

Whitehead and Hartshorne both, in their ways, say that “civilized living” precedes philosophy. But if what they say is true, in what sense is it true? In what sense are we to understand “civilized living”?

My suggestion is that, on the scale constituted by Whitehead’s threefold distinction between living, living well, and living better, “civilized living” is a matter of living well, or, possibly, living better, allowing that “better” is a comparative and, as such, a matter of less or more. But what does it mean for a human being to live well, or better, except for her or him to live in terms of “general ideas,” i.e., according to principles or norms the whole purpose of which is to define “the good life.”

In other words, “civilized living” is, minimally, living understandingly, in accordance with such fundamental norms as truth, goodness, and beauty, and, maximally, living in accordance with these same fundamental norms after they have been understood critically.

But, of course, it is precisely “civilized living” in this sense that provides the abstractions of which philosophy, as such, is the criticism. In this sense, “civilized living” precedes philosophy, which is, as Whitehead puts it, “a secondary activity.”

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