

# BEYOND METAPHYSICS?

Explorations in Alfred North  
Whitehead's Late Thought

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Amsterdam - New York, NY 2010

Cover Art: Kevin Scott Hailey, Diary of Lightness, ink on paper

Cover Design: Studio Pollmann

The paper on which this book is printed meets the requirements of “ISO 9706:1994, Information and documentation - Paper for documents - Requirements for permanence”.

ISBN: 978-90-420-3121-0

E-Book ISBN: 978-90-420-3122-7

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Printed in the Netherlands

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## Five

# IMMANENCE AND INCOMPLETENESS: WHITEHEAD'S LATE METAPHYSICS

Roland Faber

### 1. Introduction

In *Religion in the Making*, Whitehead sets the stage for an interesting paradox that runs through his whole philosophical work. On the one hand, he defines metaphysics as clearly and succinctly as possible, namely, as “the science which seeks to discover the general ideas which are indispensable to the analysis of everything that happens” (RM 84n1).<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, he warns us to *mistrust* metaphysics because of the “defect of a[ny] metaphysical system that is the very fact that it is a neat little system of thought, which thereby over-simplifies its expression of the world” (RM 50).<sup>2</sup> It is the explication of this *paradox* of metaphysics as its very “metaphysical” *situation* that will be the leading “idea” of my analysis of Whitehead's late thought. I think that his “late” thought could be defined as a series of ways to engage this paradox, which thereby *remains* a paradox that *cannot* be solved and reveals itself only as a *series* of deconstructions of metaphysical claims.

I do not believe that Whitehead ever gave up *metaphysical* claims or metaphysics as such, but that he was well aware of the fragility of any such claim and that for him the *status* of metaphysical claims are of as much importance as their *content*. However, he never *justifies* the claims through logic or linguistics (as analytic philosophy would proceed) but *deconstructs* their status as a paradoxical series of contrasts to the very point where they become the expressions of a *limit* where logic and language *dissolve*.<sup>3</sup>

Also, I don't believe that Whitehead invented this “method” only in his works after *Process and Reality*; on the contrary, if one looks closely enough, everything is already right there, sometimes right *under the surface* of the obvious agenda of the construction of a metaphysics as a “coherent, logical and necessary system” (PR 3).<sup>4</sup> However, against any claim that the works after *Process and Reality* are just recombinations and popularized versions of his “mature” work, or examples of a declining mind hanging on to main ideas by way of sweeping simplification, I would like to offer the thesis that these “late” works, between *Symbolism* and the last articles from 1941, are a *series of new attempts to articulate the main paradox of what Whitehead understood as metaphysics*.<sup>5</sup>

I tend to think that this is the true meaning of what, for Whitehead, lays *beyond* metaphysics, namely, that this “beyond” is precisely the articulation of its *paradoxical nature*: that we can *never* overcome metaphysical claims (in seeking the generality of ideas), but that we are, at the same time, *always* already *beyond* its “nature,” namely, to formulate the “general.”<sup>6</sup> In this sense, I understand Gilles Deleuze’s affinity to Whitehead not as a poststructuralist misinterpretation of Whitehead’s intention, but as a true fulfillment of the deeper status of his metaphysics as the *infinite adventure* of ideas (Deleuze 1994, 284-5).<sup>7</sup>

Hence, two of Deleuze’s comments on Whitehead will guide my own exploration of Whitehead’s “late” series of deconstructions of the status of metaphysical claims. Like Deleuze, I also think that Whitehead was a pluralist and empiricist in the peculiar sense that he defended the idea that “abstraction does not explain but must be explained” *and* that “the search is not for an eternal or universal, but for the conditions under which something new is created (*creativity*)” (Deleuze 2006, 304). Therefore, I share the conviction of Deleuze that Whitehead is *not* following a paradigm of “eternity,” that is, that the “best of all worlds is not the one that reproduces the eternal,” but that it is the one that allows for “the production of novelty” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 79).

With Deleuze, I think that Whitehead’s series of deconstructions of metaphysical claims is based on the exploration of novelty, creativity, and the incomprehensibility of experience in a way that is tantamount to a fundamental “conversion of philosophy” (Deleuze 1992, 79). I will further explore this suggestion in a series of four theses that increasingly will reveal the status of *all* metaphysical claims to be *essentially incomplete* in such a way that they can be understood only from a perspective of non-exceedable or unembraceable “immanence.”<sup>8</sup>

## 2. The Immanence of the Possible or the Actual Incompleteness of Metaphysics

First Thesis: *Whitehead’s late work is a series of deconstructions of the idea of metaphysics, understood as a general theory of all possible actual worlds, thereby revealing the status of metaphysical claims to be of actual incompleteness.*

It is an interesting philosophical gesture that Whitehead, in formulating a desire for metaphysics, accompanied every instantiation of such metaphysics with its relative impossibility.<sup>9</sup> Already in early works, like *Concept of Nature*, where Whitehead was still withholding metaphysical claims, he was already hinting at the necessity of formulating a new metaphysics in the near future, which would be based on his analysis of the implicit metaphysics of physics as mechanistic. He found this mechanistic neither to be scientific nor

necessary; in fact, it excluded what became the basis of its own endeavor, namely, *nature as experienced*.<sup>10</sup> While he still was excluding a general metaphysical claim, he laid the ground for its formulation *and* its relative impossibility when he defined nature as “the mystery of creative passage of nature” (CN 73).<sup>11</sup> The *implicit* metaphysical claim of such a new, non-mechanistic metaphysics became the analysis of what happens in nature in *events*, the realm of experience, and *objects*, the realm of structures of nature and its knowledge (CN 173). However, since objects are per se immanent to events of which they are mere abstractions, Whitehead already laid the ground for the *impossibility* of any “objective” formulation of such structures as general enough to encompass the “creative advance” (CN 34) of a world of events.

This is the *nucleus of the paradox* of Whitehead's metaphysics: that it strives for a *generality* that is always already *undermined* by the creative passage of structures and the creative advance of a world of events beyond any structural stability, which would allow us to analyze this world in terms of universals (cf. PR 20).<sup>12</sup>

When Whitehead in *Science and the Modern World* first formulated his new metaphysics, he did so precisely on the premise of a *universal activity*, which he borrowed from Spinoza, that *underlies* all structures—themselves uncovered as “abstractions”—and a *principle of concretion* that defines the most general characteristics of an actual world as *irrational process* (cf. SMW 178).<sup>13</sup> While a Whitehead-interpretation could be established on the basis of the belief that the famous Chapter X on “Abstractions” is the most comprehensive formulation of such metaphysical structures, its hierarchies of abstractions do not, in fact, establish an eternal order of the structural integrity of the world, but only a flexible instrument to analyze the irrational process of events in their intelligibility without ever making the claim that they represent an eternal order of ideas.<sup>14</sup>

Against a narrowly Platonist misinterpretation of Whitehead, which is as common as it is wrong,<sup>15</sup> metaphysical structures are, in fact, nothing but abstractions of the process of becoming itself; they are neither concrete nor are they actualizing forms of eternity. On the basis of universal activity and irrational concretion, events harbor structures as intelligible mediums of communication, not as principles of their actualization.<sup>16</sup> Instead, any metaphysical claim must have that status of *a possibility for actualization* and, hence, “describe” the actual world as one that is *actually* incomplete because of the *incompleteness of its creative activity*.

While *Process and Reality* seems to make the strongest case for a “coherent, logical and necessary system” with which to analyze the utmost generalities of the actual world—as already hinted to in *Religion in the Making* (cf. RM 84) and as repeated in slightly different language in *Function of Reason* (cf. FR 67-8)<sup>17</sup>—it is, on a deeper level, also a serious contestation of such claims and a simultaneous affirmation of the relative impossibility of this endeavor.<sup>18</sup>

Besides Whitehead's famous appeal to intuition regarding the insight into "first principles" (PR 4) and "togetherness" (PR 22) and an infinite process of approximation with only "tentative formulations" (PR 8), we find more "structural" refutations of "dogmatic certainty" (PR 264)—the ultimacy of creativity (PR 21); the irrationality, although not unintelligibility, of the Whitehead's categories (PR 22-26); the embeddedness of all orders and laws within the relativity of a chaotic nexus (PR 95); the a posteriori status of the extensive continuum (PR 35); the infinity of cosmic epochs (PR 35-6); the primacy of becoming over being (PR 22); and so on.

Although Whitehead often addresses the *limitation* of metaphysical claims with limitations of language, experience and deficiencies of the mind to grasp the most general (PR 4),<sup>19</sup> he also knows about a limitation *in principle*, namely in *actuality* (PR 20).<sup>20</sup> Maybe the most overlooked but strongest statement against the *possibility* of metaphysical claims in light of this actual incompleteness of all structures in non-preformatted actuality can be found in this passage from the section on "The Order of Nature" in *Process and Reality*.

The metaphysical characteristics of an actual entity—in the proper general sense of 'metaphysics'—should be those which apply to all actual entities. It may be doubted whether such metaphysical concepts have ever been formulated in their strict purity—even taking into account the most general principles of logic and of mathematics. We have to confine ourselves to societies sufficiently wide, and yet such that their defining characteristics cannot safely be ascribed to all actual entities which have been or may be. (PR 90)

The reason for this limitation of metaphysical claims is that the world is not based in "fact," as representations of structures, but in process (PR 7), so that no structural generalization can reach beyond the activity of the process to become; or, reversely stated, metaphysical generalities are but possibilities immanent to the process as a whole in its actual incompleteness (cf. PR 36).<sup>21</sup> This again is the reason that Whitehead can link the two ways of metaphysical analysis in such a way that they only express this limitation of the metaphysical endeavor: While "coordinated analysis" allows for infinitely different ways of "division," none of which reach the actual process exhaustively (PR 283-4), the genetic analysis discovers only phases of becoming in which all "givenness"—be it structures, generalities or facts—are only potentials for new becoming (PR 23).

This again is the reason that, for Whitehead, the "realm" of "eternal objects" is not absolute, but only *relative* to the world-process in its ultimate irrationality—whether it is based in creativity (PR 20) or the principle of limitation (PR 46). In being *relative to actuality* the "realm" of eternal objects"

may not “in itself” be in the process of “becoming”—that is, there are no new eternal objects—but it is no well-defined “realm” either; rather it is *pure multiplicity*, per se chaotic, without unity, lacking any definite structure, only being unified in the *actual* process of becoming itself (PR 46).<sup>22</sup>

In this sweeping glance through the development of the metaphysical paradox up to Whitehead's magnum opus, *Process and Reality*, we can gain the insight that the process of deconstruction of metaphysical claims is already there, right in the midst of the *constitution* of metaphysics; but unfortunately, it remains often undetected.<sup>23</sup>

In the following three theses, I want to render a *cumulative* case that the late work of Whitehead, following this initial climax of the metaphysical paradox in *Process and Reality*, reveals actual incompleteness to be *the* driving force of Whitehead's further philosophical development, that is, both of new conceptualities and their constellations entering the Whiteheadian vocabulary and of new attempts to *formulating* the paradox as paradox in its deconstructive force, thereby always breaking open all (possible) solutions.<sup>24</sup> As a point of departure, I will always start with a passage from *Process and Reality* that indicates how the fundamental actual incompleteness canalizes into the four different spheres of incompleteness.

### **3. The Immanence of Reason or the Cultural Incompleteness of Metaphysics**

Second Thesis: *Since the actualization of generalizing rationality for Whitehead is an act of civilization, rationality is a moment of its development and decline whereby metaphysical claims express a cultural incompleteness.*

One way of formulating the basis for the cultural incompleteness of metaphysics and for the immanence of reason and rationality in a cultural context in *Process and Reality* is with Whitehead's conviction that there is no “givenness” that is not based on becoming and that this becoming is a relational happening of a multiplicity of events so that its immanent rationality is fundamentally in flux.<sup>25</sup>

There must, however, be limits to the claim that all the elements in the universe are explicable by ‘theory.’ For ‘theory’ itself requires that there be ‘given’ elements so as to form the material for theorizing. ... For rationalistic thought, the notion of ‘givenness’ carries with it a reference beyond the mere data in question. It refers to a ‘decision’ whereby what is ‘given’ is separated off from what for that occasion is ‘not given.’ This element of ‘givenness’ in things implies some activity procuring limitation. (PR 42-43)

The evolution of history can be rationalized by the consideration of the determination of successors by antecedents. But, on the other hand, the evolution of history is incapable of rationalization because it exhibits a selected flux of participating forms. No reason, internal to history, can be assigned why that flux of forms, rather than another flux, should have been illustrated. It is true that any flux must exhibit the character of internal determination. So much follows from the ontological principle. (PR 46)

The problem Whitehead formulates here is not a metaphysical problem, but one of the very possibility of metaphysics as such. Although this paradox is guided by the ontological principle (cf. PR 24), this passage deconstructs the very possibility of principles to guide us beyond a certain point, namely that of the limitation of rationality by the historicity of the process, which is ungrounded, or grounded only in actuality with actuality meaning “decision amid ‘potentiality’” (PR 43).<sup>26</sup> In other words, actual incompleteness generates cultural incompleteness, that is, the immanence of rationality in the cultural settings developing rationality (cf. RM, part I).<sup>27</sup>

I think it is this link that forced Whitehead to delve ever deeper into the cultural settings of the emergence and the decline of reason and rationality. *Symbolism and Function of Reason*, written right around *Process and Reality*, express this urge for the analysis of the cultural appearance of reason and rationality.<sup>28</sup> While *Symbolism* on the one hand hints to *Process and Reality* as the “adequate discussion” of experience (S 16), it spends a third of its explorations on the *cultural embeddedness* of experience or better, of *metaphysics* of experience, and that means, in Whitehead’s context, of metaphysics as such (S, part III). *Function of Reason*, on the other hand, right after *Process and Reality*, addresses the *evolution* of rationality from the biological into the cultural context, in which it becomes cultivated, among other uses, as speculative reason, that is, as metaphysics. Reason is the driving force of cultivated life, the *art* of life (FR 4) and, at the same time, an expression of its own cultural conditions—the “passionate claim for freedom of thought” (FR 38)—that allows for its arrival (FR 38).<sup>29</sup>

In both cases, Whitehead *situates* metaphysics—as rationality of experience—in a distinctly cultural context.<sup>30</sup> In both cases, Whitehead seems to “break” with his universal metaphysical vision of utmost generality; but he does so not in order to ask a reduced “anthropological” question; rather, he situates the very existence and development of metaphysics in the *history* of the decaying and self-organizing tendencies of the “course of events” (FR 1) of which human evolution and humanities’ cultures are a direct expression.

In both cases, Whitehead ends with visions of the *utmost cultural relativity* of the metaphysical endeavor. In *Function of Reason*, “Reason is the self-discipline of the originaive element in history” (FR 3), that is, of creativ-

ity. But, while it raises the process beyond “mere blind appetite [that] would be the product of chance and could lead nowhere” (FR 89), it *never* becomes the expression of an underlying, almost divine Reason that would lead us to an eternal point beyond this history of becoming and perishing.<sup>31</sup> On the contrary, it is limited by the “form specialized to the special aptitudes of human beings” and only allows for a creative arrival of *unprecedented* cultural developments that express a “counter-tendency which converts the decay of one order into the birth of its successor” (FR 90).

That this cultural incompleteness of metaphysics, for which there is always only a *successor*, but never a point of rest in a final generality, is always the expression of a cultural environment is the insight with which *Symbolism* leaves us. The ability of a culture to establish a favourable environment and to survive a non-favourable environment is eminent in the formulation of *any* symbolism of which “metaphysics” is only one appearance.<sup>32</sup>

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. (S 87)

Hence, *none* of these cultural forms of symbolism represent reality per se, but they *always* are the *pragmatic* expressions of a success or decline of a certain cultural integrity that has no underlying reason, but the historicity of its own becoming. A “symbolism which is taken to refer to the ultimate purposes for which the society exists,” therefore, needs to “combine reverence to their symbols with freedom of revision” without which it must “ultimately decay either from anarchy, or from the slow atrophy of a life stifled by useless shadows” (S 88).<sup>33</sup>

Of course, Whitehead’s pursuit of this cultural conditioning of metaphysics in his last two books *Adventures of Ideas* and *Modes of Thought* can easily be misunderstood as an “application” of his *preceding* metaphysics.<sup>34</sup> In fact, however, they are really reflections of *precisely* the cultural incompleteness of metaphysics. While the cultivation of metaphysics for Whitehead is a civilized act of surveying “the world with some large generality of understanding” (MT 4), it must also be situated always in the particular development, the becoming and decline, of *concrete* civilizations. It is with this insight that one realizes that “[r]ationalism never shakes off its status of an experimental adventure” (PR 9) of ideas, potentials, structures, and laws of any magnitude of universality by being embedded in, and expressions of, the rela-

tivity of history, culture, society, and the universal course of events. Because of this *immanence* of rationality, Whitehead concludes that we “cannot produce that final adjustment of well-defined generalities which constitute a complete metaphysics”; we can always *only* produce “a variety of partial systems of limited generality” (AI 145). This “process is, of course, unending. All that can be achieved is the emphasis on a few large-scale notions, together with attention to the variety of other ideas which arise in the display of those chosen for primary emphasis” (MT 2).<sup>35</sup>

In light of the weight that the late works of Whitehead around and after *Process and Reality* lay on issues of social and cultural analysis, we must either conclude that Whitehead lost his metaphysical interest—hence, that he did indeed formulate his metaphysics in *Process and Reality*—or that these “late” works are a series of *deconstructions* of the metaphysical claim that already appeared underlying Whitehead's metaphysical construction in *Process and Reality*.<sup>36</sup> In the second case—and this is the thesis here—these “late” works are the *very expression of the fundamental incompleteness of metaphysics* in the relativity of its cultural constitution, articulation, scope, and flavour; an incompleteness, however, that does not leave metaphysics behind, but deconstructs it *as the moment of its constitution*. In this sense, says Whitehead in *Adventures of Ideas*, it is not the metaphysical constructions of generalities themselves but their “limitations [that] are the topics for philosophic research” (AI 145).<sup>37</sup>

#### 4. The Immanence of Categories and Principles or the Transcendental Incompleteness of Metaphysics

Third Thesis: *Since for Whitehead universality is process, there is no such thing as a “complete whole”<sup>38</sup> amounting to a transcendental incompleteness of metaphysical claims.*

The passage from *Process and Reality* I want to start from, speaks about actual incompleteness as a *condition for the possibility* to formulate any metaphysical system so that this inherent limitation of any universality as such amounts to a *transcendental* condition of the constitution of actuality.<sup>39</sup>

The aim at generalization is sound, but the estimate of success is exaggerated. There are two main forms of such overstatement. One form is what I have termed, elsewhere, the ‘fallacy of misplaced concreteness.’ This fallacy consists in neglecting the degree of abstraction involved when an actual entity is considered merely so far as it exemplifies certain categories of thought. There are aspects of actualities which are simply ignored so long as we restrict thought to these categories. Thus the success of a philosophy is to be measured by its comparative avoid-

ance of this fallacy, when thought is restricted within its categories. (PR 7-8)

When Whitehead postulates this transcendental incompleteness of any metaphysical system with its generalizing categories and embedded principles as the *overture* to his table of categories in *Process and Reality*, everything appears in a different light. Neither the categories nor the principles of Whitehead's alleged "system" nor the system as such are to be viewed as adequate statements of the *real* generalities involved in the analysis of actuality, but merely as *abstractions* from the very process of actualities that generates them as very incomplete statements of orientation.<sup>40</sup>

This limitation is, first of all, a limitation of abstraction in the attempt to use them to gain an understanding of the actual process; it is based on actual incompleteness. Secondly, it is a limitation given by the historicity and cultural embeddedness of the process of actuality. Thirdly, however, it is a *limitation of principality as such* in the course of the process.<sup>41</sup> The "fallacy of misplaced concreteness" is not just a statement on the status of metaphysical claims in differentiation from "reality," but also a statement about the "reality" itself *insofar* as it cannot be conceptualized. Hence, principles and categories ought to be incomplete not because we are limited by culture and language, but precisely because this limitation of principles and categories is the *very condition* for the conceptualization of *actuality as actuality*.<sup>42</sup> In other words, if actuality could be "rationalized," that is, universally grasped through concepts, categories, and principles, it would be only the expression of an "idea" (Plato) or a "spirit" (Hegel) of which it was only a variation or exemplification.

Of course, as soon as we have seen this transcendental incompleteness working in Whitehead's constitution of metaphysics, many of its pieces in *Process and Reality* fall into place: that the "universal of universals" is *process*, that is, the creativity beyond all forms (PR 20); that *all* four kinds of categories are irreducible to a law of unification, a One behind them, and that they are actually open-ended (especially in the case of the categories of existence, which per se generate *infinite* other categories) (PR 22); that the basic principles (principle of novelty, of process, of relativity, and the ontological principle) of his metaphysics appear *in* or *as* categories and not as self-sufficient grounds; that Whitehead can speak *at all* of a *supersession* of the category of conceptual reversion (PR 250); that the principle of concretion remains in place as the irrational, but intelligible, correction of closed systems (PR 244).

All that only explicates the fact that, for Whitehead, the *coherence* of thought is not grounded in any closed system, but in a constitutional incompleteness. While it might be true that the metaphysical paradox can go unnoticed (or is even surprising) because of Whitehead's so obvious *eros of ratio*

*nality*, that is, his striving for comprehensiveness, universality, and the “rescue from anti-intellectualism” (PR xii),<sup>43</sup> the metaphysical paradox is right there, in the heart of this “rationality.”<sup>44</sup> When Whitehead defines metaphysical coherence, he opens a *rational space* for its own *transcendental limitation*. Since coherence, for Whitehead, means that all metaphysical generalities “presuppose each other so that in isolation they are meaningless” whereby this mutual presupposition “does not mean that they are definable in terms of each other” (PR 3), they are *limited by their mutual incompleteness* in such a way that they always allow for novelty and therefore for the unprecedented on the conceptual level.

It is precisely this open potential for *unprecedented conceptual and categorical novelty* as an implication of a thereby *a priori* open world that Whitehead most forcefully develops in his “late” writings. In *Modes of Thought*, this transcendental openness appears as a restatement of the rebuttal of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness in the form of the “The Fallacy of the Perfect Dictionary,” which is “the belief, the very natural belief, that mankind has consciously entertained all the fundamental ideas which are applicable to its experience” (MT 173).<sup>45</sup> Similar to the demand for open metaphysical symbolism of societies in *Symbolism*, here, Whitehead understands that the “use of philosophy is to maintain an active novelty of fundamental ideas illuminating the social system” (MT 174). This transcendental incompleteness is nothing but precisely the *condition for the possibility of novelty* so that metaphysics is at its best when it does not fall short of always formulating anew “insight into depths as yet unspoken” (MT 174).

Since such incompleteness will always create a *series* of formulations of the unspoken, it always will appear only as an *imperfect* series of concepts, categories and principles. Here Deleuze is right: Whitehead's pluralism creates conceptual multiplicities, that is, divergent series of dimensions of conceptualization (Deleuze 2006, 304-5).

In fact, it is one of *Adventures of Ideas*' great characteristics to develop this transcendental incompleteness into *multiple open series of categories* answering a “depth as yet unspoken” (MT 174): the series of *seven Platonic notions* of which “all philosophy is in fact an endeavor to obtain a coherent system out of some modification of these notions” (AI 275); the series of “*five qualities* of Truth, Beauty, Adventure, Art, Peace” (AI 274; italics added) in which civilized society articulates itself ever anew; and the “incompleteness...[that] relates to the notion of Transcendence, the feeling essential for Adventure, Zest, and Peace” (AI 295) by which series Whitehead expresses the very incompleteness of the world-process *as such*, namely that it never finds a *unity* that does not create a new *multiplicity* in a vast process of unending novelty.

Here is also the place where Whitehead's “principle of limitation,” which seemed to have expressed a unified notion of “God,” *disperses in a multiplicity of open concepts*—Supreme Adventure, initial Eros, final Fact,

Harmonies of Harmonies, Adventure of the Universe as One, the union of Zest with Peace, final Beauty, tragic Beauty, the Great Fact (AI 295-6).

In a final move in Whitehead's last article "Mathematics and the Good," Whitehead even infects his earlier version of ultimate concepts, categories and principles with this transcendental incompleteness; that is, he begins to reconstruct *whatever* ultimacy one could pose in Whitehead's "system"—insofar as it would always be based on the *assumption of transcendental completeness* that is infused by the assumption of the primacy of infinity (and eternity)—instead, now, from *finitude* (and novelty).<sup>46</sup> It was the "superstitious awe of infinitude [that] has been the bane of philosophy"; but the "infinite has no properties. All value is a gift of finitude" (MG 105), writes Whitehead, thereby actually performing the "conversion of philosophy" in which Deleuze had situated Whitehead to formulate the conditions of the possibility of novelty. In one of the central passages from "Mathematics and the Good" Whitehead concludes that while

Spinoza emphasized the fundamental infinitude and introduced a subordinate differentiation by finite modes.... Leibniz emphasized the necessity of finite monads and based them on a substratum of Deistic infinitude. Neither of them adequately emphasized the fact that infinitude is mere vacancy apart from its embodiment of finite values, and...finite entities are meaningless apart from their relationship beyond themselves. (MG 106)

From the *generative energy* of this *intersection of immanent infinitude* and, hence, a *multiplicity of series of actualities*, Whitehead now *derives* all of his ultimate notions of process in which they mutually deconstruct each other. The world now has no *unity*, except that of finite actualities; *creativity* arises in "the awakening of infinitude to finite activity" (MG 111); *possibilities* are "abstraction involved in the creation of any actuality, with its union of finitude with infinity" (MG 112-113).<sup>47</sup>

We can summarize this development in the "late" works of Whitehead with a "metaphysical principle" that Whitehead invokes in *Adventures of Ideas* really as a principle that *defies* all principles as a transcendental condition of *pure becoming*: namely, that "the very essence of real actuality—that is, of the completely real—is *process*." Hence, for Whitehead, "no static maintenance of perfection is possible" (AI 274); any unification is "Imperfection" (AI 264); and "the singular of *The Universe*, of *Nature*, of  $\phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$  can be translated as *Process* (AI 150).<sup>48</sup>

### 5. The Immanence of Immanence or the Essential Incompleteness of Metaphysics

Fourth Thesis: *We can define the late work of Whitehead as a series of explorations of the metaphysical paradox of rational comprehensiveness and relational multiplicity. Addressed with the notion of “mutual immanence,” the secret of this paradox is essential incompleteness.*

Maybe the most imminent structural appearance of this paradox in *Process and Reality* is Whitehead's definition of “necessity” in his formulation of a metaphysical scheme of ideas. Although it might be widely conceived as the cornerstone and proof of Whitehead's rationalism,<sup>49</sup> it is actually the opposite: a formulation of universal relativity; it is the very ground for the limitation of rationality by essential incompleteness:<sup>50</sup>

Thus the philosophic scheme should be ‘necessary,’ in the sense of bearing in itself its own warrant of universality throughout all experience, provided that we confine ourselves to that which communicates with immediate matter of fact. But what does not so communicate is unknowable, and the unknowable is unknown; and so this universality defined by ‘communication’ can suffice. This doctrine of necessity in universality means that there is an essence to the universe which forbids relationships beyond itself, as a violation of its rationality. Speculative philosophy seeks that essence. (PR 4)

Necessity is *universal communication*; but “necessity in universality” is *universal relativity*, that is, *relationality*, that nothing is isolated beyond its *communication* with everything. This is its *rationality*. To seek the essence of the universe, then, means to seek an essential incompleteness through the *universal immanence that is the process* of the communication of everything in everything. Indeed, I think what Whitehead's late work accomplishes is to explore this claim in a manner that transcends *Process and Reality*. In *Symbolism*, e.g., we find *this* formulation of the metaphysical paradox:

Universality of truth arises from the universality of relativity, whereby every particular actual thing lays upon the universe the obligation of conforming to it. Thus in the analysis of particular fact universal truths are discoverable, those truths expressing this obligation. ... The fallacy of ‘misplaced concreteness’ abstracts from time this specific character, and leaves time with the mere generic character of pure succession. (S 39)

Here, Whitehead understands universality of truth not as conformation of particulars with universal truth—representing the philosophy of infinity and eter-

nity, in which all actual happenings are but representations of universal ideas (or a divine will)—but as *universality of relativity* whereby all actual happenings are related to one another. This relationship of mutual immanence, however, is not a “state” of things, but an *infinite process of finite events*, the generation of ever-new multiplicities and series of multiplicities of events. These are not just series of variations of “eternal objects” in the realm of time and extension,<sup>51</sup> but, since the *singular* event generates universality,<sup>52</sup> *series of reverberations of novelty throughout the universe*.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, here, universality and relativity articulate *manifolds in mutual immanence* of which time, space, ideality (eternal objects), extension, and creativity are expression of their mutual and universal incompleteness.<sup>54</sup>

In many important passages of *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead declares the very concept of “mutual immanence” central to his metaphysics.<sup>55</sup> Maybe the most daring passage from the beginning of the chapter on “The Grouping of Occasion” reads:

The general common function exhibited by any group of actual occasions [however] is that of mutual immanence. ... If the group be considered merely in respect to this basic property of mutual immanence, however otherwise lacking in common relevance, then—conceived as exemplifying this general connectedness—the group is termed a Nexus. Thus the term Nexus does not presuppose any special type of order, nor does it presuppose any order at all pervading its members other than the general metaphysical obligation of mutual immanence. (AI 201; italics added)

This “common function” of whatever happens is not any “property,” it is not a “form,” it is more like Plato’s “place,” the *khora*, “‘a natural matrix for all things’. It receives its forms by reason of its inclusion of actualities, and in a way not to be abstracted from those actualities” (AI 134).<sup>56</sup> At this stage in Whitehead's work, it formulates the widest, and maybe the *only* truly *meta physical* “function” of actuality, *prior* to extensiveness, time, space, characteristics, structures, orders, and laws. Although it does not presuppose *anything*, it is no chaos either; rather it is the “medium of intercommunication” (AI 134) “whose sole function is the imposition of a unity upon the events of Nature. These events...obtain their actuality by reason of emplacement within this community” (AI 187). *It is universal relativity as such; incompleteness; the multiplicity of becoming.*

Slowly again: How is “mutual immanence” not a violation of the metaphysical paradox? Isn't it a new universal category, finally capturing everything? How does it formulate essential incompleteness? First of all, *relativity* is only “universal” insofar as it actually says that there is *no* universality *transcending* the mutual immanence of all actualities, which already harbour pos-

sibilities, categories, and principles. It is a non-category, a non-principle. It is not *a* unity, but *pure difference*.<sup>57</sup> It is not *a* form, but only *connection*.<sup>58</sup> It says that there is no principle encompassing everything. Secondly, it is a *critical* notion that, in refuting any transcendence of categories and principles, *denied anything* the status of origin, source, ground, aim, or goal beyond the nexus of happenings itself. It is anti-hierarchical!<sup>59</sup> Hence, thirdly, it can only be realized *as process*, as in/finite becoming, unguided by any order or law transcending its actual process. It is the expression of *groundlessness* of becoming as such.<sup>60</sup>

In his last lecture “Immortality,” held 1941 in Harvard, Whitehead explores unoccupied territory. Clearer than ever before, and maybe for the first time in this sense ever, he formulates mutual immanence in such a way that it directly exposes the deepest meaning of the metaphysical puzzle that has energized his thought throughout his whole career.<sup>61</sup> He restates metaphysical universality in terms of the mutual immanence of *all* concepts, categories, and principles as exhibiting the essential incompleteness of the world-process and its conceptualization. I confine myself to the most daring claims.

Firstly, from the claim that the “contrast of finitude and infinity arises from the fundamental metaphysical truth that every entity involves an indefinite array of perspectives” he concludes that no “finite perspective does...enable an entity to shake off its essential connection with totality,” that is, an always unanalyzed “infinite background” that any entity presupposes, “which is the universe in its relation to that entity” (Imm 682).<sup>62</sup> In other words, in *whatever* categories we can analyze the universe, the *mutual immanence of infinity and finitude* always generates *multiplicities* of categories and principles.

Secondly, in answering how infinity and finitude *generate* infinite categories of analysis, Whitehead analyses the universe into *two* multiplicities—a world of actualities and a world of values—that must be mutually immanent in such a way that “the description of either of the two Worlds involves stages which include characteristics *borrowed* from the other World” (Imm 685).<sup>63</sup> Because the contrasting series of concepts, categories, or principles must “include *characteristics derived from the other*,” these “major examples of perspectives of the universe” “*require each other*” (Imm 685; italics added) so that they exhibit the universal incompleteness of *all* metaphysical claims.

Finally, since metaphysical claims can only exhibit “the *concrete* Universe in its relation to either of its ... aspects” (Imm 684-5; italics added) by avoiding the metaphysical generalization that happens when these aspects become “considered by itself [in] abstraction” *from* the Universe, it is always only in their *mutuality* that metaphysical claims approximate the concrete.

Indeed, Whitehead’s late work finally addresses the paradox of a metaphysical claim *without* invoking any “unity” that names “*the same*” in the difference of aspects, but only names the differences *themselves* in their *mutually creative dynamic*.

## NOTES

1. Cf. Griffin (2007).
2. Cf. Faber (2005, 179 200).
3. Cf. Faber (2009).
4. Cf. Leclerc (1958, part I).
5. Much work was done on the early development of Whitehead up to the “mature” metaphysics; cf. Ford (1984); Lowe (1941/1991, 15 124); and the “final phase” of Whitehead's metaphysics of multidimensionality and relativity in PR: cf. Welker (1985, 269 312). The later work appears only as “application” of this metaphysics; cf. Johnson (1983).
6. Cf. Faber in Helmer, Suchocki, and Quiring (2004, 39 72).
7. Cf. Faber and Stephenson (2010). Deleuze, like Whitehead, has rejected the “end of metaphysics” as “idle chatter” but rather wanted to reformulate its constitutional paradox. Cf. Robinson (2005, 129 136).
8. Cf. the most radical application of this immanence is in Deleuze and Guattari (1994, ch. 2).
9. This has raised the question why Whitehead, if he really wants to employ a pluralistic viewpoint, would not deconstruct any metaphysics as one claim among infinitely many but would instead formulate “one” metaphysics of plurality; cf. Kasprzik, (1988) and the pondering of this problem in Faber (2000a, § 16). I think that the reason is that Whitehead wanted to uphold the paradox as essential to the metaphysical endeavour as such.
10. Cf. Sayer (1999).
11. “The passage of nature which is only another name for the creative force of existence has no narrow ledge of definite instantaneous present within which to operate. Its operative presence which is now urging nature forward must be sought for throughout the whole, in the remotest past as well as in the narrowest breadth of any present duration. Perhaps also in the unrealised future. Perhaps also in the future which might be as well as the actual future which will be. It is impossible to meditate on time and the mystery of the creative passage of nature without an overwhelming emotion at the limitations of human intelligence” (CN 72).
12. Cf. Faber (1999).
13. It is often overlooked that Whitehead never gave up on his “principle of concreteness” and, hence, also never on the fundamental irrationality of its being an act; cf. Faber (2008a, § 27).
14. Cf. Leue (2005).
15. Its “presence” can even be felt in new approaches; cf. Williams (2005a, 88 92).
16. Cf. Faber in Helmer, Suchocki, and Quiring (2004, 72).
17. Cf. Rust (1987, 45 66).
18. Cf. Weber (2006, 83 138).
19. Cf. Mesle (2008).
20. Cf. Wiehl (1986, 141 68).
21. Here, Leclerc cannot overcome a hidden rationalism; cf. Leclerc (1986, 13 32). Rohmer (2000), however, with the explication of Whitehead's thought in a rhythm of creativity and rationality points in the right direction, namely the overcoming of the rationalism as the foundation for the creative process.

22. Cf. Ford (1972, 79–84); Leue (2005, 107–16); and Faber (2008, § 15).
23. Cf. Griffin (2001).
24. For the transmutation of the project of “universalizing towards relativity” into that of “relativizing towards universality” after PR cf. Faber (2000a, § 17).
25. This assumption that can always be undercut by fundamental rationalistic assumptions that are understood as justifications of Whitehead’s approach. Whitehead instead does not justify rationality but explores it always already on the basis of actuality; cf. Lachmann (1990, 130–135).
26. The “ontological principle” states that all “reasons” are (or are grounded) in actualities; hence, it is the very principle that situates reason in actuality; cf. Faber in Helmer, Suchocki, and Quiring (2004, 67).
27. Cf. Kraus (1997, ch. 1).
28. Their existence, therefore, is not due to any “side project” in which Whitehead would have wanted to “apply” his metaphysics but a necessary implication of the actual incompleteness of metaphysics as such.
29. Both works are mostly consulted only as additions to PR’s discourses on reason and perception; in their integrity, however, they reveal the relativizing effect they have on metaphysics. Notable exception is Lachmann (1990, part II/ch. 3–4).
30. Cf. Kann (2001, ch. 2).
31. Whitehead, therefore, is a notable exception to the “logocentrism” that Derrida criticizes; cf. Faber (2008, § 19).
32. For an analysis of the modes of perception that create “symbolic reference” cf. Kraus (1998, 75–93). It is easy to overlook that which Whitehead formulates in Symbolism as a self-referential undermining of metaphysics as a symbolic system that is already based on the relativism of the biological, evolutionary and cultural symbolism out of which it grows; and even deeper, the principle of relativism in the generation of such symbolic systems.
33. Cf. Faber (2008b).
34. Cf. Johnson (1958).
35. “Philosophy is the attitude of mind toward doctrines ignorantly entertained. By the phrase ‘ignorantly entertained’ I mean that the full meaning of the doctrine in respect to the infinitude of circumstances to which it is relevant, is not understood. The philosophic attitude ... refuses to be satisfied by the conventional presupposition that every sensible person knows the answer. As soon as you rest satisfied with primitive ideas, and with primitive propositions, you have ceased to be a philosopher” (MT 171–172).
36. Cf. C. Keller, “Introduction: The Process of Difference, the Difference of Process,” in Keller and Daniell (2002, 1–30).
37. Cf. Faber (2000a, §§ 25–26).
38. Cf. Jung (1965, 608).
39. Cf. Faber, in Helmer, Suchocki, and Quiring (2004) 64–71.
40. Cf. Bradley (1994).
41. Cf. Williams (2005a, 1–8).
42. This is the basis for Deleuze’s “transcendental empiricism” that he relates back to Whitehead, which does not seek the transcendental condition of all possible experience but that of actual experience. Cf. Marks (1998, 78–90).

43. Cf. Griffin et al. (1993).
44. Cf. Keller and Daniell (2002, 1 11).
45. Cf. Franklin (1990, 293).
46. Not that Whitehead never had another “ideal” than this reversal. In this sense, event and process are the thoroughgoing ideal of Whitehead's philosophy from CN on. Cf. Ford and Kline (1983). But it is his deconstruction of the grounding ideal of “infinity” as “ultimate reality” that remains in the background as “substantialist remainder” that he addresses in MG in a manner that is unprecedented insofar as it now has consequences for Whitehead's own “ultimates.”
47. Cf. Faber (2000b, 171 199).
48. Cf. Faber (2008, §§ 16, 24).
49. Cf. Rescher (1996); cf. the discussion with Rescher in Weber (2006, 13 31).
50. Cf. Faber in Helmer, Suchocki, and Quiring (2004, 60 4).
51. Cf. van Heften (2006, 319 337).
52. Cf. Faber (2008, §§ 11 4).
53. Cf. Leue (2005, 105 115, 125 152).
54. Cf. Faber (2000b, 171 199).
55. Cf. Faber (2000a, § 25).
56. Cf. Faber (2006a, 179 97).
57. Cf. Faber (2008, §§ 16, 24, 32).
58. Cf. Keller in Keller and Daniell (2002, 4).
59. Cf. Faber (2010a).
60. Cf. Faber (2010b). In *Adventures of Ideas* Whitehead directly implements mutual immanence as anti principle, as anti hierarchical refuge, and as “foster mother” of becoming, by criticizing any transcendence breaking through the mutuality of everything in all. When there are no pre given Laws, all laws must be immanent (AI113); when there is no One beyond this immanence, there can be no external God but only self creativity or immanent creativity (AI 236); when there is no unity as ground or goal, all unity must be becoming and perishing. Immanence creates multiplicity of becoming and its mutuality essential incompleteness. Cf. Faber (2006b).
61. Cf. Faber, “De Ontologizing God: Levinas, Deleuze, and Whitehead,” 209 234, in Keller and Daniell (2002).
62. A. N. Whitehead, “Immortality,” in Schilpp (1941/1991, 682 700).
63. Cf. Williams (2005, 89 106).