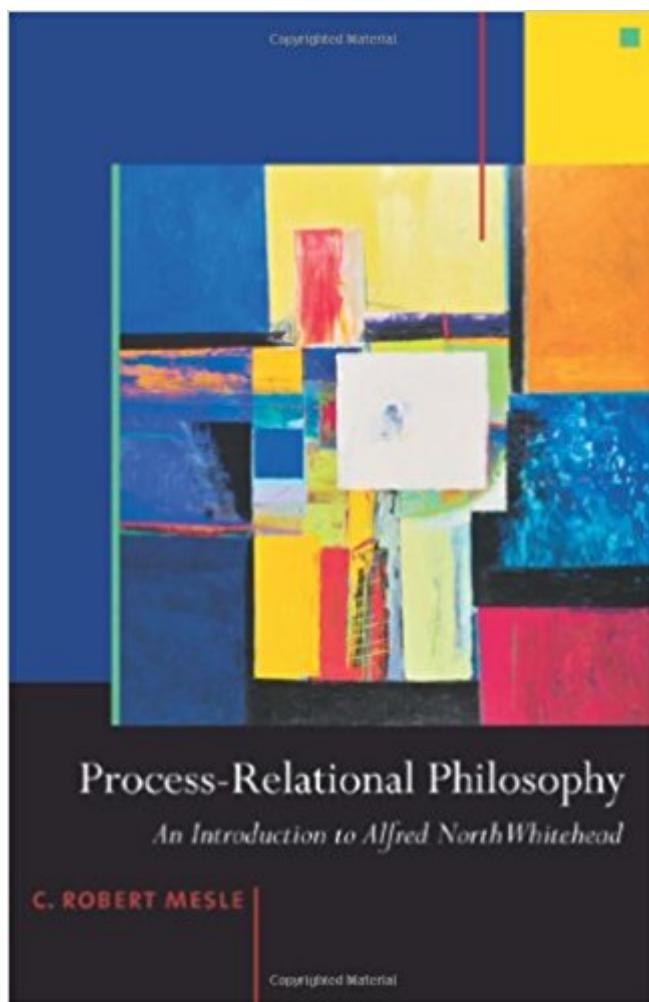


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# Process-Relational Philosophy: An Introduction To Alfred North Whitehead



## **Synopsis**

Process thought is the foundation for studies in many areas of contemporary philosophy, theology, political theory, educational theory, and the religion-science dialogue. It is derived from Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy, known as process theology, which lays a groundwork for integrating evolutionary biology, physics, philosophy of mind, theology, environmental ethics, religious pluralism, education, economics, and more. In *Process-Relational Philosophy*, C. Robert Mesle breaks down Whitehead's complex writings, providing a simple but accurate introduction to the vision that underlies much of contemporary process philosophy and theology. In doing so, he points to a "way beyond both reductive materialism and the traps of Cartesian dualism by showing reality as a relational process in which minds arise from bodies, in which freedom and creativity are foundational to process, in which the relational power of persuasion is more basic than the unilateral power of coercion." Because process-relational philosophy addresses the deep intuitions of a relational world basic to environmental and global thinking, it is being incorporated into undergraduate and graduate courses in philosophy, educational theory and practice, environmental ethics, and science and values, among others. *Process-Relational Philosophy: A Basic Introduction* makes Whitehead's creative vision accessible to all students and general readers.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"At last we have a short book that introduces the major ideas of Alfred North Whitehead to the general reader clearly and accurately." -- John B. Cobb Jr.

C. Robert Mesle is a recognized authority on process thought and the author of the acclaimed *Process Theology: A Basic Introduction* (1993), the most widely read introduction to process theology. A professor and chair of the philosophy and religion department of Graceland University in Lamoni, Iowa, he received his PhD from Northwestern University. He is a board member of the International Process Network and the China Project of the Center for Process Studies and serves on the editorial boards of the *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* and *Process Studies*. He resides in Lamoni, Iowa.

C. Robert Mesle's Process-Relational Philosophy is basically an introduction to the thought of Alfred North Whitehead. PP begins by opening up the world of ANW by contrasting his thought with traditional Christian notions of the God-world relationship and other issues like time and the questions of causality. He then treats a partial history of western philosophy in terms of being and becoming. Mesle flips the standard of the western preference for being by asserting that becoming is basic and has a priority over being. Mesle then turns directly to the thought of Whitehead and notes that he has a difficult jargon to understand (17). He asserts that Whitehead's actual occasions are simply ways of saying that experience "goes all the way down." In other words, everything is some form of experience. If it doesn't, Mesle asks, how can it every arise (37)? So, "There is one kind of reality--experience. But experience has both its physical and mental aspects (39). As a person, you are not some kind of special species, over and above the other parts of the universe. All is experience. Whitehead's epistemology is also briefly handled. Mesle notes Whitehead's distinction between two kinds of perception: causal efficacy and presentational immediacy. The first is a perception that arises from our past experience through a continual process of the past world. The second is, in general, sense perception. He disagrees with Whitehead that God is a needed factor in reality (83), but he treats the issue fairly as Whitehead tried to lay out. So, he begins the discussion of creativity, the eternal objects and God. In an epilogue he goes through some of Whitehead's words and explains them in a bit more detail. And that's about the basic jist. It's a good introduction to process thinking and the thought of ANW. I would recommend this if you are looking for a glimpse into process philosophy.

For students of process-relational thought, this little book is a true gem" Robert Mesle's gives us a much-needed introduction and very approachable overview to the

thinking, philosophy, and language of Alfred North Whitehead. For those new to the subject, process-relational philosophy addresses the ontological over-emphasis western society has historically placed on the static state of *being* (expressed in all aspects—culture, languages, etc.) versus the ever-changing quality of *becoming* (which is easily observable in the birth, growth, life and death of all living things). This bias is a philosophical perspective that goes back at least as far as Plato, so it is understandable that we have difficulty in seeing it, questioning it, and looking at the alternative: the process-relational perspective. Further, it is commonly acknowledged that while process-relational ideas have the potential to be very important contributors to ongoing dialogue about the problems of our complex times—learning Whitehead's unique terminology is a prohibitively large barrier. Well, thankfully, with Mesle's book, this is no longer the case. Process-Relational Philosophy allows Whitehead to be accessible to a much larger audience. This perfectly-sized 123 page book addresses the major themes of Whitehead's seminal 1929 *Process and Reality*. Mesle's chapters flow well from one theme/idea to another. He builds conceptually, beginning with why process thought matters and finishing with a succinct appendix: *Getting Technical: Whitehead's Language*—a whirlwind tour of actual entities, eternal objects, prehension, concrescence, etc. Each chapter finishes with the helpful *So What?* and *Looking Ahead* summaries which keep the reader focused and curious through this thought-provoking material. Mesle does a nice job of putting process-relational thought in the larger context of the philosophical ideas of Plato, Aristotle, Hume, Kant, etc. Anecdotes from his personal journey and always encouraging the reader to apply the abstract ideas to his/her own life for a validity-check keep the material relevant and interesting. Though there is some repetition, in my opinion, it serves well to keep the reader on-track through some fairly esoteric conceptual ideas. This book is excellent for beginners and intermediate readers alike. I purchased it in 2008, shortly after it came out, and only recently got around to reading it. This was a mistake. If you are interested in process-relational thought, read this book first without delay. You will thank Robert Mesle for giving you a perfect starting foundation.

Prof. Mesle has accomplished an amazing feat by making one of the most important 20th Century philosophers (Alfred North Whitehead) accessible, relevant, and lively. Followers of Whitehead often have found it difficult to interpret process philosophy to those outside the field. With a minimum of technical language, Dr. Mesle has overcome this barrier. Whitehead's cosmology is the only one that does not separate the universe into separate realms of matter, mentality, and spirituality. Instead, he

provides a way to bring together the material view of reality with the non-material view of reality. Because of this, Whitehead's ideas matter profoundly as scientists, religious practitioners, political leaders, mental health specialists, and many others look for solutions to our divided, anxious and potentially deadly world. Dr. Mesle's work will help many more people gain access to these important ideas. (For more information on process philosophy, see [...].) May 22, 2010: One addendum to respond to Mr. Riding: It is noteworthy that Prof. Mesle actually is not a theist (unlike many process thinkers). He makes this clear in his previous book, *Process Theology: A Basic Introduction*. He considers himself to be a process naturalist and leaves it to theologian John B. Cobb Jr to explain process theism (all of this is in the last section of the book on process theology).

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