

Hartshorne speaks variously of “the central religious issue” (AD: 5); “the central religious question” (2 f., 22, 208); and “the central religious belief” (17; cf. 97; also 135: “the main religious belief”). But to what issue, belief, or question, exactly, does he refer?

The answer is indicated when he formulates the question, “Does divinity exist?” (25). Arguing that the logical or self-answering questions that most directly and significantly concern existence are at the same time properly “metaphysical” questions, he claims that “Anselm discovered one of the most important of these—does divinity exist?” One may reply, of course, that this question could be “the central *religious* question” only by reducing religion itself to metaphysical belief—and to holding a particular metaphysical belief at that. But for me, at any rate, the question whether God exists is certainly the *metaphysical* question, an affirmative answer to which is the necessary supposition of the properly *theistic* religious question and thus of any answer thereto.

Allowing this, I can agree with Hartshorne that philosophy’s most important function, especially in its second, ^{existential phase or} ~~critico-constructive~~ aspect, is to clarify “the central religious question,” which is to say, the main *metaphysical* question that any answer to at least the theistic religious question necessarily begs affirmatively. Given, as he says, the very real dangers of fanatical faith, on the one hand, and cynical despair, on the other, philosophy has no more important task than precisely cooperation with others, whatever their beliefs, in free mutual criticism of any and all answers to this question. In this sense, I, too, would say, that philosophy cannot evade its responsibility to deal with faith—meaning by “faith” here, of course, “philosophical faith,” or the “common faith” of human beings simply as such (cf. 24 f.; also 208 and 276, where Hartshorne speaks respectively of “the central philosophical question,” which he defines as asking about “the rationally accessible content, if any, of the central religious question,” and of “the most burning question of philosophy”).

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