

A Reading Map for the Whitehead Seminar

Built from three books · Whitehead, *Process and Reality* · Mesle, *Process-Relational Philosophy* · Sherburne, *A Key to Process and Reality*.

- All the page numbers are numbers in the book (not the pdf page numbers).
- TIP: Use the Glossary in Sherburne's book to help with Whitehead's specific terminology!

The sessions

Session 1 Speculative philosophy and why the process?

Focus — What *speculative* philosophy is trying to do, why we need it, what is the intention of Whitehead's approach?

Read this week:

- **Mesle** (Chs. 1–2, pp. ix–xii, 3–19 · + OPTIONAL Preface) — “A Process-Relational World,” and “Imaginative Generalization”
- **Sherburne** (Appendix, pp. 191–204 + OPTIONAL “Purpose and Design of this book, pp. 1-5) — “In Defense of Speculative Philosophy.”
- **Whitehead** (Part I, Ch. I §§ I–II, pp. 3–17 ·) — “Speculative Philosophy”

Session 2 The actual entity, prehension & the ontological principle · ontology · core

Focus — The central move: the basic realities are momentary events (“actual occasions”) that are constituted by their relations (“prehensions”), not enduring bits of stuff.

Read this week:

- **Mesle** (Ch. 5, pp. 42–53) — “Reality as Relational Process: Substance and Process”.
- **Sherburne** (Part One (all), pp. 1–19) — Actual Entity; Prehensions; Satisfaction / Superject / Objective Immortality; the Ontological Principle.
- **Whitehead** (Part II, Ch. X “Process,” pp. 208–215)

Session 3 Experience all the way down · relational · mind & nature

Focus — Whitehead's panexperientialism — a thin notion of ‘feeling’ reaches all the way down, closing the split between mind and nature.

Read this week:

- **Mesle** (Chs. 3–4, pp. 20–41) — “Minds, Bodies, and Experience” and “Experience All the Way Down”.
- **Whitehead** (Part II, Ch. VII “The Subjectivist Principle,” pp. 156–166) — The reformed subjectivist principle, in the original.
- **Sherburne** (Glossary, pp. 205–248 ·) — Look up *feeling, subjective form, subject-superject* as you read.

Session 4 Concrescence & the theory of feelings · process · the pivot

Focus — How a new occasion comes to be by unifying its many feelings into one — the phases of “concrescence,” and the theory of prehensions behind them.

Read this week:

- **Sherburne** (Part Three §§ I–III, pp. 36–53) — Introductory Statement; Phase I (Conformal Feelings); Phase II (Conceptual Feelings).
- **Whitehead** (Part III, Ch. I “The Theory of Feelings,” pp. 219–232)
- **Mesle** (Appendix, pp. 93–110 ·) — *Concrescence, feeling, phases* — use “Getting Technical.”

Session 5 Propositions & the lure for feeling · the later phases

Focus — The later phases of concrescence, where propositions act not as true/false statements but as “lures for feeling.”

Read this week:

- **Sherburne** (Part Three §§ IV–VI, pp. 54–71) — Simple Comparative Feelings (physical purposes, propositions); Complex Comparative Feelings; Satisfaction.
- **Whitehead** (Part II, Ch. IX “The Propositions,” §§ I–III, pp. 184–195) — What a proposition actually is for Whitehead: a lure for feeling, not a true/false statement.
- **Whitehead** (Part III, Ch. IV “Propositions and Feelings,” pp. 256–265) — Propositions as felt lures, in the original.
- **Mesle** (Glossary / Appendix · dip in) — *Proposition, lure for feeling, subjective aim.*

Session 6 Causal efficacy & perception — feeling the past · relational · physics

Focus — How the past physically flows into the present. Whitehead’s two modes of perception and his answer to Hume on causation.

Read this week:

- **Mesle** (Ch. 6, pp. 54–64) — “Reality as a Causal Web” — the world as inherited influence.
- **Sherburne** (Part Five (all), pp. 98–125) — Causal Efficacy; Presentational Immediacy; Symbolic Reference; the Rebuttal of Hume.
- **Whitehead** (Part II, Ch. VIII “Symbolic Reference,” §§ I–II, pp. 168–174) — The two perceptual modes, in the original.

Session 7 Societies & the order of nature · ontology · physics

Focus — How stable, enduring things (rocks, organisms, you) are really societies of occasions — and how “laws of nature” become habits.

Read this week:

- **Sherburne** (Part Four §§ I–II, pp. 72–88) — Transmutation; Nexus and Order — how aggregates produce the ordered world.
- **Whitehead** (Part II, Ch. III “The Order of Nature,” §§ I–IV, pp. 83–102) — Societies, social order, and structured societies, in the original.
- **Mesle** (Glossary / Appendix · dip in) — *Society, nexus, personal order.*

Session 8 The self as a society · ontology · mind

Focus — You are not one enduring thing but a society of occasions with “personal order” — a route of inheritance held together moment to moment. What makes a person one, and what is the “soul”?

Read this week:

- **Mesle** (Ch. 3, pp. 20–30) — “Minds, Bodies, and Experience: Envisioning a Unified Self” — a fuller read of the material sampled in Session 3, now for personal identity.
- **Sherburne** (Part Four §III “Psychological Physiology,” pp. 89–97) — The living body, the “presiding occasion,” and personal order.
- **Whitehead** (Part II, Ch. IV “Organisms and Environment,” §§ IV–V, pp. 120–129) — The animal body and the living person, in the original.
- **Whitehead** (Part II, Ch. V “Locke and Hume,” pp. 130–137) — Whitehead against Hume on personal identity — is there a self behind the moments?
- **Mesle** (Ch. 6 / Appendix · dip in) — *Causal web, vector, energy* — the plain-English version.

Session 9 Consciousness — a late achievement · ontology · mind

Focus — Consciousness is not the ground floor of reality but a rare, high-grade achievement — it shows up only in complex occasions capable of “intellectual” feeling. The flip side of Session 3.

Read this week:

- **Whitehead** (Part III, Ch. V “The Higher Phases of Experience,” pp. 266–279) — Where consciousness, intellectual feeling and the affirmation-negation contrast arise.

- **Sherburne** (Part Three §§ IV–VI, pp. 54–71) — The ascent from comparative feeling to conscious, intellectual feeling. (Shared with Session 5.)
- **Mesle** (Appendix, pp. 93–110 · dip in) — *Consciousness, intellectual feeling, propositional feeling* in “Getting Technical.”

Session 10 Ideal opposites & the payoff · relational · synthesis

Focus — What process-relational thinking changes — for power, value, ecology, and how we live. A retrospective on the “ideal opposites” the system balances.

Read this week:

- **Mesle** (Chs. 7, 8, 10, pp. 65–78, 89–92) — “Unilateral Power,” “Relational Power: So What?,” and “Looking Ahead.”
- **Sherburne** (Part Two §III + Part Seven §I, pp. 32–35, 172–176) — Creativity, and “The Ideal Opposites” — permanence and flux, order and novelty.
- **Whitehead** (Part V, Ch. I “The Ideal Opposites,” pp. 337–341) — The final interpretation, in the original — a short, resonant close.

Extra sessions

These extra session could be held as **open discussions** after the primary sessions: everyone does the reading, we talk it through together, and no one leads. Alternatively, if someone would rather **lead** one of these, you can **swap it in for one of the main sessions** above, but let me know beforehand.

Extra A Organism, environment & modern science · physics

Focus — The “philosophy of organism” in dialogue with relativity and quantum theory: why the event, not the inert particle, is basic.

Reading:

- **Sherburne** (Part Six §§ IV–VI, pp. 154–170) — Newton; Newton and Plato; Modern Science (substance; philosophy and science).
- **Whitehead** (Part II, Ch. III “The Order of Nature,” §§ V–VII, pp. 102–109) — The electromagnetic society and our “cosmic epoch” — the physics of this era of the universe.
- **Whitehead** (Part II, Ch. IV “Organisms and Environment,” §§ I–III, pp. 110–120) — The organic, vibratory view of nature, in the original.

Extra B Energy & the physics of influence · physics · relational

Focus — How one event physically shapes the next — feeling as the transmission of energy, the “vector” flow of influence out of the past. Whitehead’s account of causation at its most physics-like.

Reading:

- **Whitehead** (Part III, Ch. II “The Primary Feelings,” pp. 236–243) — Simple physical feelings: one occasion literally feeling another.
- **Whitehead** (Part III, Ch. III “The Transmission of Feelings,” pp. 244–255) — The “vector” character of feeling; feeling as inherited energy.
- **Sherburne** (Part One, pp. 8–13 (revisit)) — The “simple physical feeling” diagram, read this time for its physics: how influence passes between occasions.

Extra C The extensive continuum & measurement · physics · technical

Focus — Whitehead’s relational theory of space-time — extension as relations between events — and how measurable geometry is derived from it.

Reading:

- **Whitehead** (Part II, Ch. II §§ I–III, pp. 61–74 + a taste of Part IV, Ch. V, pp. 322–330) — “The Extensive Continuum” and the opening of “Measurement.” Do not try to master Part IV.
- **Sherburne** (Part Five §II “Presentational Immediacy,” pp. 103–114) — The geometry of what we actually perceive — the accessible way into extension.

Extra D Creativity, freedom & God · process

Focus — Creativity as the ultimate; the “dipolar” God; how process, value and freedom hang together in Whitehead’s final vision.

Reading:

- **Mesle** (Ch. 9, pp. 79–88) — “Creativity, Freedom, and God” — with Mesle’s own *naturalist critique*, i.e. a built-in debate.
- **Sherburne** (Part Seven §II “God and the World,” pp. 177–190) — The primordial and consequent natures; the resolution of the cosmological problem.
- **Whitehead** (Part V, Ch. II “God and the World,” pp. 342–351) — The closing antitheses — a beautiful passage to end on.