

Wherein is the essential contradiction involved in metaphysical error?

According to Coreth, the essential contradiction involved in metaphysical error is that between the manifest meaning or content of the erroneous metaphysical judgment and the latent (nonthematic) meaning or content necessarily presupposed by the act of judging itself as its transcendental condition of possibility.

Hartshorne's view, although different, is in important respects the same. "Metaphysical judgments," he says, "are a priori, though not formally analytic. To deny them is to utter no formal non-sense. Yet it is to utter non-sense, to contradict the intuitive content of one's idea." Thus "metaphysically erroneous beliefs are not, except verbally, conceivable. . . . [T]he most general conceptions can never be wholly inaccessible, and we must be able to judge, with whatever difficulty and danger, when we are using them in accordance with the meaning which experience, imaginatively varied, is able to give them, and when we are contradicting that meaning and talking non-sense, even though with good syntax. . . . [What is in question is] contradiction of what is and must be conceived concerning some general feature of experience" ("Anthropomorphic Tendencies in Positivism": 199 f.).

As for the difference of Hartshorne's view from Coreth's, the contradiction to which Hartshorne points is not merely "performative" but also—to use a term he uses elsewhere—"semantic." Thus while both thinkers rely on something like Passmore's distinction between "pragmatic" and "absolute" self-refutation, Hartshorne's view is the more subtle in distinguishing between two species of the second, i.e., "semantic" as well as "syntactic."

Hartshorne's view also closely converges with Coreth's in arguing that a properly metaphysical contradiction is involved in denying that human beings can attain to metaphysical knowledge of what is "really universal." Why? Because "'really universal' is itself a human concept, and cannot be used to demonstrate the necessarily nonuniversal character of human conceptions. To

say that things may exist which do not correspond to our idea of existence (as entering into this assertion) is to contradict oneself" ("Metaphysics for Positivists": 290). Furthermore—or, perhaps, as an aspect of the same notion—it is contradictory or meaningless to say that "non-human things possess characters that are quite outside the system of variability which experience itself discloses"; for "'characters,' or any other general concept can be defined only by reference to the system spoken of" (302).

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