

Notes on *The Allure of Things: Process and Object in Contemporary Philosophy*. Edited by Roland Faber and Andrew Goffey. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.
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The Whitehead Research Project explores current modes of thought in light of Whitehead's vision of a universe in which physical and mental entanglements are not the exception, but the rule. It hosted a conference in December 2010, "Metaphysics and Things. New Forms of Speculative Thought," which constitutes the basis of this edited volume, *The Allure of Things: Process and Object in Contemporary Philosophy*. This title brings together a number of Whiteheadian and process oriented philosophers with key figures from the branch of speculative realist thinking known as object-oriented ontology. It explores some of the congruencies as well as some of the tensions between various attempts to return to speculative thought and to reorient the concept of the thing (i.e., object). It is representative of some key issues in these different directions in contemporary speculative thought, noting that rather than being something to be overcome, metaphysics has in fact acquired renewed respectability in recent years. In what follows, I will more concretely delineate the entailments of this title, before proffering an evaluative conclusion.

In Chapter one, James Bono offers an explicit account of what it might mean to think about science studies with Whitehead, showing how fruitful his approach is in understanding issues that some forms of contemporary science, with their overtones of Aristotelian ideas of substances, cannot understand properly. He convincingly argues that Whitehead reversed the traditional metaphysical understanding of the continuity of becoming. For Bono, Whiteheadian atomicity refers to an understanding of things as events, to the affective involvement, and indeed the mutual immanence of these things in

each other. His application of Whiteheadian thinking to the field of genetics is particularly fruitful. Chapter two, by Graham Harman, argues for an object-oriented ontology that is anti-relational and refuses “smallism” (45), that is, the practice of reducing facts to their lowest ontological level of entities. He focuses on a series of key points of contrast between an ontology of objects that withdraws from all relation, and a thoroughly relational ontology of the Whiteheadian kind. The third chapter, by Roland Faber, one of the editors of the volume, picks up where Harman leaves off, asking just how dissimilar and exclusive the object- and process-oriented positions in recent philosophy really are. In a densely argued essay, he characterizes Harman’s reworking of the theory of occasional causation as a “democratization” of its theological inaccessibility, placed within the interiority of all real objects, and argues for a resonance between Whitehead’s own theorizing and dissociation from any occasion of becoming.

The second section of the book, which delves into conceptual problems associated with the history of metaphysics, begins with Levi Bryant’s contribution in Chapter four, in which the author develops an account of Aristotelian substance that implies an object-oriented position in which every substance necessarily withdraws from both other substances and from itself. Bryant employs concepts from Derrida in arguing his position, which allows him to offer a theorization of processuality from within an object-oriented position. Continuing the engagement with Whitehead in relation to traditional metaphysics, Judith Jones in Chapter five offers a detailed consideration of a Whiteheadian account of individuality, making a pragmatic move to address the challenge of Whitehead’s concrescence in dialogue with Scribner Stearns’s “Reason and Value” (1952). In the essay of Stearns, a picture of the relationship between reason and value is presented in which reason is the creator of value even as it struggles to cognize already-existing natural, aesthetic, moral, and other values. In Chapter six, Beatrice Marovich leads us to question the limits of being “creaturely,” proposing a constructive account of the “inhuman,” and developing Whitehead’s ideas on the complexification of the “creaturely cosmos” (111).

Given the current academic popularity of thinking about the hazy division between human and animal, she uses Whitehead in such a manner that is not open to deconstructive accounts of the human/animal dyad. Michael Halewood, in Chapter seven addresses the problem in accounts of things – that is, that they oscillate between an exploration of the abstracted general properties predicated of them and their specific, individual particularity – their “thingness.” He demonstrates a poignant sensitivity to the differences between talk of objects and talk of things, as well as – here showing his filial relation to Whitehead – “the sociality of things” (129). Halewood leads us to reflect on the “religiosity” of things, that is, the enduring presence of theological concepts within Western thought.

The third section, on “Dramatisations,” comprises the final four chapters of the volume. Chapter eight, by Jeffrey Bell, offers us a considered reading of aspects of the account of philosophy in terms of drama and experiment that one can find in Deleuze, to tell us what it might mean to do metaphysics in the “style of Whitehead.” Drawing on Deleuze’s “method of dramatization,” Bell explores the question of what a hyper-realist Deleuzian metaphysics might be. Melanie Sehgal’s subsequent chapter reads Whitehead’s conceptualization of history in such a manner that allows her to develop a detailed account of the logic of situating metaphysics in relation to its history. The careful negotiation that Sehgal makes, using Whitehead, is between the generic notion of “having a history” and the specificity of every history as a situated form of knowledge. Isabelle Stengers contributes Chapter ten, in which she too draws on Deleuze’s understanding of dramatization in philosophy to help explore the way in which creations in philosophy operate. According to her, a philosophical creation is the act of giving an imperative question the power to claim the concepts it needs in order to obtain its most dramatic, forceful necessity, in order to force thinking in such a manner that the philosopher can no longer say “I think,” that is, that they can no longer be a thinking subject. The concluding Chapter eleven, by Andrew Goffey, the volume’s other editor, also turns to Deleuze’s work, particularly his

neglected concept of experimentation. Experimentation is a term that Deleuze consistently contrasts with interpretation, and it here provides Goffey with a thread to draw together Deleuze's concern with the nature of the philosophical oeuvre, the shifts that he makes in his reading of Spinoza, and the exorbitant style of their first collaboration, entitled *Anti-Oedipus*.

In sum, this edited volume draws together an international range of leading scholars covering the similarities between object oriented ontology and Whiteheadian process philosophy. It is an essential addition to the literature on metaphysics, as it explicates how Whitehead's philosophy traverses the fields of metaphysics, mathematics, logics, philosophy of science, cultural theory, and religion. The title makes manifest how Whitehead's thought furthers the adventure of thought that belongs to the essence of civilization (cf. Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas*). It also makes apparent the notion that metaphysics has acquired new respectability in recent years. I recommend this volume to scholars — but not the general public — who have interests in metaphysics. It will appeal to graduate students who are working in Whiteheadian metaphysics and who have an awareness that Whiteheadian process philosophy poses challenges to the critical settlement.

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