

What is the difference between "bad and good metaphysics"?

If "bad or unsuccessful metaphysics" is "metaphysics which fails of its highest aim," then presumably good or successful metaphysics is metaphysics that realizes its highest aim. What makes for failure and success in realizing this aim is indicated by the commonsense distinctions between "one-sided" or "unbalanced," on the one hand, and "well-balanced," on the other; or by "exaggerated" or "extreme," on the one hand, and "properly qualified" or "the golden mean," "the higher synthesis," i.e., "the unity of contraries," on the other. This presupposes, one assumes, that "[m]etaphysical affirmations seek to put into conscious conceptual form whatever is common to, or true of, all conceivable occurrences"; and that "[m]etaphysics is the attempt to characterize this [common] element [of all possibility]"—in short, that the "highest aim" of metaphysics is to express, on "a different level of conscious explicitness," "the higher synthesis" that is "simply ordinary good sense" (*WsM*: 63 f., 65 f.).

This means, among other things, (1) that good or successful metaphysics (Hartshorne actually speaks of "successful or true metaphysics"!) "expresses no illusion but a necessary or a priori truth, not in particular about 'the world,' but about reality as such, about any and all [not 'possible worlds,' but] possibilities or conceivabilities for worlds or thinkable states of affairs"; and (2) "that belief in this necessary truth does not satisfy any particular wish" or "counter any particular fear," but rather affirms "common factors relevant to all possible wishes and all possible remedies for fear, against no matter what" (63 f.). Elsewhere Hartshorne says: "Good metaphysics means one that avoids the extremism that is the mark of error in philosophy and in life" (5). "[B]ad metaphysics [is illustrated by] one-sided extremes of a sort which few major speculative philosophers during the last century and a half have wished to defend" (68). "[W]e must allow for a distinction between good and bad, or balanced and unbalanced, metaphysics" (71).

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