

Throughout his writings, so far as I know, Hartshorne has taken the position that what God does in or to the world, as distinct from *with* the world ("God and Nature": 58) can all be placed under Whitehead's concept of "persuasion." Anything that God does (or, at any rate, can be known to do) in or to the world is by way of persuading it, or, more exactly, persuading each of the creatures in it, to conform to the prevailing pattern of cosmic order that God alone is competent to determine (59). In some, though not all, places in which Hartshorne takes this position, he expresses or implies a contrast between this divine method of acting called "persuasion" and what ~~is~~<sup>he</sup> characterized<sup>ed</sup> as "coercion." Thus, for example, in a passage in *The Divine Relativity* in which Hartshorne introduces the concept of "persuasion" by way of explaining God's predominant influence as "object" upon us as "subjects," he goes on to state the rule that "objects influence but do not coerce subjects" (142).

At the same time, Hartshorne is consistent in stressing that God's ability to influence the self-creation of all other agents, or creators, is "ideal," "unfailing," "infallible," "irresistible," in short, "unsurpassable." In fact, he sometimes says, and at other times clearly implies, that God's influence on others is without limits. Thus, having argued that "no teleology can exclude unfortunate accidents and frustrations, for goals have to be reached through multiple acts of freedom, none of which can be entirely controlled, even by God," he goes on to add, "The point is not that [God] cannot control them, but that they cannot be controlled. It is not [God's] influence which has limits, but their capacity to receive influence. Absolute control of a free being, and there can be no others, is self-contradictory" ("The Modern World and a Modern View of God": 81).

Of course, this is only what one would expect Hartshorne to say, holding, as he does, that God must be conceived as in every way unsurpassable by others, and in that sense perfect—*absolutely* perfect in every respect in which anything logically could be so, and *relatively* perfect in every other respect. Accordingly, God's power over others, no less than God's goodness toward and knowledge of them, is absolutely perfect, such that none greater can be conceived. It is as great as any power over others could

conceivably be and, therefore, can only be conceived as maximal and without limits (cf. *DR*: 138).

There is nothing surprising or inconsistent, then, in Hartshorne's saying the kinds of things he does about God's action—such as, for example, that God "sets" the rules by which the creatures must play the game of life, and even that God "enforces" these rules ("*Process Philosophy as a Resource for Christian Thought*": 55); that God "issues directives" or gives "stage directions" to the creatures, "decides," or "decides upon," the general outlines of the world plan, or provides "the necessary limits to disorder among the always partly self-made creatures" (*PCH*: 597); and that God "institutes," "imposes," or "decrees," natural laws, thereby "guaranteeing" certain limits to creaturely freedom ("*A New Look at the Problem of Evil*": 206; "*Our Knowledge of God*": 61).

But if Hartshorne's talk about God's persuading creatures is in no way intended to suggest that God's influence on them is anything less than the greatest that can be conceived, what's its point? What is the alternative to persuasion that stressing it is intended to exclude? One can answer, of course, "coercion." But if this answer is taken to imply that God's influence on, or power over, the creatures is anything less than the maximally conceivable, Hartshorne's point in contrasting "persuasion" with "coercion" is clearly misunderstood. What *he* has in mind in drawing this contrast is well indicated by the following passage, in which he contrasts the laws of nature that are "true 'acts of God'" with human laws. "Unlike human laws," he says, "the cosmic or divine laws or regularities are not maintained by sanctions, threatened punishments for deviations. Punishments are our poor human substitutes for the ideal means of making laws effective. God *persuades* the creatures to accept the laws as patterns for their behaviour. He makes certain patterns attractive to them. . . . God charms the creatures. If you like, this is irresistible grace" ("*God and Nature*": 58).

To take what Hartshorne says here seriously is to realize that, as he uses it, "coercion" stands, not for a greater power over others than "persuasion," but for a lesser—a "poor substitute" for the ideal way of moving others by moving oneself, by so responding to their actions that, up

to a certain point, at least, they cannot fail to respond in return (cf. *DR*: 141 f.; 127).

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