MODERN MORAL THEORY: A PROCESS RESPONSE

by

BRADFORD O. DOWNS

(Under the Direction of William Power)

ABSTRACT

The dominant consensus in modern moral theory suggests that comparative judgments concerning moral values can be adequately made apart from theism. Building on the thought of Charles Hartshorne and other process thinkers, I hold that values such as good, desirability, or importance are meaningless unless we posit God, properly understood in a metaphysical theory, as real and the basis or telos according to which moral values are established and measured.

MODERN MORAL THEORY: A PROCESS RESPONSE

by

BRADFORD O. DOWNS

A.B., The University of Georgia, 2001

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2003
MODERN MORAL THEORY: A PROCESS RESPONSE

by

BRADFORD O. DOWNNS

Major Professor: William Power

Committee: Carolyn Medine
            Bradley Bassler

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May, 2003
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## PART

### I INTRODUCTION
- Moral Theory and the Ground of Moral Assertions.............1

### II MODERN MORAL THEORY
- Ethical Nihilism: A Response to Secularism.........................4
- The Modern Consensus in Moral Philosophy..........................5
- Autonomy........................................................................6

### III THE MORAL RELIGION OF IMMANUEL KANT
- Kant’s Impact on Modern Thought....................................8
- Kant’s Philosophy of Religion...........................................10
- The Fundamentals of Kant’s Moral Theory.........................11
- Morality and Reasoned Belief in the Notion of God.............18

### IV CHARLES HARTSHORNE’S “PROPERLY FORMULATED” GOD
- God as Ground of Moral Assertions................................22
- “God” and Theistic Arguments Reconsidered......................23

### V THE MORAL ARGUMENT OF CHARLES HARTSHORNE
- Hartshorne’s Position Regarding Theistic Arguments..........28
- The Global Argument....................................................29
- Hard-core Commonsense: The Final Criterion.....................31
- Contributionism..........................................................33
Moral Theory and the Ground of Moral Assertions

The notions that morality and theism are necessarily interrelated and that God is the ground of importance and moral values have dominated much of the history of Western moral philosophy. Moral theorists and ethicists generally have agreed that God, understood in various ways, serves as the sole ground on which human beings are capable of establishing and legitimating values of any kind, particularly moral values.

Those who seek a ground capable of legitimating moral assertions are inevitably involved in what we shall call moral theory. Franklin Gamwell, in his *Divine Good*, defines moral theory as “the order of reflection that seeks to answer the question: What is the ground of any valid distinction between moral and immoral human choice, action, or character?” (1990, 2). The term “ground” indicates that which establishes any moral assertion as legitimate or properly valid (1990, 2). Traditionally, the ground capable
of validating moral claims was thought to be theistic in nature.

As I shall state in Parts II and III of this work, modern moral theorists, having been highly influenced by the thought of Immanuel Kant, David Hume, and others, have come to something of a consensus which suggests that assertions concerning values or importance can find their ground in something other than divine reality. Most contemporary philosophers working outside the domain of moral theory tend to deny the existence of moral values of any kind; yet they hold some modes of philosophical discourse to be more important than others, at least tacitly if not explicitly. Many, having once again been influenced by Kant and Hume, are hesitant to make any statements whatsoever concerning metaphysical states of affairs; yet they write on ethics. I find each of these positions problematic at the very least.

In this work, I intend to argue that “good,” in its final and proper sense, is a nonsensical notion without God, properly conceived within a metaphysical theory, as the absolute standard or basis for such. In Part IV I will describe Charles Hartshorne’s notion of God, which is based in his neoclassical metaphysics, and in Part V I will explore Hartshorne’s cumulative argument for God’s existence, paying close attention to his moral argument. I shall take as my thesis that in order for a moral theory to
make sense out of the values we inevitably presuppose in practice, it must be theistic, metaphysical, and teleological.

In my opinion, the best available system capable of fulfilling these criteria is process oriented. As we shall discuss throughout this work, for process thinkers such as Charles Hartshorne, Schubert Ogden, and Franklin Gamwell, an appropriate method for establishing such a moral theory must employ logical tools and be supported by human reason and experience. As we shall see, for these thinkers, human experience is the final criterion upon which all philosophical judgments are dependent.
Ethical Nihilism: A Response to Secularism

In modern thought, the notion that the ground of moral assertions is theistic in nature has lost popularity amongst moral theorists. To be sure, as Gamwell suggests:

> It is a commonplace that modern thought has been pervasively secularized, and one expression of this fact is the widespread belief that at least many moral problems of individual and social life can be properly thought about and discussed independently of religion. (1990, xi)

The prevalence of secularism in modern thought is clearly an effect of various historical factors, including the proliferation of religious pluralism, scientific and technological advances, and the increasingly critical and incredulous nature of scholarship in general.

In response, many modern thinkers have adopted a position of ethical nihilism, denying the existence of moral facts, moral truths, and moral knowledge (Griffin 2001, 286). It is important to distinguish between two kinds of
ethical nihilism. Ontological nihilism is a doctrine that explicitly denies the existence of moral values at all.
Epistemic nihilism does not necessarily deny the existence of moral values; rather, it merely suggests that if moral values do happen to exist, we lack the ability to know or properly understand them (Griffin 2001, 286). Ethical nihilism of either the ontological or epistemic variety inevitably results in what Max Weber called a “disenchanted” world, a world that either lacks values of any kind or contains values imperceptible to human agents (1958, 155).

The Modern Consensus in Moral Philosophy

Other theorists, while maintaining a “secularistic self-understanding,” have not denied the existence of moral values; rather, they have adopted the notion that values such as goodness and beauty are both real and justifiable apart from any categorical or tacit theistic convictions (Gamwell 1990, xii). This is the dominant position in modern moral philosophy. Despite the diversity of its various manifestations or conclusions, modern moral philosophy, especially post-Kantian moral philosophy, has, in general, unreservedly held that its proper undertaking is to convey rationally a secular, non-theistic foundation for the moral endeavor. David Ray Griffin, in Reenchantment without Supernaturalism, concurs: “Most mainline
philosophical ethicists, agreeing. . .that theism is false, have argued that ethics is ‘autonomous,’ meaning that it needs no cosmological support” (2001, 287). Moreover, certain moral philosophers and theologians thinking specifically within a religious framework have implicitly given assent to this and similar beliefs which deny the connection between moral values and the existence of God. In recent years, Gamwell insists, “this consensus has been so dominant that, in moral philosophy, the independence of morality from religion has been largely taken for granted” (1990, xii).

Autonomy

Griffin and Gamwell agree with the popular notion that the modern philosophical period “is marked in some sense by the increasing affirmation of autonomy” (Gamwell 1990, 3). The principle of autonomy suggests that our interpretations concerning the actual nature of both the world and humanity are not legitimated merely by appeal to some traditionally established authority. Rather, “our understandings can be validated or redeemed only by appeal in some sense to human experience and reason as such” (Gamwell 1990, 4). Since modern thinkers insist upon the value of human reason and human experience, Gamwell insists that modernism is a humanistic movement.
The notion that human experience and human reason are useful in philosophical endeavors is certainly present prior to the modern period. One can hardly deny that our ancient philosophical forefathers, both in the East and the West, understood the value of human reason. Nonetheless, in the modern period, this primary appeal to human reason has become increasingly adopted in all areas of scholarly discourse, including philosophy of religion and theology. For the purposes of this thesis, the modern period may be designated as the philosophical epoch in which the appeal to human experience and reason becomes “increasingly accepted throughout the full range of human reflection” (Gamwell 1990, 4).
Kant’s Impact on Modern Thought

According to Gamwell and others, “no single thinker is more responsible for the consensus in modern ethical theory than Immanuel Kant” (1990, 8). Regardless of their positions in relation to Kant’s ethical system, nearly all subsequent moral theories are Kantian in at least one sense. Nearly all post-Kantian moral theories demand that the validation of moral assertions be completely independent of theism or its various assumptions (1990, 8). Ironically, Kant’s own system of ethics is intrinsically connected to his philosophy of religion, in which Kant develops his moral or practical argument for the existence of God. While the majority of post-Kantian philosophers have decided that Kant’s theistic argument ultimately failed, “this does not gainsay that the dominant consensus is Kantian in character, precisely because Kant himself seems to affirm a ground for moral claims independently of theism” (Gamwell 1990, 9).

Kant’s philosophy of religion has drawn mixed reactions and is considered by many to be a fragile point in his
philosophy; some critics go so far as to suggest that his theory of rational theology originated out of his “old age and loss of mental acuity” (Green 1978, 6). Despite this sort of criticism, during the modern period, Kant has served as an intellectual beacon for those working within the margins of philosophy of religion and/or philosophy in general. Kant’s thought extends to Hegel and to Schopenhauer, whose influence extends to Nietzsche and to others (Wood 1970, 2). Schopenhauer, in The World as Will and Representation, writes:

Kant’s teaching produces a fundamental change in every mind that has grasped it. This change is so great that it may be regarded as an intellectual rebirth. It alone is capable of really moving inborn realism which arises from the original disposition of the intellect. . .In consequence of this, the mind undergoes a fundamental undeceiving, and thereafter looks at things in another light. . .the man who has not mastered the Kantian philosophy, whatever else he may have studied, is, so to speak, in a state of innocence. (1958, xxiii)

Indeed, as Schopenhauer passionately insists, any post-Kantian philosophical system that ignores or dismisses the significance of Kant’s thought is incomplete at best.
Granted, Kant’s “dense philosophical style” can make his writings difficult to comprehend fully; nevertheless, in order to understand properly any subsequent philosophical system, one must encounter seriously Kant’s thought (Green 1978, 27).

Kant’s Philosophy of Religion

Integral to Kant’s thought and many of his writings are religion and rational theology. In Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason, Kant reduces the concept of divinity to a consequence of morality and reason (1996, 133-136). He goes on to suggest in his Lectures on Philosophical Theology that “religion is nothing but the application of theology to morality, that is, to a good disposition and a course of conduct well-pleasing to the highest being” (1978, 26). Kant insists that morality is the basis of religion and that it provides a foundation for intelligent belief in notions such as freedom, immortality, and God. He argues that “the sum total of all possible knowledge of God is not possible for a human being, not even through a true revelation” (1978, 23). Indeed, he insists in the Critique of Pure Reason that “so-called proofs of God’s existence are illusions of reason”; nonetheless, he contends that belief in the concept of God can be justified logically through a careful inspection of morality from the
vantage point of human reason (Hartnack 1974, 93). It is important to note, however, that morality does not furnish a basis for any traditional religious practices or beliefs, other than belief directed towards the concept “God” as the notion of perfect benevolence. Therefore, Kant understands “God” as teleological, an entity or notion which in itself establishes a moral paradigm for all moral creatures to emulate.

The Fundamentals of Kant’s Moral Theory

If Kant’s theory of religion is thus reducible to morality, what, then, are the fundamentals of his moral theory? Though not systematic or complete, Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals is undoubtedly Kant’s most accessible and readily comprehensible discourse on ethics.

Unlike some Enlightenment and modern thinkers who hold that there is no final aim or good for human life, Kant, in the Foundations, posits that the ultimate good is the “good will.” “Nothing in the world,” Kant maintains, “indeed nothing even beyond the world, can possibly be conceived which could be called good without qualification except a GOOD WILL” (1995, 9). The good will is an inherent principle of reflection or moral instinct, which is in itself essentially good and is the decisive gauge according to which the moral worth of any action is measured (1995,
The good will is indeed considered a natural and inherent component of the human intellect; given this assessment, Kant implies that the supreme end in human life is to devote one’s self to action originating out of the good will.

What exactly does Kant mean by the terms “will” and “good”? Let us begin with “will.” In order to fully understand what Kant means by “will,” one must consider “will” as activity. “To will” means to originate an action from one’s self knowingly and consciously. To suggest that an individual can will is to suggest that he or she is the author or the originator of his or her actions, an autonomous agent. Kant suggests that laws govern everything in nature, and that “only a rational being has the capacity of acting according to conception of laws (i.e., according to principles)” (1995, 29). This capacity to act in correspondence with laws or principles is the will.

What, then, makes a will “good”? If will is to be regarded as activity, namely, willing or intending, how does the will determine what it wills? To answer these questions, Kant introduces the concept of duty, which “contains the concept of a good will” (1995, 13). Kant characterizes the concept of duty by three main propositions. First, Kant argues that an action, in order to have authentic moral value, must be executed out of a
sense of duty (1995, 15). The sense of duty arises as a feeling of inner compulsion. In other words, if an individual feels that he ought to do something, then it becomes his duty to actuate that potentiality, and only actions performed out of this feeling of obligation are really good. Kant affirms in the *Foundations* that “to be kind where one can is a duty” (1995, 14). However, some people simply enjoy being kind and extending compassion to others. It is conceivable that the motivation for these individuals is the self-satisfaction that is achieved through behaving kindly. According to Kant, the acts of benevolence or generosity practiced by such people have “no true moral worth,” for they lack the “moral import of an action done not from inclination but from duty” (1995, 14).

In the analysis of an instance such as this one, the significance of Kant’s second proposition pertaining to duty becomes distinct. The moral worth of an action, Kant declares, does not reside in its consequences, but in the maxim according to which the action is performed (1995, 16). That which makes an action morally good, therefore, is not its outcome, but the fact that a person intends, or wills, to execute it in accordance with a moral principle or regulation. The action performed out of a sense of duty is morally good even if its effects are revolting or painful or if it does not produce the intended consequence. The factor
that determines the moral worth of an action is not its outcome, but its intention.

Kant’s third proposition concerning duty, “a consequence of the two preceding,” is that a dutiful action must be done out of absolute respect for the coinciding moral law (1995, 16). In order for an action to be appropriately deemed an act of duty, no ulterior motives for performing the action can influence the final carrying out of the action. Again, the action being executed, in order to have true moral worth, must be done primarily and strictly out of an inflexible adherence to a certain moral law—for example, “respect your parents” or “love your neighbor.” Any individual conducting herself in a certain way out of respect for the moral law must do so with critical awareness and must deliberately yield her will to the moral law informed by the inherent sense of duty. Let us consider a specific example. If one’s father is ill, she probably feels that she ought to be by his side; she feels, in other words, that it is her duty to be by her father’s side.¹ In order for her presence at her father’s side during his illness to have genuine moral worth, she must knowingly and purposely choose to be there out of respect for a moral law, which dictates that she ought to love and

¹ A similar example was provided in a lecture by Michael Mitias at Millsaps College, Fall 1998.
respect her father. If the action is to be truly good, she must not perform it out of fear of public opinion or merely to make her father feel good.

If actions, in order to be genuinely good, must be executed out of respect for a sense of duty, the next question we should ask is how one’s good will determines what properly constitutes moral duty? In the “Second Section” of *Foundations of Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant delineates three requirements which an action must satisfy in order to be an act of duty and therefore morally good. First, the action must comply with the inherent, unconditional command or categorical imperative, which states, “Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law” (1995, 38). The categorical imperative permits no exceptions; particulars or specific circumstances encompassing any moral decision must not be taken into account. This moral imperative concerns the principle or mental predilection from which a given action proceeds, not the result of the action (1995, 32-3). The function, then, of the categorical imperative is to specify and define that which is dutiful for a given moral decision. In order for an action to be good, an individual must be able to will that the maxim according to which he makes the moral decision become a universal law.
Second, proper duty must be defined by the law of ends. As a principle of humanity, the law of ends orders, “Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only” (1995, 46). This theorem indicates that one person should never actively treat any other person as an object or tool. The foundation of this principle rests on the following assumption: rational nature exists everywhere as an end. Human beings are rational natures; therefore, they should always be treated as ends in themselves. This principle of humanity, Kant declares, “is the supreme limiting condition on the freedom of action of each man” (1995, 47-8).

Third, Kant argues that legitimate moral behavior is determined by the “law of autonomy of the will” (1995, 57). The will is an intrinsic principle of contemplation. Given this point, for Kant, a human being should always act as a purely contemplative person; that is, every human should act as an autonomous being. An autonomous person is a self-determined being who thinks, feels, and imagines from within. In other words, the autonomous person is the originator of his or her actions, and therefore, of his or her life. This principle is embodied in Kant’s short essay, “What is Enlightenment?” in which he expresses the motto of the Enlightenment, “Have courage to use your own reason”
For Kant, autonomy is the basis and necessary condition for self-respect, honor, and human dignity. According to J. B. Schneewind, in “Autonomy, obligation, and virtue: An overview of Kant’s moral philosophy,” autonomy, as understood by Kant, involves two components: first, “that no authority external to ourselves is needed to constitute or inform us of the demands of morality,” and second that “in self-government we can effectively control ourselves” (1992, 309). The first component suggests that any normal adult can know for herself what she ought to do because moral obligations are obligations she imposes on herself. The second component indicates that there is no basis “for others to tell us what morality requires, nor has anyone the authority to do so—not our neighbors, not the magistrates and their laws, not even those who speak in the name of God” (1992, 309).

Kant suggests that the rules or demands “we impose upon ourselves override all other calls for action, and frequently run counter to our desire” (Schneewind 1992, 309). Thus, autonomy entails responsibility by providing an adequate reason and the very ability to act as we should. For Kant, autonomy is a prerequisite for responsibility, the absence of which renders the possibility of the existence of true moral action impossible. Indeed, that humans are capable of “being fully self-governing in moral matters”
makes possible the existence of morality in itself (1992, 309).

Kant believes that when a group of people, e.g., a society, seriously observes these laws (the categorical imperative, the law of ends, and the law of autonomy), they will form a kind of ideal society which he calls the “Kingdom of Ends” (1978, 31). Kant understands “realm” or “kingdom” to mean “the systematic union of different rational beings through common laws” (1995, 58). While the kingdom of ends is certainly an attractive concept for Kant, he realizes that such a society is merely an ideal.

Morality and Reasoned Belief in the Notion of God

Having outlined the fundamentals of Kant’s theory of morality, let us now examine morality’s connection to the logical belief in the concept of God. For Kant, God is *summum bonum*, the highest good. In the *Foundations*, he holds that to attempt to derive morality from examples is an insufficient effort, for “each example of morality which is exhibited must itself have been previously judged according to principles of morality to see whether it was worthy to serve as an original example or model” (1995, 24). Therefore, there must be a final authority that provides a pattern or model of morality. Kant remarks, “Even the Holy One of the Gospel must be compared with our ideal of moral
perfection before He is recognized as such” (1995, 24). In this statement, while he does not refer to the specific source, Kant is undoubtedly alluding to Mark 10:18. In this passage, Jesus is reported to say, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.” This indicates, as Kant proposes in his Lectures on Philosophical Theology, that God is *summum bonum*, “ruler of the world,” the lawgiver, the final scale according to which the moral values of all actions are measured (1978, 29).

If, as Kant speculates, “the concept of God is not a natural concept” and not at all psychologically necessary, what then are the logical grounds for conceiving of God as the highest good? (1978, 109). For Kant, the concept of God as a strictly moral concept is “practically necessary” (1978, 110). If it is often the case that doing one’s duty leads to misfortune or unhappiness and that “the noblest honesty and righteousness is often misunderstood, despised, persecuted, and trodden under foot by vice” (1978, 110), what gives value to living a moral life? For Kant, the answer is God. It is necessary, Kant declares, that a being exist “who rules the world according to reason and moral laws, and who has established, in the course of things to come, a state where the creature who has remained true to his nature and who has made himself worthy of happiness through morality will actually participate in this
happiness” (1978, 110). Without the existence of God and a future world, the incentive to act in harmony with the inherent good will and the duties of a logical human being seems to fade (1978, 111). Thus, Kant’s argument for the existence of God is not theoretical, but purely practical.

Simply put, without the concept of God as the highest good, morality is diminished to a human construct and ceases to have real meaning or value. It is important not to misunderstand Kant on this point. The existence of God and the possibility of rewards in a future world or post-mortem existence are not at all requirements for the existence of morality; on the contrary, the reality of morality in itself makes it possible to posit the existence of concepts such as God and immortality. As Gamwell suggests, “Kant can affirm the ‘postulate’ of God’s existence only because the moral law is justified independently of theistic argument” (1990, 9). Thus, “the moral law does not presuppose religion, but religion presupposes morality” (Hartnack, 1974, 97).

Even though Kant was, in a certain sense, a Christian, his philosophy of religion yields no reason to believe that the Jesus described in New Testament writings is anything other than a particularly good moral example. He disregards traditional Christian beliefs about the nature of Jesus and his role in salvation. For Kant, the concept of God can be reasonably assumed only by properly understanding the
reality of morality. Therefore, traditional Christian practices such as prayer, church attendance, and participating in sacramental rituals have no ultimate moral purpose or significance. On the whole, according to Kant, organized religion is merely a consequence of morality, and most modern moral theorists agree.
God as Ground of Moral Assertions

Having been influenced by Kant and his moral theory, most modern moral theorists hold that moral values can be legitimated apart from specifically theistic beliefs. While the proposition that valid moral values exist independently of theistic notions is something of a consensus in modern moral philosophy, as we shall see, certainly not all modern moral philosophers concur. Indeed, Gamwell, a student of Schubert Ogden, takes as his thesis that “one cannot affirm or deny any moral claim without at least implicitly affirming a divine reality” (1990, xii). It goes without saying, however, that such a thesis is incoherent and unintelligible unless we establish with some authority and precision what is meant by the phrase “divine reality” (1990, 2).

Essential to any moral theory that advocates divine reality as either the sole or primary ground for making distinctions between moral and immoral actions is the designation of an exact and accurate definition to the expression “God” in a metaphysical theory. For Gamwell,
theism necessarily entails the belief that only God is
capable of providing “the authentic telos for the human
enterprise as such” (1990, xii). That is to say, “God” or
“divine reality” suggests a metaphysical individual upon
which all value judgments are fully dependent.

“God” and Theistic Arguments Reconsidered

While Kant proposes that proofs for the existence of
God are “illusions of reason,” maintaining that belief
merely in the concept of God based on the existence of
morality is justifiable, Alfred North Whitehead, Charles
Hartshorne, and numerous other process thinkers suggest
that, given a suitable definition of divinity within a
metaphysical theory, there are justifiable reasons for
positing that God actually exists. It is likely the case
that for Hartshorne, Hume and Kant are, in a limited sense,
correct in scrapping the theistic proofs; after all, the
classical arguments for the existence of God are “imprisoned
in the Greek bias which tended to identify eternity,
infinity, [and] absoluteness, with divinity” (1972, 65).
For Hartshorne, the classical proofs are proofs, “not for
God, but for idolatrous absurdities” (1972, 65). In fact,
in *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method*, Hartshorne
insists that for his purposes “what Kant thought of as
theism is non-theistic” (1970, 279).
According to Hartshorne, an appropriate or correct definition of the expression “God” must be consistent with the principle of “dual transcendence.” Hartshorne’s criterion of dual transcendence asserts that:

God surpasses other beings, not by being sheerly absolute, infinite, independent, necessary, eternal, immutable, but by being both absolute, infinite, independent, and so forth, and also, in uniquely excellent fashion, relative, finite, dependent, contingent, and temporal. (1982, 17)

While such an ensemble of attributes may seem incompatible or inconsistent, Hartshorne insists that dual transcendence is not a contradictory principle because “there is a distinction of respects in which the two sets of adjectives apply to God” (1982, 17).

Indeed, in Hartshorne’s version of neoclassical metaphysics, “God is not the immutably perfect being,” a Greek notion adopted by Christianity, championed by second and third century Apologists, and embraced today by a seemingly endless number of Christians worldwide (1970, 277). God is not unconditionally “unsurpassable and hence immutable;” rather, God is both “surpassable, but by himself only,” and “unsurpassable” by another (1970, 277). To be unsurpassable by another, according to Hartshorne, is the common idea of perfection posited in most religious
tradi...ions, a notion which maintains that for God, there can be no equivalent (1970, 277).

For Hartshorne, to define divinity as wholly absolute or infinite is a tragic error that deprives the notion “God” of any tangible meaning. In short, such a definition reduces divinity to a “mere abstraction” (1982, 17). Thus, Hartshorne denies the concept of God posited by both Kant and classical theists. In his words, “the great theologians and philosophers... were primarily (in one way or another) guilty unconsciously of changing the subject and misusing the word God” (1972, 63). Classical theists, in harmony with their Greek forefathers, have long defined God as absolutely infinite and eternal, immutable and impassible. The attempt to synthesize “purely eternal knowledge, or the omnipotence of a wholly absolute being, with the freedom of our temporal acts, or with the occurrence of suffering and other forms of evil,” according to Hartshorne, has “often been downright masochistic” (1972, 63).

To be sure, if one takes classical theism to its logical conclusion, he or she is bound to see clearly that God is ultimately in control of all of history, leaving no room for the freedom we presuppose in our temporal actions and providing no acceptable explanation for the evil we experience. According to classical theism, God is singular, absolute, ultimate, and wholly necessary. God willfully
created and designed the universe and is thought of as the sustainer and administrator of this creation. This means that for the classical theist, God is literally the master of all that has been, all that is, and all that will be. He is ontologically superior to his creation, infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent. When these thinkers propose that God is infinite, they mean that God is illimitable; literally, in this system, God is thought to have no limitations. If God has no limitations, then God can do anything that is logically possible. Since God knows all there is to know, and since God has the power to do anything without exception, every event in the history of the universe, every disaster of cataclysmic proportion, every genocide, every murder, every instance of child abuse, has been sanctioned by God. Since, in this system, God is omnipotent, meaning that he has the power to do anything, including unilaterally acting in the world to control or prevent certain historical events, one must be willing to accept that God is ultimately in control. Nothing happens without his permission. Ultimately, then, every event has God’s stamp of approval. Hence, classical theists are bound to struggle endlessly with problems concerning both human freedom and the existence of evil. Regarding classical theism, Whitehead, in Religion in the Making, states, “All simplifications of religious dogma are shipwrecked upon the
rock of the problem of evil” (1926, 74). In the same
spirit, Hartshorne states, “Monopolistic power able to
guarantee universal harmony is a hopeless misconception of
the divine ‘majesty,’ [and] it betrays a pitiful human
weakness that this has not been clear all along” (1970,
298).

Besides problems associated with freedom and evil, the
definition of God provided by classical theism also leaves
little room for genuine love for God, which Hartshorne, in
accordance with Tillich’s “Great Commandment,” adamantly
insists upon preserving. He grants that attributes such as
omniscience and omnipotence, understood in a particular way,
are perhaps worthy of admiration, but admiration is not the
same as love. The term “deity,” he declares, should be
defined as “that which can be loved in integral fashion”
(1972, 62). As humans interested in “history and change,”
living in a world in which all experiences are subject to
both change and limits, we cannot possibly cultivate
authentic love for that which is wholly absolute,
impassable, and immutable. How is it possible? According
to Hartshorne, the individual who feels he has developed
immutable love for that which is immutable and unconditioned
is a victim of self-deception (1972, 67).
Hartshorne’s Position Regarding Theistic Arguments

With God redefined in terms of dual transcendence, Hartshorne holds that there are “rational grounds” for the assertion that God exists. In *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method*, Hartshorne develops his six theistic proofs. However, as Hartshorne maintains in “Can There be Proofs for the Existence of God?,” “no argument for theism is so evidently cogent that there can be no reasonable ground for rejecting it” (1972, 17-18). The manner in which Hartshorne formulates his six theistic arguments certainly allows for their rejection. If one finds one or more of the atheistic premises of any particular argument acceptable, he may logically reject the neoclassical theistic conclusion. Hartshorne, in formulating his anti-theistic premises, seeks to make “explicit what the denial of theism implies, so that people will know the price tag on the denial” (1970, 290).

---

Later in his career, Hartshorne comes to prefer the term “argument” to “proof” because “proof” seems to imply certainty and infallibility. I shall honor this preference when speaking about his arguments.
In discussing this point concerning arguments for the existence of God, Hartshorne recalls Aristotle’s golden mean. He maintains that there are two extremes regarding the theistic arguments “which seem equally mistaken,” namely, that the arguments are empty and useless, or, that the arguments are “completely satisfactory and coercive” (1970, 275). In the wake of Enlightenment thought and postmodernism, the former extreme has become the prevalent view. For many theologians of the Medieval period, the latter was affirmed. Hartshorne concedes that for any theistic argument, “either the premises will not be acceptable to all or there will, at least in the judgment of some competent logicians, be a formal fallacy” (1970, 275). As Hartshorne indicates, an individual thoroughly committed to atheism, or any other philosophical or religious conviction for that matter, is not going to be convinced otherwise by an argument or even a set of arguments. Nonetheless, to assert that the search for arguments is unimportant or useless is to go far beyond this point.

The Global Argument

According to Hartshorne, his writings concerning theistic arguments have suggested to some that his primary reason for accepting theism is the ontological argument. Indeed, Hartshorne and his affection for the ontological
argument have been the subject of a considerable amount of scholarship. However, Hartshorne himself maintains that he believes in the reality of God, not only or primarily because of the ontological argument, but because of a collection of mutually supportive arguments. Hartshorne, having been influenced by C. S. Peirce, develops and formulates his six theistic arguments so that their “combined strength is not, as Kant would have it, like that of a chain which is as weak as its weakest link, but like that of a cable whose strength sums the strength of its several fibers” (1978, xi). Hartshorne refers to his six arguments taken together as the “global argument” (1970, 276). This means that his case for theism is cumulative in nature; that is, it is composed of a series of mutually supportive arguments. Therefore, as Donald Wayne Viney reminds us in Charles Hartshorne and the Existence of God, a book that remains one of the best summaries of Hartshorne’s theology, the case for theism does not necessarily fail if a single argument displays certain weaknesses or fails entirely (1985, 1).

Hartshorne’s global argument is composed of six separate arguments divided into two categories, namely, theoretical and normative. The ontological, cosmological, and design arguments belong to the theoretical class. Theoretical arguments are derived from “modality and order
(‘design’)” (Hartshorne 1970, 281). Hartshorne classifies the epistemic, moral, and aesthetic arguments as normative. The normative arguments “attempt to demonstrate or make probable an existential assertion from normative or valuational considerations” (Viney 1985, 22). Regardless of their individual natures or forms, Hartshorne’s arguments are designed to be taken together as a single cumulative case for God’s existence. Indeed, the global argument is as much a metaphysical system as it is an argument. Metaphysics, especially for Hartshorne and other process thinkers, is taken to include both ontological and axiological elements.

**Hard-core Commonsense: The Final Criterion**

In formulating his global argument, Hartshorne, building on Whitehead’s suggestion that the primary criterion for establishing the validity of a proposition is its ability to harmonize with inevitable presuppositions of practice, has in mind to show that “the idea of God, taken as true, is required for the interpretation of some fundamental aspect of life or existence” (1970, 280). These existential presuppositions, which Griffin terms “hard-core commonsense notions,” are, for process thinkers, the final criteria according to which the legitimacy of any theory or opinion must be evaluated (2001, 5). For Whitehead:
The metaphysical rule of evidence [urges that] we must bow to those presumptions, which, in despite of criticism, we still employ for the regulation of our lives. Such presumptions are imperative in experience. Rationalism is the search for the coherence of such presumptions. (qtd. in Ogden 1986, 74)

Let us examine a specific example. Process thinkers necessarily reject solipsism. To suggest that the self is the only existent thing is to deny ontological realism, a doctrine that posits the existence of an actual, external world, a world given to experience. Naturally, everyone, even the most committed solipsist, presupposes the existence of an external world in practice. To take a step is to presuppose that the ground is capable of supporting one’s weight, which is to presuppose a world external to the self. For process thinkers, solipsism is an unacceptable doctrine because it formally denies in theory what we all inevitably presuppose in practice.

In addition to ontological realism, according to Whitehead and other process thinkers, we all presuppose axiological realism, a doctrine that suggests that values such as good and desirability actually exist. For Hartshorne, a properly formulated notion of God taken as true is necessary for adequately interpreting this aspect of
human existence. That we presuppose the actuality of importance or goodness makes no sense if God, properly formulated, is not taken as real. This realization leads Hartshorne to develop his moral argument for God’s existence.

Contributionism

It has been suggested that “given the frequency with which [Hartshorne] refers to the [moral] argument, there is good reason to believe it is one of his favorite proofs for God’s existence” (Viney 1985, 107). Moreover, Viney claims that during a personal conversation in April, 1983, Hartshorne said that “the two arguments of the global argument he finds most compelling are the design and moral arguments” (1985, 153-54). Contributionism, the principle that the underlying purpose of human existence “is to contribute to the divine life through our creative activity,” serves as the foundation for Hartshorne’s moral argument (1985, 107). The concept of God assumed by classical theism, which holds God to be immutable and impassable, is not reconcilable with such a principle. Only a definition of God that permits divine passibility can include contributionism (1985, 107).
The Moral Argument

Hartshorne formulates his moral argument as follows:

A1 There is no supreme aim or *summum bonum* whose realization a creature’s action can promote.
A2 There is a supreme aim, which is to promote the good life among some (or all) creatures during their natural life spans.
A3 There is a supreme aim, which is to promote the good life among creatures after death or in heaven.
T There is a supreme aim, which is to enrich the divine life (by promoting the good life among creatures). (1970, 286-87)

In the atheistic premises, Hartshorne seeks to make explicit what the denial of theism entails. If one finds any of the first three premises acceptable, she may justifiably deny the theistic conclusion. Viney holds, however, that the conclusion of this argument contains within itself all that is desirable or best in the atheistic alternatives. Any sensible end towards which an atheist might strive, such as nourishing the common good or human happiness, is contained in the end of contributing to the divine existence. In Christian ethics, this is a common and indispensable theme; indeed, as Viney affirms, “one cannot love God without loving his creatures” (1985, 108).
Against Premise One

According to Hartshorne, “in ethics we need to assume that, taking their consequences into account, some modes of action are better than others” (1972, 70). However, if we accept the first anti-theistic premise, namely, that “there is no supreme aim or sumnum bonum whose realization a creature’s action can promote,” we are left with no “reasonable idea of comparative value or importance” (1970, 289). According to such a rationale, comparative judgments concerning importance or values of any kind become thoroughly nonsensical. Terms such as “good” and “evil” or “right” and “wrong” cease to possess genuine meaning.

However, for some, namely, proponents of ethical nihilism or ethical relativism, the first anti-theistic premise presents an accurate description of reality. Indeed, concerning moral theistic arguments, Tennant says:

Our moral experience, evaluation, progress, etc., presuppose norms and ideals; but it is no more obvious that they presuppose an absolute, infinite, or perfect norm than that our growth in stature presupposes the existence, or even the idea, of an infinitely tall giant. (qtd. in Viney 1985, 108)

Concerning this analogy, Viney points out that standards of height are not subject to questions regarding moral value;
therefore, “Tennant’s analogy between standards of value and quantitative standards (such as those use to measure growth) breaks down” (1985, 109).

Relativists, unlike more extreme nihilists, tend to concede that comparative discernment pertaining to importance or value does assume some standard or basis; however, they do not concede that the standard or basis is in itself nonrelative. To be sure, for the relativist, the standard or basis is necessarily something less than absolute (Viney 1985, 108-09).

Of course, such a position is open to obvious objections from process thinkers. Any standard or basis for importance or value that is less than absolute requires legitimation concerning its own moral value. Is the standard itself good? This is a question Kant poses as well. For comparative judgements concerning importance or value, the absence of an absolute standard or basis renders terms such “good,” “better,” or “worse” utterly useless. However, for Hartshorne, as human beings, we presuppose the reality of notions such as good or importance in daily activity; for this reason, Hartshorne rejects premise one.

Against Premise Two

The position advocated in the second premise, that “there is a supreme aim, which is to promote the good life
among some (or all) creatures during their natural life spans,” is fundamentally consistent with modern humanism. Humanists, perhaps desiring to dodge certain hazards associated with relativism and nihilism, generally agree on two issues. First, most humanists deny the possibility of any sort of post-mortem existence for humans. Second, humanists tend to agree that the supreme end or proper aim of human existence is to “promote the good life among some (or all) creatures during their natural life spans” (Hartshorne 1970, 287). However, those who accept this premise, granting that some modes of action, particularly those “which promote the good life among some (or all) creatures during their natural life spans,” are better than others, are in some sense obligated to illustrate the sense in which they are better. While conceding that both the short term and long term consequences of particular modes of actions are relevant, we must not forget that as human beings, all of us eventually will die. We should also recall, as Hartshorne reminds us, that “the human race itself will eventually perish, or at least will change beyond any knowable limit, and beyond any definitely traceable benefit from our individual actions” (1972, 70). Against those who maintain that the human race as we know it will likely persist forever, Hartshorne argues:
At any finite time in the future human power will not be absolute. This means that human security will not be absolute, that there will be a finite risk of the ending of the human adventure through disease, race suicide, stellar collision, or what not. A finite risk, endured for infinite time, looks like an infinite probability of destruction. (qtd. in Viney 1985, 112)

If Hartshorne is correct, at a certain point in the future, any good ever achieved will fade out of existence as humanity fades out of existence, ceasing to matter in any practical sense (Hartshorne 1970, 289). In Viney’s words, “after the final extinction of the human race, any values that may have been achieved by the individuals of the race, will become as if they had never been” (1985, 110).

While humanists typically agree in assuming that both the human individual as well as the human species as a whole will eventually cease to exist, they certainly presuppose that some actions are more desirable or better than others, namely, those actions that “promote the good life among some (or all) creatures during their natural life spans” (Hartshorne 1970, 287). When faced with an ethical decision, therefore, the humanist tends toward the option capable of promoting the greatest good, apparently “to make the world a better place” (Viney 1985, 110). However, if,
as Viney poignantly asks, when all is said and done, the human species will cease to exist “leaving no trace of its activities, how has the kind deed made the world a better place?” (1985, 110). If Hartshorne’s notion of contributionism is taken as true, the world is a better place because the good deed has contributed positively to the divine existence and will be eternally remembered in the mind of God.

Another problem with the second anti-theistic premise is what Hartshorne calls the “multiplicity of beneficiaries” (1970, 289). If an individual focuses solely upon his or her own good, and uses others merely as instruments for achieving personal benefits, we tend to label him or her as self-centered and unethical. According to Hartshorne, in a statement reminiscent of Kant’s law of ends, the inflexible egoist who uses others as means to arriving at purely self-interested good is “unethical and indeed more or less inhuman” (1970, 289). If one focuses solely upon accomplishing good for others, “he loses the one advantage of the self-interested person, namely the unity of the beneficiary of his efforts” (1970, 289).

Good, for Hartshorne, is not necessarily good in itself; we label an action good because it is good for someone. Hartshorne appropriately poses the following question: “How is the welfare of A plus the welfare of B a
greater good than that of either alone? The sum of happiness, for whom is this a happiness?” (1970, 289). What is happiness if someone or something does not experience it? Given the problems associated with the inevitability of the extinction of the human race, at least as we know it, and the multiplicity of beneficiaries, Hartshorne rejects the second anti-theistic premise. Again, for many humanists, this is an acceptable premise; Hartshorne certainly realizes this.

Against Premise Three

The third anti-theistic premise, that “there is a supreme aim, which is to promote the good life among creatures after death or in heaven,” is open to obvious objections. First of all, “we...do not know our individual immortality,” and, according to Hartshorne, “there are a priori arguments against it” (1970, 289). For many thinkers, that we are spatially restricted indicates that we are also temporally limited. Hartshorne is definitely one of these thinkers. This premise also suffers from difficulties associated with multiple beneficiaries. Viney appropriately asks “why the happiness of two disembodied spirits is better than the happiness of one” (1985, 115). In order to evaluate properly the plausibility of premise three, we must attempt to answer at least two questions.
Are there adequate reasons for positing human immortality while simultaneously denying the existence of divinity? Is human post-mortem existence given to experience?

Regarding the first question, all process thinkers agree that the answer is “no.” However, regarding the second question, there is division in the process school. For most process thinkers, including both Whitehead and Hartshorne, there is no convincing evidence that suggests that human beings experience any sort of subjective, post-mortem existence. Indeed, Hartshorne often denies even the possibility of subjective existence after death, speaking disdainfully about “tall tales [we tell ourselves] about human career after death” (1984, 117). Instead, Hartshorne, along with Whitehead, holds that all finite experiences have “objective immortality” in God (Griffin 2001, 234).

According to the doctrine of objective immortality, since God experiences all that is occurring and remembers all past experiences perfectly, humans, in a certain sense, live eternally in the divine memory. Our contribution to the divine life is our immortality. This is the source of our worth and significance. For Hartshorne, objective immortality, not subjective survival after bodily death, supplies our lives with the ultimate meaning we presuppose in practice.
While Whitehead and Hartshorne agree that the existence of subjective immortality is, at the very least, highly unlikely, some subsequent process thinkers have suggested that there is convincing evidence for human survival of bodily death. David Ray Griffin is foremost amongst these thinkers. According to Griffin, “By virtue of its doctrine of the human being as a compound individual, process philosophy provides the basic necessary condition for the possibility of life after death within a naturalistic framework” (2001, 241). Emphasizing the process notion that the mind and brain are distinct, Griffin holds that brain death need not logically necessitate the death of the mind.

Some critics of Griffin’s position claim that the prospect of life after death is contradicted by modern psychology, “which is said to show the mind to be wholly dependent on the brain” (Griffin 2001, 241). Major proponents of such a view include Bertrand Russell, Corliss Lamont, and J. J. C. Smart. Russell claims that “all the evidence” suggests that what humans hold to be the mental life is “bound up with brain structure and organized bodily energy” (qtd. in Griffin 2001, 241). For Griffin, however, the mind’s experience is not entirely reliant upon the workings of the brain, and he holds that process philosophy reinforces the possibility of some sort of mental life after the death of the body. Griffin’s position has as its
foundation three core doctrines of process philosophy agreed upon by both Whitehead and Hartshorne, namely: “its nonsensationist doctrine of perception, its panexperientialism with organizational duality, and its naturalistic theism” (2001, 244). Griffin’s argument for subjective immortality may well have as its ground certain core doctrines of process philosophy, but, on this issue, he is certainly breaking with the two most important process thinkers. Indeed, the fact remains that Hartshorne explicitly denied the reality of any sort of subjective post-mortem experience, and Whitehead counted the same as highly unlikely.

The Neoclassical Theistic Conclusion

For Hartshorne, each of the anti-theistic premises is unsatisfactory “either by reason of insoluble paradoxes or contradictions” (Viney, 1985, 107). The neoclassical theistic conclusion alone makes sense of what we experience as our moral lives. Recalling what he felt was a major mistake in Kant’s famous moral argument, Hartshorne maintains:

God is needed, not so there can be human advantage

---

3 For an excellent, detailed discussion of each of these core doctrines, see Griffin’s Reenchantment without Supernaturalism, pp. 5-10 and 52-168.
in the ultimate long run for good acts and human disadvantage in the long run for bad acts, but so that the ultimate human long run need not concern us at all, but only the human present and relative long run. Our need is not for an ultimate aim of self-advantage, or human advantage, but for an ultimate aim—period. (1972, 72)

This ultimate aim, according to Hartshorne, is to contribute positively to the divine existence by encouraging the good life among creatures during their natural life spans. As human beings experience that which is desirable, God enjoys their enjoyments. When I love my mother, God experiences my experience of offering love as well as my mother’s experience of receiving love. The divine life or experience is altered everlastingly. As entities that experience, we contribute to the very shape and nature of the divine experience. What more meaning or significance do we as humans require? The worth of human existence is eternally sealed “in the never darkened expanse of his memory, the treasure house of all fact and attained value” (Hartshorne 1941, 298).
PART VI

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have attempted to demonstrate that notions such as good, importance, and desirability are meaningless apart from a moral theory that is metaphysical, theistic, and teleological. As a consequence, if one has pertinent reasons for denying the existence of the divine or metaphysics, as many have suggested that they do, one has no ground for confirming the existence of morality or axiological values of any kind. Notions such as importance or good are rendered useless without a final source of legitimization. Nonetheless, the same thinkers privilege certain actions over others in daily practice, and this is to assume, at least tacitly, importance or value. To suggest that one has pertinent reasons for denying the existence of the divine is to suggest that these reasons are more important or better than the reasons theists posit for assuming God’s existence. However, if terms such as “importance” or “good” have no final standard or basis according to which they can be measured, the atheist has no basis for assuming that his reasons are better or more
important than those of the theist; whereas the theist, retaining God as the absolute standard, can justifiably assert that his reasons are more pertinent than those of the atheist. The theist has a much more solid ground upon which to build such arguments.

Anyone who explicitly denies the reality of the divine as metaphysical and teleological has no ground for making comparative value judgments at all. The fact remains, however, that we all presuppose the reality of values such as desirability and importance in daily practice. To act as a decision-maker is to presuppose importance or desirability. Thus, as Whitehead implores, in developing our various philosophical opinions, we must begin with those notions that we inevitably presuppose in practice. To fail to do so is to fall into performative contradictions that make no sense of reality as it is given to experience. Since we all presuppose the existence of values such as importance and desirability, philosophers involved in moral theory are obligated to explain with clarity the existence of such values. According to Hartshorne, in order to explicate accurately the existence of the moral values we presuppose in practice, we must appeal to a moral theory that takes God, properly formulated, to be the real component of the metaphysical structure of the universe
capable of providing the final aim according to which moral agents can lead their lives.
REFERENCES


