

Metaphysics As Method In Charles Hartshorne's Thought

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I

This essay represents an effort to set forth in a comprehensive fashion the nature of metaphysics as method and the logical character of its concepts as these are displayed in the thought of Charles Hartshorne. Hartshorne is perhaps most well known for his persistent efforts to press for the re-assessment of the ontological argument for the existence of God,¹ and perhaps less well known for his efforts to formulate a "di-polar" theism upon the premises of what he terms a "neo-classical" metaphysics.² Both types of enterprise, however, are instances of rational construction that are metaphysical in character; and the success or failure of Hartshorne's efforts in either case cannot be judged adequately apart from a consideration of the view of metaphysics as method (meta-metaphysics) which they presuppose. For example, Hartshorne is careful not to claim overly-much for the ontological argument, and in fact he asserts that all theistic arguments are a priori.³ The premises of such arguments derive from a larger meta-

physical view (system) in terms of which the premises must be judged. In turn, the premises comprise the meaning of the term "God." It can be argued that the ontological argument does not so much intend to prove the existence of God to disinterested reasons as to explore the consistency and coherence of that conception of God which is built into the premises.⁴ In any case, the important logical point in the critique of the ontological "proof" is that this critique must consist of not only the formal analysis of the pattern of inference taking into account all the premises, but also the evaluation of grounds for accepting or rejecting any or all of the premises.⁵ When this distinction is observed, the metaphysical character of the theistic issue is disclosed, for the criteria of this evalua-

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¹ Hartshorne, Charles: *Anselm's Discovery: A Re-examination of the Ontological Proof for God's Existence* (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1965); and *The Logic of Perfection and Other Essays in Neo-classical Metaphysics* (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1962).

² The most comprehensive statements are found in Charles Hartshorne, *Man's Vision of God: And the Logic of Theism* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941); *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964); *Reality as Social Process: Studies in Metaphysics and Religion* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1953); *A Natural Theology for Our Time* (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1967).

³ *Anselm's Discovery*, p. 135; and Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese, *Philosophers Speak of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 14.

⁴ I.e., the argument is a formal way of testing the consistency of the "meaning postulates" of theism.

⁵ This distinction is disclosed, for example, in Hartshorne's recognition that the ontological argument cannot refute positivism, though he insists that it refutes atheism.