

In reading "The Formal Validity and Real Significance of the Ontological Argument," I'm struck by Hartshorne's use of such basic terms as "real," "actual," "possible," etc.

He uses "reality" in such a way as to make the notion of a "mode [or modus] of reality" an intelligible notion. Moreover, he seems to assume that there are two, and, in the nature of the case, only two, modes (or modi) of reality: "the modus of actuality" and "the minimal mode, and the only [sic] alternative to actual existence," namely, "real, ontological potentiality" (226). Therefore, if an idea is coherent and not sheer nonsense, it is the idea of something that is either actual or potential (= possible). Thus the idea of God, assuming that it is neither incoherent nor nonsensical, has to refer to something either actual or potential. Since God cannot be coherently conceived to be an unactualized potentiality, the idea of God can refer only to an actuality. Two passages confirm this use of terms: In one of them Hartshorne argues that if we find the meaning of an idea to be coherent, "we shall therewith have found what, if anything, can be meant by its potentiality; or, if nothing can be meant by this, then we shall have found as its required referent an [sic] actuality" (244). In the other passage, he concludes, "on the whole we must probably choose between the incoherence of all definitions of perfect being, and the actuality [sic] of the referent of some one of them" (245).

I'm struck by this usage because in later writings, if I'm not mistaken, Hartshorne declines to speak of the necessary as actual. Qua necessary, it is, indeed, real, but, since it never has been, nor ever could be, actualized, it could never be, properly, actual.

Thus he says: "God-as-such is not an actuality, but yet it exists [necessarily], by virtue of some suitable actuality or other." Or, again: "Not that everything is either actual or potential: the ultimate universals or the categories, and the essence of God, are eternally real but in themselves never can be actual. This is because

they are the common factors of all possibility, abstract elements of being in all becoming. . . . Actual means determinate, potential means more or less indeterminate: definiteness is 'the soul of actuality' (Whitehead) and the reason for its superior value" ("The Divine Relativity and Absoluteness: A Reply": 44, 56 f.). Or, still again, "even perfect knowledge must distinguish between the actual, the possible, and the necessary. Modal conceptions are irreducible" ("Real Possibility": 593). In other words, there are not two, but three, modes or modi of reality: the actual, the possible, and the necessary.

Here, however, he uses "actuality" sufficiently broadly to include both actualized potentialities (or possibilities) and necessity. Thus he can say: "necessity means this double truth: the ultimate identity in the world process is actually [sic] there (for it is an aspect of the process), and further, it is meaningless to think of it as not there, as not actual [sic], for 'there' or 'actual' only means 'in the identical process.' How can the nonbeing of the factor which makes alternatives possible be one of the alternatives? Potentiality, whether of existence or of nonexistence, is the protean character of the ultimate cosmos, and therefore this character has no potentiality of existing or of not existing, but simply exists, without benefit of potentiality, that is, necessarily—which only means, without possibility of nonexistence" (240 f.).

The question I need to consider is which of these two ways of speaking is preferable.