

Hartshorne argues that "philosophy's most important function . . . is to clarify the religious question. Science and practical common sense almost take care of themselves, but in facing life, death, and the everlasting, the first and last or strictly cosmic things, man is in great danger of fanatical faith, on the one hand, and cynical despair, on the other. He needs to think about these topics as wisely as he can, and to do this he must cooperate with others, whatever their beliefs, in mutual criticism. This free mutual criticism is the central task of philosophy" (AD: 24).

This argument evidently closely parallels the one Hartshorne develops elsewhere on the basis of Bergson's analysis of the sources of religion. According to this second argument, "when and if reflection goes so far as to attempt the resolute analysis of myth, any merely negative or destructive outcome of such analysis must reinstate the original need for the counterbalance to egoism and despair which the myth furnished. There will then either be a new upsurge of myth, or the group or species will decay and destroy itself. The only way to avoid this destruction, other than by myth, is by a positive metaphysics. For the difficulties to which religion is the counterbalance are metaphysical difficulties. . . . Physical power over nature has not removed the basic uncertainty of our projected accomplishments, and their foredoomed at least partial failure. . . . [A]s men control more and more of nature, they more and more take to themselves that frightening power over men which formerly belonged in good part to the nonhuman. . . . Great is science, and to me it is even one of the clearest expressions of man's spirituality, his freedom, and love; but the metaphysical aspects of life which religion expresses are only implicit in natural and social science. *The choice is not between myth and science, but myth and metaphysics*" ("Hartshorne on Religion and Metaphysics").

There are, of course, certain notable differences between these two lines of reasoning. In the first, there is no mention of "egoism" alongside of "despair," or "cynical despair," as the danger that threatens when reason demythologizes myth and thus escapes the opposite danger of "fanatical faith," or what Hartshorne speaks of somewhat more extensively in the larger context of the second argument as "a purely irrational, mythical, or merely private and intuitive, or merely sectarian and dogmatic, mode of satisfying

the metaphysical curiosity and anxiety." Or, again, while the first argument is concerned with the relation between *philosophy* and religion, the second is concerned with the relation between *metaphysics* and religion. But notwithstanding these and other differences, the two arguments alike serve to make the important point that, because religion has functioned to meet a human need not otherwise met or meetable by either practical common sense or science, philosophy/metaphysics has an abiding urgency even in the post-religious, or post-mythical, phase of human history.

I should prefer to make this same point, however, in somewhat different terms. Instead of speaking of the "*religious* question" and "the *metaphysical* aspects of life which religion expresses," "*the metaphysical* curiosity and anxiety," etc., I should speak of the "*existential* question" and of "the *existential* aspects of life," etc. Religion, properly understood, is the primary form of culture in which the existential question is explicitly asked and answered. This existential question is the question about the ultimate meaning of human life, or about the meaning of ultimate reality for us as human beings. As such, it presupposes that there is such a(n ultimate) meaning, and it perforce has both a metaphysical and a moral aspect, in that it asks at one and the same time about the ultimate reality of our own existence—which is to say, ourselves, others, and the whole—and about how we should understand ourselves and lead our lives accordingly. But the metaphysical aspect of the properly existential question is one thing, the properly metaphysical question, something else; and this is so even though the two questions are closely related. Whereas the first asks more concretely about the meaning of ultimate reality for us, the second asks more abstractly about the structure of ultimate reality in itself. In other words, the aspects of life that religion expresses are its "existential aspects," and they may be said to be "metaphysical" only in that the question about their structure in themselves, as distinct from their meaning for us, is the proper question of metaphysics.

As for philosophy, it, too, is addressed to the existential question to which religion is addressed, albeit as a secondary, rather than as a primary form of culture. ("Philosophy," Whitehead says, "is a secondary activity. It meditates on this variety of [sc. cultural] expression.") For this reason, there is

a point in Hartshorne's saying that philosophy's "most important function" is to clarify "the religious question," since religion itself is addressed to the existential question. But considering that the "variety of expression" on which philosophy mediates is hardly exhausted by religion but encompasses the whole of human culture, it seems more appropriate to say that philosophy's most important function is to clarify the *existential* question. In performing this function, naturally, philosophy, also, has a metaphysical as well as a moral aspect—or, if you will, includes metaphysics as well as ethics.

By a "positive metaphysics," I understand Hartshorne to mean a position that itself makes the basic supposition of the existential question, that life has an ultimate meaning, or that ultimate reality has a meaning for us, in that there is a way of understanding it, and therewith of understanding oneself, that is authentic because it is appropriate to, or authorized by, ultimate reality itself. A "negative metaphysics," by contrast, would either question or deny this basic supposition. Consequently, it would be unable to meet the need that religion and, in its way, philosophy exist to meet.

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