary community. Crosby relies upon Whitehead's "creativity" as well as the Daoist concept of *ch'i* to articulate an empirically-grounded, non-theistic "Religion of Nature" that places humans squarely in their earth home without recourse to oppositional bifurcations that isolate our experience or action from Nature. Long focuses on crucial differences between Cartesian dualism and Indian dualisms. While the former has supported widescale degradation of the environment, the latter has supported extreme practices of nonharm toward creatures and

plants, especially in the Jain tradition. Long utilizes the concept of *māyā* in Advaita Vedānta to investigate whether Jainism, too, has a dynamic unifying principle that undergirds its productive dualisms and commitment to nonviolence. Sheri Kling highlights the oppositional tensions that are essential to each author's relational worldview—such as individual/multiplicity, freedom from/freedom for, unity/distinction, matter/energy—suggesting transdisciplinary and transcultural conversation partners who also emphasize resonant paradox.

In Part VI: Solution and Dissolution, Luke Higgins and Adam Wolpa press beyond paradigms of modernity and scientific knowledge toward deeper empirical-experiential practices. Higgins pulls from Whitehead, Bruno Latour, and Isabelle Stengers to move from stagnant abstractions to imaginative actions, crafting conceptual tools that enliven diverse disciplines such as biology, political science, and cultural theory. He envisions an ecotheology that is neither purely subjective nor supernatural, but rather connects empirical-religious practice with new relational expressions of adventurous scientific knowledge. Adam Wolpa examines representation of animals in visual culture, paying special attention to images that not only subordinate animals (as well as other people), but also place them in scenarios of humiliation, degradation, and socially-sanctioned brutality. Wolpa identifies several oppressive ideologies contributing to this phenomenon, and counters these strains with examples of visual artists whose work opens up lines of communications and fosters creative participation between artist, creatures, ecosystems and viewers, allowing for productive alienation from current knowledge regimes. Jon Ivan Gill responds with his own poetic contribution that interrupts straight theoretical analysis. He advocates an aesthetic approach to religious experience that destabilizes dominant claims to truth and helpfully elucidates both Higgins' and Wolpa's reference to the shaman/shawoman as a dissembling figure that reorganizes conditioned modes of thought and response within a dynamic planetary multiplicity.

In closing, I would like to mention that I began editing these essays during a time of considerable personal and professional uncertainty. I had recently resigned my first teaching position, had returned to India in a half-hearted attempt to do research and nurse my bruised expectations, and my existential proclivities—which are never too far from the surface—had enveloped me like a backyard swimming pool. In reading and re-reading these essays, I felt somehow buoyed by a balm of distant friendship, kept afloat by the increasing awareness that each of these authors was writing for

their life in a way—and for the life of others—and doing the difficult work of considering and reconsidering not only inherited assumptions, but even their own inclinations. I was reminded also that, in our time of buffet-style academics and social commentary—where students and the public regularly take only a haphazard bite of a text or idea before going on to the next dish—a close and attentive reading is an act of friendship and self-care that bears its own illuminating rewards.

When taken together, I believe this collection of essays uniquely emphasizes action *and* thought, indeterminacy *and* practical decision-making, difference *and* relationality, limits *and* boundlessness. It accepts a role for strategic anthropocentrism while also attempting to dismantle anthropocentrism altogether; it highlights the function of daily hierarchies, and simultaneously defends a wild proliferation of shifting hierarchies; it resists dualisms even as it integrates dualist concepts in dissonant collisions toward unforeseen relational futures.

We, like all creaturely entities, create our present moments between what has been, what is available, and the possibilities of what might be—between the real and ideal, the now and not yet, the practical and implausible. By enfolding these essays together, readers need not land on one perspective, but can creatively integrate these manifold insights in their own navigation between the individual and the multitude, between habit and experimentation, between the inevitable cost of existence and the persuasive invitation toward abundant co-flourishing with the elemental and creaturely life of plants, animals, organisms, systems, and neighbors which are strange refractions and homecomings of our very Self.

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