

There appears to have been, from very early times—as early, possibly, as Parmenides—a certain confusion in the minds of philosophers about just what metaphysics is. On the one hand, it is about the ultimate, real nature of things, as distinct from how they appear to be. On the other hand, its propositions are not true merely contingently but necessarily and may even pretend to a "unique kind of certainty," and to be "exempt from intellectual challenge." Thus they are neither exactly a priori, having the empty, noninformative certainty of logical statements, nor exactly a posteriori, having the merely empirical certainty of statements of fact. It is a fair question, indeed, whether even Whitehead, for one, doesn't still show certain signs of this venerable confusion—as when he can say on one page, for example, that "there is no meaning to 'creativity' apart from its 'creatures,' and no meaning to 'God' apart from the 'creativity' and the 'temporal creatures,' and no meaning to the 'temporal creatures' apart from 'creativity' and 'God,'" only to say, a few pages later, that "the oneness of the universe, and the oneness of each element in the universe repeat themselves to the crack of doom in the creative advance from creature to creature" (*PRc*: 225, 228).

Hartshorne, on the other hand, has worked especially hard at clarifying the distinctive character of metaphysics so as to avoid confusing it with science and empirical knowledge generally. Employing, in effect, Leibniz's distinction between "truths of fact (*vérités de fait*)" and "truths of reason (*vérités de raison*)," he has explained how the second include, in addition to the merely analytic, tautological truths of logic and mathematics, which are only conditionally necessary, certain other truths that, being necessary unconditionally, are also existential to the first power, which is to say, are about concrete reality. Although they are not, strictly speaking, factual truths, they are like factual truths in referring to the real and being measured by it, as it is disclosed through experience. More exactly, they refer to the real as it is disclosed through the properly existential aspect of experience, as distinct from its other, properly empirical aspect—"existential" here meaning existential to the second power, in that the concrete reality referred to is the threefold ultimate reality of ourselves, others, and the whole.

Of a piece with this analysis is a theory of modality sharply different from the currently popular view that it is *de dictu*, but not *de re*—a matter entirely of our language and of the rules governing our speaking and writing. As Hartshorne views it, on the contrary, modality is not thus merely grammatical or logical, but also, and in the first instance, *ontological*. Its modes are, first of all, modes of time or process—that being necessary which is eternal and so real at any time, that being contingent which is temporal and so real, actually or possibly, only at or during some particular time. Thus the necessary, on this theory, is "the least common denominator" of "pure possibility," or the set of all possibilities simply as such—or, as can also be said, the necessary is what is bound to obtain no matter what possibility is or is not actualized. Metaphysics in the strict sense, then, may be defined simply as the theory of the necessary so understood. Alternatively, it may be defined as the theory of concreteness, "concreteness" designating the utterly abstract, "transcendental" property belonging to anything concretely real. As such, of course, metaphysics is also definable as the theory of abstractness, "concreteness" itself being an abstraction that both implies and is implied by all other abstractions comparably (i.e., utterly) abstract, including "abstractness."

Also of a piece with this clarification of metaphysics and its unique logical differences from all of the other compartments of human knowledge is Hartshorne's threefold distinction between "essence," "existence," and "actuality." In his view, the seemingly intractable controversy about metaphysics, its possibility and necessity, is almost certainly due, in large part, to failing to make this distinction—specifically, between "existence" and "actuality." An essence may be said to exist if it is actualized *somehow*, the particular *how* of its actualization being undetermined. But, then, properties may be said to exist if they are *somehow* instantiated, the particular *how* of their instantiation being, again, unspecified. In the case of properties, however, that can be instantiated only universally, no matter what possibilities are or are not actualized, the class of things instantiating them cannot be an empty class. Although any particular member of the class is and must be contingent, that there is at least *some* such member is not contingent but necessary. With all this in mind, metaphysics may also be defined as having to do with, or as making explicit, properties of (contingently existing members of) classes that

are necessarily nonempty and that therefore exist *somehow*, as the properties of *something*, no matter what. Withal metaphysics does not, and cannot, say anything whatever about just what possibilities are or are not actualized. Just as knowing there are secrets need not make one privy to any of them, so knowing that all utterly abstract and universal properties cannot fail to be instantiated *somehow* need not include knowing just *how* they happen to be instantiated. It follows from this, however, that the existence of x may be necessary, even though the actuality of x , like that of any other value of the variable, can only be contingent.