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God as the Most and Best Moved Mover: Hartshorne's Importance for Philosophical Theology

DONALD WAYNE VINEX

IN FEBRUARY 1981, the American philosopher-ornithologist Charles Hartshorne (1897-2000) visited the University of Oklahoma where I was a graduate student. In the school paper his book, *The Divine Relativity*, was referred to as "The Divine Reality." Hartshorne remarked, "Any number of authors have talked about the divine reality. How many have seriously considered the divine relativity?" I do not recall my response, but the correct answer is that, prior to the twentieth century, few thinkers seriously considered the divine relativity, and those who did were largely ignored. According to traditional metaphysics, what it means to be *divine* is to be the creator that is, in *all respects*, beyond time, change, finitude, and contingency. In addition, God is unaffected by the world; this is the central meaning of impassibility, a word whose Latin roots mean "lack of suffering" (Creel, 11). This theory, which Hartshorne calls classical theism, can be summed up in a word: Absolute. To be "the Absolute" is to be the eternal, immutable, infinite, necessary, and impassible creator. According to this theory—construed alternately by its adherents as about the divine nature or as a theory about appropriate language to use about God—the phrase, "divine relativity" is a contradiction in terms.

For over a thousand years, classical theism was at once the default position of anyone claiming to be orthodox as well as the target of anyone wishing to question the existence of God. Alternatives to classical theism were belittled—by theists and

their critics—as unworthy of attention, for any concept of God diverging from classical theism was regarded as less than genuinely theistic. As Daniel Dombrowski says, "very often atheists and agnostics assume without argument that classical theism just is theism" (1996, 11). This results in the spectacle of otherwise intelligent people arguing from false alternatives. Happily, classical theism increasingly finds itself on the defensive as there is growing knowledge of and widespread sympathy for the idea of a creator that is, to a greater or lesser extent, affected by the creatures. The later writings of the English philosopher-mathematician Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) were the initial impetus and guiding inspiration for this change. Arguably, however, Hartshorne's life work, which is indebted to Whitehead, was the single most important factor in dissolving the consensus that an entirely absolute deity should be considered normative for theology.

Hartshorne observed that, "We have a population that inclines, in the majority, to be religious, but that shies away from any attempt at rational discussion of religious issues" (1984, 13-14). He maintained that there is progress in philosophy of religion but newspapers, and often even periodicals of general interest, don't report it (1997, 73). The object of this essay is to redress these grievances by exploring the seismic shift in theological thinking and the arguments that support it. Beginning with an explanation of classical theism, we shall see its tensions with some of the dominant ideas about God in Scripture. The theological appropriation of certain aspects of Greek philosophy was instrumental in creating these tensions. Thus, Hartshorne's criticisms encourage a reassessment of the biblical witness as well as a fresh look at Greek thinking. The final section of the essay outlines central elements of Hartshorne's constructive proposals for philosophical theology. This article is an exercise in Western and near-Eastern intellectual history. Far Eastern versions of theism were equally dominated by the absolutistic bias, but the situation is complicated and deserves separate treatment.

The Elements of Classical Theism

Classical theism is an ingenious synthesis of Western monotheistic traditions and certain Greek philosophical ideas about perfection. From Jewish monotheism, it embraced the concept of God as the creator of the universe. Gerhard May (1994) demonstrates that, early in the history of the Christian church, the opening lines of Genesis were interpreted to mean that God creates the universe *ex nihilo*, that is to say, from no pre-existing material. The fact that this is one, but not the only, interpretation of the Genesis poetry should not be finessed. The idea of creation *ex nihilo* was first developed in the second century of the common era by Theophilus of Antioch (also the first to use the word "Trinity") and Irenaeus of Lyon to counter Greek ideas about the primordial reality of chaotic matter and Gnostic ideas that matter is evil. By the third century, creation *ex nihilo* was taken for granted in most Christian circles, but it was not accepted in Judaism until much later in the middle ages.

Creation *ex nihilo* fits neatly with the ideas that God's creative act and God's knowledge of the world are non-temporal. In the fifth century, Augustine argued in his *Confessions* (bk 9, chs 13 and 14) that it is nonsensical to ask what God was doing before the creation of the world. God, in creating the universe, brings time—and with it, relations of before and after—into existence; thus, it is no more meaningful to ask what came *before* the first moment of time than it is to ask what is north of the north pole. Interestingly, these ideas about the nature of time are contrary to the view of Newton, but they anticipate modern scientific theories, from Leibniz to Einstein. Augustine, however, goes beyond a strictly scientific analysis when he attributes to deity a non-temporal perspective on the universe. Space and time are spread out before God who sees them in their entirety from an eternal vantage point, like an observer on a hill overlooking travelers in a caravan. As Boethius said in the sixth century in *The Consolation of Philosophy* (bk 5, prose 6), eternity is the com-

plete, simultaneous, and perfect possession of everlasting life. For classical theism, therefore, the opening phrase of Genesis, which speaks of God's creative act in the past tense, is a metaphor expressing the idea that God creates (not created) the entire space-time universe in eternity.

Because classical theism holds God's creative act to be eternal it is a mistake to identify creation *ex nihilo* with the idea that the universe had a first temporal moment, as though God lit the fuse of the Big Bang (to use modern metaphors). The conflation of these ideas is all too common in contemporary discussions of science and theology. To his credit, Thomas Aquinas, in the thirteenth century, was not guilty of this confusion. He treats separately the questions whether God is the creator and whether the universe had a beginning. He believed that it is possible to prove, by philosophical argument, that God creates the universe *ex nihilo*. Unlike his contemporary, Bonaventure, Aquinas denied that there could be a proof that the universe is temporally finite—this doctrine Aquinas accepted on faith alone (Kovach, 164). Like many other classical theists (Leibniz, for example) Aquinas held that God could create a temporally infinite universe, but it too would be created *ex nihilo*. Because creation *ex nihilo* is unlike ordinary forms of creation Aquinas says in *Summa Theologica* (bk I, question 45, article 5) that in the proper sense of the word, only God creates.

Creation *ex nihilo* complements the idea that the relations between God and the world are one-way relations. God creates, but the creatures lack all creative power, the one *wholly* uncreated, the others *wholly* uncreative. Aquinas's way of expressing this asymmetry in *Summa Theologica* (I, Q 13, a 7) is to say that the relation from God to the creatures is *real* (for it makes all the difference to them) whereas the relation from the creatures to God is *rational*, or in the mind only (for the existence and activity of the creatures makes no difference to the being of God). Aquinas baptized, for Christian purposes, Aristotle's terms, "pure act" and "unmoved mover" (see Aristotle's *Physics*, bk 8, ch 10, and *Metaphysics*, bk 12,

chs 6-8). For Aquinas, God is pure act in the sense of being the unlimited (infinite) activity of existing. This entails that anything God could be, God already is—there is no potentiality in God for any type of change or contingency (immutability, necessity). To say that God is the unmoved mover is to say that the divine moves others but is unmoved by another (impassibility).

A favorite image for God's relation to the world that was used throughout the medieval period is the wheel and its spokes. According to Boethius and Aquinas, moments of time are equally present to God in a way analogous to the way points on a circle's edge are equidistant from the center (*Consolation*, bk 5, prose 6; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, bk I, ch 66, para 7). In the twelfth century, Hildegard of Bingen gave exact poetic voice to classical theism (quoted in Craine, 133):

You, all-accomplishing Word of the Father,
Are the light of primordial daybreak over the spheres.
You, the foreknowing mind of divinity,
foresaw all your works as you willed them,
your prescience hidden in the heart of your power,
your power like a wheel around the world,
whose circling never began and never slides to an end.

Hildegard clearly sees the asymmetry in classical theism. The "spokes" point outward toward the world (real relations); none point inward toward God (rational relations). God's very knowledge, unlike ordinary knowledge, is causative "your prescience hidden in the heart of your power." As Aquinas later says in *Summa Theologica* (I, Q 14, a 8), God knows the world because God is its premier cause.

The Anomaly of Classical Theism

The "Absolute" of classical theism leaves no room for a doctrine of divine relativity, but in retrospect it is surprising that philosophers did not explore this idea. Any Jewish or Christian theology must do justice to the Hebrew Scriptures. Yet, they portray God in strikingly anthropomorphic terms as a person encountered in history. The biblical God is one that

grieves and repents (Gen 6.6 I; Sam 15.11, 35); one that can be bargained with and cajoled (Gen 18.22-33; Ex 32.11-14); one that answers heartfelt prayers and listens patiently to complaint (2 Kings 20; Jon 4); one that gathers Israel like a hen takes chicks under its wings (2 Esd 1.30); one that promises not to remember human sins (Isa 43.25); one that recoils from anger because of compassion (Hos 11.8-9); and one that, though sovereign over the entire creation, is mindful of and cares for human beings (Ps 8). In the words of Jonah and Joel, God is "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing" (Jon 4.2; Joel 2.13). John Sanders notes that this formula adds to the summary of the divine nature given in Exodus 34.5-7 that God is prepared to repent (Sanders, 78).

A deity that changes its mind and feels compassion for the creatures cannot be correctly described as *wholly* immutable, impassible, and lacking in contingency. Christianity only makes it more difficult to accept God as "the absolute." Its central doctrine is that Jesus of Nazareth is the incarnation of the God of the Hebrew Scriptures. The analogy suggested by John is that Jesus is to God as the spoken word is to the thought it expresses (Jn 1.1). Like the Jewish God, Jesus does not simply act upon others but *interacts* with them, as with the Cananite woman (Mt 15.22-28). He is affected by their suffering as when he grieves for Mary's loss of Lazarus (Jn 11.33-35). He laments the stubbornness and cruelty of God's people (Mt 23.27; Lk 13.34, cf. 2 Esd 1.30). He suffers a horrible death but forgives his executioners (Lk 23.34). If in Jesus one sees the divine character, it is not a *wholly* immutable and impassible God that one sees.

It is true that the biblical authors occasionally speak of God's changelessness (Num 23.19; 1 Sam 15.29; Mal 3.6; Jas 1.17). The passage in Sammel is particularly interesting since it is sandwiched between references to God's regretting having made Saul king (verses 11 and 35). To understand the changelessness of God one arguably needs no more than the ideas of deathlessness and trustworthiness, in which case, the

doctrine of complete immutability is unnecessary. From the earliest pages of Scripture God is referred to as the Everlasting God (Gen 21.33); that is to say, God cannot be born and cannot die. God's reliability in keeping promises is also a recurring theme (Ps 105.8). The passage in Numbers, a favorite proof-text for absolute immutability, is *explicitly* concerned with God's trustworthiness in keeping promises. If God is immutable in the sense of being deathless and trustworthy, it does not follow that God is immutable *in all respects* as classical theism requires.

It was not the Bible that led theologians to think of God as lacking all relativity. It was, rather, the Bible as read through the lens of *some aspects* of Greek philosophy. In one of his early moods, in the *Republic* (bk 2, 380e-381c), Plato argues that perfection excludes change—this, because change for the better implies a striving for perfection and change for the worse implies imperfection. As already noted, the ideas of the unmoved mover and the God of pure act are not in the Bible, but in Aristotle. It is not surprising, therefore, that theologians found the most persuasive case for divine immutability in Plato and Aristotle. They could throw in, for good measure, the handful of Bible verses that speak of God's changelessness (see *Summa Contra Gentiles*, ch 13 and 14.4 and John Calvin's *Institutes*, 1.17.12-13). Calvin characterized the Bible's anthropomorphism as a nurse hisping to a child (*Institutes*, 1.13). Thus, he viewed talk of God's repenting as an accommodation to human limitations, a kind of baby talk that God uses in revealing the divine nature to the frail human intellect.

Interestingly, some of the early church fathers, prior to Augustine, came closest to breaking with the dominant strand of Hellenistic thinking that pictures God as lacking all relativity (Sanders, 142-47). Their efforts, however, were inconsistent. For instance, Origen held that God the Father experiences emotions but is passionless. Gregory, a student of Origen, engaging in deliberate paradox, argued that Christ suffers without suffering. Another example: Arians held that

God the Son (Christ) suffered, but he was not fully divine; for Athanasius, a foe of the Arians, Christ suffered according to his humanity, but not according to his divinity (Gutenson, 234-38). Thus, whatever issues divided the fathers, the vast majority of them stopped short of unequivocally ascribing suffering to God since this would compromise complete divine immutability. It is ironic that Hartshorne, a philosopher who claimed no special commitment to Christianity, can more clearly affirm biblical statements about God's dynamic relations with the creatures than can classical theists. Perhaps, after all, this is not surprising since he identified "God is love," and the idea of God as worthy of being loved with one's entire being, as his "ultimate intuitive clue[s] in philosophy" (Hahn, 700).

The Antinomies of Classical Theism

Hartshorne argues that the denial of real relations in God leads to incoherence. According to classical theism, God perfectly knows a contingent and changing world, yet God is *wholly* necessary in the sense that nothing in God could be other than it is. The one condition, however, contradicts the other (Hartshorne 1948, 13-14; Shields 1983). If any event is contingent then it could be otherwise—for example, this bird at this place and time is singing rather than sleeping. If the event could be otherwise, then God's knowledge of the event could be otherwise—God knowing this bird at this place and time as singing rather than as sleeping. The contingency is not that God might have been ignorant of something but that what God knows might have been different. An infallible knower knows whatever exists; it does not follow, however, that what exists is necessary unless one adds the premise, taken from classical theism, that nothing in God could be other than it is. Hartshorne jettisons the premise that there is nothing contingent in God. The only other non-atheistic alternatives, says Hartshorne, are to follow Aristotle and deny that God knows the world or to follow Spinoza and deny that nothing in God or in the world could be other than it is (1976,

12). What is impossible is a God with no contingent aspects knowing a contingent world.

Classical theism also has paradoxical consequences for the concept of divine goodness. If God is impassible, then God is not moved by the suffering of the creatures. In the eleventh century, Anselm asked, in *Proslogion* (chapter 8), how God can be compassionate towards creatures without feeling sympathy for them. His answer is that the creatures feel the effects of divine compassion but that God feels nothing—but this leaves unanswered how non-sympathetic compassion is possible. Aquinas provides a more straightforward reply in *Summa Theologica* (I, Q 20, a 2). He says that to love another is to will the good of the other; God necessarily wills the good of the other, so God is love. But is pure beneficence that includes no felt sensitivity to the feelings of the beloved the highest form of love? Hartshorne points out that this sort of God can give us “everything except the right to believe that there is one who, with infinitely subtle and appropriate sensitivity, rejoices in all our joys and sorrows in all our sorrows” (1948, 54). Interestingly, Hartshorne’s criticism suggests not only a different quality of divine love, but a greater degree of knowledge—God knowing *that* others feel and *how* they feel.

Closely related to the problem of passionless love is the question of the world’s value. The denial of real relations in God, coupled with the concept that the world and its creatures have no value except as it is borrowed from God, implies that the total reality of *God-and-the-world* contains no more value than *God-without-the-world*. This view has two unhappy consequences. First, there is no value in God creating the world; nothing is gained or lost in God’s decision to create. Second, there is no value in God’s interaction with the creatures. Hartshorne points out that these ideas do not square with analogies drawn from experience. One cannot love another unless the other exists, or once existed. Thus, if there is a value in love, it requires *the existence of the other*, not merely *the idea of the existence of the other*. Hartshorne rejects the counter-intuitive claim that the world as actually

existing has no more value than the world as possibly existing. By partly of reasoning, he rejects the view that it is no better for God to create the world than to contemplate the possibility of creating it.

Perhaps the most disastrous consequences of classical theism, as far as Hartshorne is concerned, are the problems that it poses for human freedom and creaturely suffering. Creative or causal relations flow one way only, *from God to the world*. The world and its creatures are products of a unilateral divine decision that things should be one way rather than another. Hartshorne poses a dilemma for this view. Either biological parents are part creators of their children or they are not. If they are then God alone is not the creator. On the other hand, if parents are not genuine creators of their children then the creatures never create anything and we don’t know what “to create” means, for parents having children would seem to be a paradigm of creation (Hartshorne 1987, 88-89). Classical theists accept the implication that Hartshorne finds absurd, namely, that the creatures never create anything. Aquinas holds that one’s parents are not creative; they are the vehicles whereby matter-energy is rearranged so as to form (not to create) a new human being. Strictly speaking, for Aquinas, what God creates is *your-parents-having-you*. Your parents had no part in your creation.

Aquinas’s theory seems to jeopardize human freedom. The reality described by *your-parents-having-you* includes the decisions they make in having you. God, in creating that reality, also creates those decisions. In Aquinas’s view, one’s free decisions have *two* sufficient explanations, one’s own will and God’s will. In other words, God not only brings it about *that* one freely decides something, but *what* one freely decides (*Summa Theologica* I, Q 19, a 8). Hartshorne counters that, “Risk and opportunity go together, not because God chooses to have it so, but because opportunity without risk is meaningless or contradictory” (1970, 238). If this is true, then it must be possible for the will of the creatures to be at cross purposes with the divine will. Human beings, however, do

not always will their own good, or the good of other people. In those cases, on the classical view, God brings it about that people freely decide not to will the good of others. It follows that the crimes that disfigure human history are the fault of human beings, but they are also God's doing. Hartshorne replies that this makes God responsible for evil and suffering thereby contradicting divine goodness.

Classical theists are not without responses to these criticisms. One well-known reply, used by Augustine and Aquinas, is that God does not cause human wickedness and suffering, but permits them to bring about a greater good. For example, the Exultet of the Easter Vigil, sometimes ascribed to Ambrose of Milan, speaks of the blessed fault (*felix culpa*) of the Fall from Paradise that made possible the sacrificial death of Christ. Hartshorne argues that if God creates the universe *ex nihilo*, divine causation and permission come to the same thing, for whatever is "permitted" is also created to be as it is—one of the few points on which Hartshorne agrees with Calvin (Case-Winters, 71). For Hartshorne, the idea that God allows human decisions to occur which conflict with the divine purpose is no more meaningful than saying that God risks losing in a game of chance but loads the dice to insure the win. Albert Einstein wrote that "the Old One" does not play dice with the universe (quoted in Clark, 340). Although Einstein was not a classical theist, his view on *this* issue parallels that philosophy. Hartshorne calls this "a great man's error" because "human individuals are some of the dice" and no individual, not even God, can unilaterally control the free decisions of another (1967, 113).

The Divine Relativity

Hartshorne attempts to avoid the problems of classical theism by reverting to a suggestion in one of Plato's later dialogues, the *Sophist* (247e), that every real being has the power to act and to be acted upon (Plato says real beings have the power to act *or* be acted upon). Reality, on Hartshorne's view, is *social*, in the sense that it is necessarily composed of many

beings in interaction with each other. This includes deity; hence, the subtitle of *The Divine Relativity* is "a social conception of God." In Hartshorne's metaphysics, God is the supreme, but not the sole, creative power. Furthermore, non-divine creativity is not limited to the human but includes every "dynamic singular" in nature, down to its most elementary constituents. Hartshorne, following Whitehead, considers this metaphysical hypothesis more in keeping with science which reveals nature as a fertile milieu from which emerge, in a cumulative process of evolution, novel forms of matter, life, and sentence. The apparently inactive bits of matter revealed to the unaided senses are at best a camouflage for the restless fecundity of nature.

According to Hartshorne, creativity, in its most generic sense, means unpredictable "*additions to the definiteness of reality*," conditioned by, but not fully determined by, past causal conditions. He explains, "Every effect is in some degree, however slight, an 'emergent whole'" (1970, 3). Implicit in this concept of creativity is the denial of both creation *ex nihilo* and the mechanical philosophy of early modern scientists. Creation *ex nihilo* is rejected in the idea that *every* "emergent whole" is causally conditioned—none are brought into being "out of nothing." Unqualified determinism is rejected in the idea that *no* "emergent whole" is fully prefigured in its causal conditions. The traditional analogy was that effects are related to causes as a set of premises is related to a conclusion in a sound deductive argument (often with God providing all of the "premises"). Hartshorne makes a striking reversal of this analogy, "On the contrary, each event is primarily a new premise for old conclusions" (1973, 67). In this way, Hartshorne can affirm the massive regularities codified by science in the laws of nature while understanding those laws to be stochastic rather than deterministic.

Hartshorne preserves the *primacy of divine creativity* by conceiving God as making other forms of creativity possible by setting limits to them in the laws of nature (Viney, forthcoming). God's creativity, exercised on a cosmic scale, is

needed to explain cosmic order. This is because no beings *within* the universe can explain the order *of* the universe. All localized order presupposes cosmic order. For example, when hydrogen and oxygen atoms fused for the first time, water molecules, with all of their possibilities for specialized forms of aquatic life, were born. This event was possible only because there was already a more inclusive order in terms of which atoms could exist. One may resist this reasoning and take "cosmic order" as having no explanation. In Hartshorne's view, this is arbitrary, for cosmic order depends on *contingent* physical values such as Planck's constant, and contingencies—things that could be otherwise—are precisely the things for which we seek explanations (1962, 74). Furthermore, all real beings, in Hartshorne's metaphysics, are partly self-creative. Cosmic order falls under this principle, for the order of the cosmos is nothing more than the cosmic dimensions of divine self-creativity.

If God sets the limits within which lesser creators can exist, it is still the case that, in Hartshorne's metaphysics, what happens *at any level of reality* is the product of multiple creative acts. Humble as non-divine creativity is in comparison to God's, it is still real, with real effects—hence, real relations in God. This means that our lives contribute something to God. Indeed, omniscience guarantees this since our decisions create God's knowledge of them. This is a repudiation of the Thomistic doctrine of God's knowledge as the cause of our decisions. As we have effects on each other, including the memories others have of us, so we have effects on God who remembers us forevermore. For this reason, Hartshorne says that we are not only co-creators of the world with God but also co-creators with the divine of its own experience (1967, 113). An important consequence is that God is affected by creaturely failures and tragedies. This does not mean that God is made worse by our sins; this would be like saying that counselors are made worse by knowing the shortcomings of their clients. Nevertheless, precisely because of divine goodness, it makes sense to speak of God as sympathizing with

creaturely suffering and grieving over the ruin we often make of our lives (1972, ch 13).

Classical theists found it inconceivable that a perfect being could in any way be mutable, contingent, or passible, for they believed this to imply an impossibility—the death of God. As Aquinas argues, in *Summa Contra Gentiles* (1, ch 16, para 2), a being whose substance has any admixture of potency—that is, susceptibility to change—is subject to decay or annihilation. Hartshorne disagrees. He counters that there is a difference of logical type between *existence* (that a thing is) and *actuality* (the particular state in which a thing exists). Using an example dear to his ornithological interests, he says, "That I shall (at least probably) exist tomorrow is one thing; that I shall exist hearing a blue jay call at noon is another" (1962, 63). The sentence, "I shall exist tomorrow as hearing a blue jay call at noon" (which expresses *actuality*) entails "I shall exist tomorrow" (which expresses only *existence*), but the latter sentence does not entail the former. To be actual is to exist; to exist is to be *somehow* actual. Hartshorne agrees with classical theism that the existence and actual states of any non-divine individual are contingent (could be otherwise). He denies, however, that there is any contradiction in holding that God cannot fail to exist but that God's actual states are contingent. To say that the class of divine experiences could not be empty is not at all to say that its particular members are necessary (Hartshorne 1970, 144).

David Tracy refers to the distinction between existence and actuality as "Hartshorne's discovery," for it is the conceptual tool necessary for overcoming the antinomies of classical theism without sacrificing the perfection of God (259). Hartshorne maintains that God's character, like God's existence, lacks contingency, but the actual state of the divine knowledge or will at any given moment is contingent (1948, 87). If God's character or essence is supremely excellent then the contingencies in the divine actuality do not include the possibilities of God being selfish, cruel, or wicked as they do in the human case. Hartshorne refers to his theology as *dipolar*

theism to indicate that he affirms both pairs of metaphysical contrasts as applied to God. With respect to existence and character, God is infinite, eternal, necessary, immutable, and impassible; but with respect to actuality, God is finite, temporal, contingent, mutable, and passible. In sum, God is both absolute and relative, but *in different respects*. Hartshorne quipped that he believed in twice as much transcendence as the classical theist—God as eminent in existence and in actuality. Thus, dipolar theism is characterized by the doctrine of *dual transcendence* (Hartshorne 1970, ch 11).

There remains, however, the apparent paradox in dipolar theism of a changing perfection. Aquinas argues that being perfect means being thoroughly (*per*) made (*factum*). One is perfect only to the extent that one *becomes* perfect (Blanchette). For this reason, Aquinas says that God, in whom there is no coming to be, is called perfect only “by a certain extension of the name” (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, ch 28, para 10). The basic idea, traceable to the early Plato, is that any being that changes falls short of an unchanging divine standard of perfection. Hartshorne concedes that the idea of perfection has these connotations, but he insists that there can be perfect forms of change, for some types of growth in value do not admit of a maximum (1953, 114). The clearest example is aesthetic value. Hartshorne emphasizes that aesthetic values are values for experience (*aesthesis* means “feeling”). If aesthetic values require experience it does not follow that beauty is *merely* in the eye (the experience) of the beholder (the experiencer). Hartshorne recognizes objective criteria of aesthetic values such as unity amid contrast and intensity amid complexity (Dombrowski, 2004). The critical point is that some objects experienced as beautiful, and measured by various criteria, can become more beautiful. It may be no more meaningful, says Hartshorne, to speak of a greatest possible beauty than it is to speak of a greatest possible positive integer (1970, 262).

Hartshorne’s logic of aesthetic values applies to the universe as a whole. If the universe is growing, then its beauty

is an open-ended beauty that admits of unlimited increase. Inherent in the idea of divine perfection is that God alone fully appreciates the beauty of the universe. In classical theism, God surveys space and time from eternity. Hartshorne points out the questionable assumptions of this theory.

This assumes that events to us future are yet in themselves real and determinate, or that time is analogous to a circle and not to an endless line whose points are added to it from moment to moment and form no completed sum. (1945)

If the universe is not a completed whole, then it cannot be known as a completed whole even by omniscience. A common objection is that this theory makes God ignorant of the future. Hartshorne unmasks this objection as question begging. The question is not whether God knows a fully determinate future but whether there is a fully determinate future to know. More generally, the issue is the nature of time. In Hartshorne’s view, the past is fully determinate, the future is partly indeterminate, and the present is the process of determination, and therefore God knows them as such.

Another objection to the idea of changing perfection is the specter of a rival to deity—could another being become God? Hartshorne denies this. He contrasts God’s A-perfection (absolute perfection) with God’s R-perfection (relative perfection) (1941, 8-9). The former applies to the divine existence and essence, the latter applies to the divine actuality. God is A-perfect in the sense of being unsurpassable by all others, *including self*. God is R-perfect in the sense of being unsurpassable by all others, *excluding self*. In Hartshorne’s view, God alone is necessarily supreme in goodness, knowledge, and power; this is God’s A-perfection. The divine actuality is R-perfect, and therefore surpassable, but only by a subsequent state of the divine self. Because God necessarily exists, the divine experience, unlike any non-divine experience, encompasses the entire universe, including its past as so far achieved. Therefore, while God’s experience expands to include every latest stage of the universe, no individual within

the universe can rival God. For this reason, Hartshorne speaks of God as "the self-surpassing surpasser of all" (1948, 20).

The Most and Best Moved Mover

Doubleless our discussion leaves a lot of unfinished philosophical business. Perhaps enough has been said to explain why classical theism is no longer taken for granted. Religious thinkers in groups as diverse as Judaism (Kaufman), Evangelical Christianity (Pinnock, et al.), and Catholicism (W. Norris Clarke) now take seriously the affirmation of real relations in God. Hartshorne proved throughout his lengthy and productive career that his ideas about God are a candidate for what he called "a natural theology for our time" (the title of one of his books). It is still too early to know how well his theories can withstand the sustained and rigorous criticism of history. There is evidence, however, that they can speak to existential concerns and that they can be put into practice in pastoral settings. Harold Kushner's widely read *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (1981), while not drawing directly on Hartshorne's work, is in most respects consistent with it.

Hartshorne's formulation and defense of a concept of a God that is fully engaged in temporal processes is perhaps his lasting achievement. He argues that the deity of classical theism is at once too active and too static. It is too active in the sense that its control of the universe is absolute, leaving nothing for the creatures to do except to unwittingly play the parts decided for them in eternity. It is too static in the sense that it lacks potentiality to change, to participate in the evolving universe it created, and to be affected by the triumphs and tragedies of its creatures. In short, it is a God who acts but is never acted upon and can therefore never interact. This is captured in the Aristotelian formula: unmoved mover. Fritz Rothchild described the God of Rabbi Abraham Heschel—a God with *pathos*, who feels and is felt by the creatures as "the Most Moved Mover" (Heschel, 24). Hartshorne greatly

admired Heschel and amended this formula in an attempt to distill the essence of bipolar theism: "God is the most and best moved mover" (1997, 6, 39).

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