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## **Modern Personalist Philosophies of God**

In ancient and medieval philosophy and theology, as was discussed in the preceding chapters, the ground of being was often described in impersonal terms — totally, or at least almost totally. The God of the philosophers tended to be described as an impersonal absolute, perfect and unchanging, which was completely transcendent and far removed from the things of this universe, where we human beings lived our lives. In some of these systems — such as medieval Arabic Neo-Platonism — the ground of being was simply the impersonal base of a universe which operated, out of blind necessity, as a system of mechanical natural processes. That medieval Arabic God could not be said to know of the existence of human beings as individuals.

And most of the medieval philosophies (including the Christian ones) had great difficulty devising an adequate answer to the problem of how an eternal and unchanging ground of being could know of the existence of a universe moving through time, particularly if there

were, in that universe, creatures like human beings who were exercising genuine free will. The tendency often was to try to solve that problem by denying human freedom, and attempting to describe human mental processes in deterministic and mechanical terms, where our belief that we were thinking through our decisions and making choices about how we would act, was simply an illusion. This tendency continued into the early modern period in one especially striking version, the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, which we can see still being defended in the eighteenth century by Jonathan Edwards in his book *On the Freedom of the Will*. The only way philosophers of this persuasion could see to put human beings into direct contact with an absolute, eternal, impersonal, and unchanging God was by effectually denying any real human freedom, and hence (in most thoughtful people's eyes) human moral responsibility. How could I be praised or condemned, either one, for doing that which I could not help doing, in a universe where everything operated mechanically and impersonally, and I was no more than a cog in that machine? Philosophers who begin by assuming that God could not possibly be a personal being, seem to find themselves also having major difficulties explaining how humans can be personal beings.

In reaction to this centuries old tendency in western thought, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century there were a number of philosophical systems devised which attempted to show that God was a totally personal being at an intrinsic and necessary level. Ultimate reality was a conscious person or self, the new philosophers insisted, who was aware of us as individuals. In some of these systems, it was also possible for human beings to enter into a personal relationship with God, as for example in the kind of personal idealism developed

by Mary Whiton Calkins (1863-1930), who was one of the three most important early women philosophers in America.<sup>1</sup> And there were many other philosophers and theologians during that same period who developed versions of these same kinds of ideas.

In particular, two of these ways of speaking about a God who was intrinsically personal to the core of his essential being, managed to develop into distinct schools of philosophy which, though small, managed to flourish and produce a series of competent thinkers lasting for at least three or more generations: the *Boston Personalists* and the *process philosophers*.

### **The Boston Personalists**

The Boston Personalists were closely connected to Boston University and to Boston School of Theology, which was linked to the university, and was one of the two major Methodist graduate theological institutions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Since the Methodists were the second largest Protestant group in the United States during that period (exceeded in number only by the Baptists), and since a majority of the Methodist bishops of that time had received their early training at Boston School of Theology (or if not there, at a Methodist seminary which had close ties with the Boston faculty), the Boston Personalists had an impact at the popular level, all across the United States, far greater than was normally associated with an abstract philosophical theory. These ideas ending up being embodied not only in numerous sermons in parish churches, but in the Methodist Sunday School literature and — most importantly of all — in the daily devotional work called *The Upper*

*Room*, which the Southern Methodists began publishing in 1935. These little pamphlets spoke so well to the spiritual life, that Americans of many other denominations began using *The Upper Room* for their morning prayers, including Roman Catholics.

This Methodist meditational book, which was strongly influenced by the ideas of the Boston Personalists, was also the most popular meditational book during the first thirteen years of the Alcoholics Anonymous movement (1935-1948), so that we can see its influence coming out in a number of the fundamental ideas and perspectives contained in the A.A. Big Book. Anyone who wants to make a serious study of the concept of God which is taught in the Big Book, and even more importantly the inner dynamic of the tension between divine grace and human freedom which runs through every page of the Big Book, needs to be thoroughly acquainted with Boston Personalism, for although it was not the only source of ideas in these areas, it was one of the major and most important sources.

And later on in that century, the black civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., received his Ph.D. in systematic theology from Boston University in 1955, with a thesis on Paul Tillich, to whom two earlier chapters of this study were devoted. This was the same year that a young black woman named Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus to a white person, a small symbolic protest against the injustice of the racist world in which she lived, which sparked off the great mid-twentieth century American civil rights movement. King, who had become pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, became one of the key leaders of the Montgomery Bus Boycott which followed. And King's movement, in turn, spurred other people into action, in a series of

successful attacks on the old racist way of doing things (conducting voter registration campaigns, forcing an end to segregated schools, and so on), which did more to help African-Americans in concrete ways than anything else in the whole course of the twentieth century. The Boston Personalists had taught King about the fatherhood of God and the infinite worth of the human personality, and King took them seriously and acted on it.

### **Rudolf Herman Lotze**

The Boston Personalists borrowed some of their key ideas and perspectives from a German philosopher named Rudolf Herman Lotze (1817-1881), a fascinating figure who combined deep philosophical interests with the study of medicine. He believed that the study of physics and particularly biology could be pursued with full scientific responsibility, without sacrificing belief in either a personal God or in human personhood. We study scientific *facts* in the context of scientific *laws*, which provide us the *means* to obtain the higher *moral and aesthetic values* which we desire. We can only make sense of that process however, in a world which we see as under the governance of a personal Deity who has voluntarily chosen those laws of nature, through whose natural operations he will ultimately gain his purposes. That is because at the highest level, nothing is real except the living spirit of God and the world of living spirits which he has created, who are in continuous personal relationship to him as well as to each other.

But this did not require us to deny any of the major findings of modern science. As one of the Boston Personalists put it, God did indeed create all the species of living creatures which have ever lived

on the face of the earth, but the way God created them was through the natural workings of the laws of evolution — including not only the evolutionary successes, but also the evolutionary failures and mistakes — because as any competent biologist will explain, there have been at least a thousand evolutionary experiments that failed for every one that succeeded. Evolution has never in any way been a process which was magically guided so that each step automatically was a smooth and workable step forwards. The fossil record is littered with the bones and shells of countless species which flourished for a brief period but then went extinct. Or in other words, neither Lotze nor the Boston Personalists wrote anything which would give aid or comfort to the modern anti-evolutionary figures who have attempted to teach “Creation Science” or “Intelligent Design.” This is an important point to make. Lotze and the Boston Personalists accepted the findings of good modern science, and were in no way hostile to modern scientific methodology.

But if the laws of science and the ordinary workings of natural process are real and their existence unarguable, we must also say that human persons are real too, as well as the human perception of goodness and beauty, and this, Lotze and the Boston Personalists argued, can only be made sense of in a universe presided over by a fully personal God.

### **Borden Parker Bowne**

The Boston Personalist movement was founded by Borden Parker Bowne (1847-1910). Brought up in a devout Methodist home, he did his undergraduate degree at New York University, followed by a

masters degree, and then went over to Europe to study for two years in France and Germany. This was when he discovered the philosophy of Lotze. Shortly after his return to the United States, he accepted a position teaching philosophy at Boston University in 1876, where he continued to teach and eventually serve as Dean of the Graduate School, down to his death in 1910.<sup>2</sup>

His book *The Immanence of God*, which came out in 1905, was the classic statement of the Boston Personalist position.<sup>3</sup> Philosophically, it was a *personal idealism* which stressed personality as the fundamental reality, both at the natural level and at the level of the divine. God is revealed (through the human beings who act as channels of his grace) as an infinite Person, whose will directs the purpose of the world and whose grace is expressed in both creation and redemption.

This doctrine we call the divine immanence; by which we mean that God is the omnipresent ground of all finite existence and activity. The world, alike of things and of spirits, is nothing existing and acting on its own account, while God is away in some extra-sidereal region, but it continually depends upon and is ever upheld by the ever-living, ever-present, ever-working God.<sup>4</sup>

### **Edgar Sheffield Brightman**

Bowne's successor as leader of the Boston Personalists was Edgar Sheffield Brightman (1884-1953).<sup>5</sup> Brightman was an ordained Methodist minister, as his father had also been before him. He did his

B.A. and M.A. degrees at Brown University, but then went to Boston University and Boston School of Theology where he earned a Bachelor of Sacred Theology in 1910, followed by a Ph.D. in 1912. Like Bowne, he also spent two years studying in Europe, in Brightman's case at the University of Berlin and the University of Marburg. After teaching philosophy at Nebraska Wesleyan University and religion and ethics at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, he came back to Boston University and taught philosophy there from 1919 until his death in 1953.

The entire universe is personal, Brightman insisted. It is made up of minds and their consciousnesses. God presides over all as the Supreme Person.

To deny that God is conscious is to assign to him a state of unconsciousness; it is to deny that he can love or know or will or purpose, for all of these are conscious processes. If there is a God at all, a being worthy of our worship, he must be conscious. A blind force might be feared, but could not be worshiped; an unconscious spirit might be pitied, but could not be adored. To be a God is to be conscious.<sup>6</sup>

This vision of a loving and compassionate God — a God with whom we could have a two-way personal relationship, talking to him just as we would to a good friend, and being aware of his response — flourished in Methodist circles through the whole first half of the twentieth century. And it also made its influence felt outside Methodist circles, including its profound influence on the Alcoholics

Anonymous movement during its formative period in the 1930's and 40's.

The Boston Personalist school nevertheless began to gradually lose influence in Methodist circles in the 1960's, under the impact of Neo-Orthodox theology and existentialist theology (among other forces), along with the rise of process philosophy and process theology. During the 1980's I spent a year in Boston, serving as Visiting Professor of Ancient History at Boston University and Visiting Professor of Theology at Boston School of Theology. Boston Personalist ideas were still being taught, but the movement had lost most of the enormous power which it had wielded over the American Methodists during the first half of the century.

### **Process philosophy: Alfred North Whitehead**

As a result of this, at the Methodist seminary where I did my B.D. degree in theology in the 1960's,<sup>7</sup> process philosophy had already taken the place of the older Boston Personalist system. This was a philosophy linked closely to the writings of an Englishman named Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947). Whitehead came from a staunch Church of England background: his father and uncles were all Anglican pastors, and his brother was a bishop. He started out as a mathematician, and taught that subject for thirty years at Trinity College, at Cambridge University. But he became interested in the philosophical foundations of mathematics when he collaborated with the philosopher Bertrand Russell in writing the *Principia Mathematica*

(1910-13), a seminal work in which the two of them attempted to show that all of arithmetic could be deduced from a restricted set of logical axioms. He nevertheless continued to make his living teaching mathematics, and became Professor of Applied Mathematics at the Imperial College of Science and Technology in London in 1914.

But then in 1924, when Whitehead was sixty-three years old, he was invited over to the United States to teach philosophy at Harvard University, where he lectured on that subject until his retirement at the age of seventy-six. His two most important philosophical works were written during these later years: *Process and Reality* (1929) when he was sixty-eight, and *The Adventures of Ideas* (1933) when he was seventy-two.

In “process philosophy,” as Whitehead’s system was referred to, God and the universe formed a single evolving organism, in which all the other things in the universe were constituent parts of this cosmic process. Since all the individual pieces were involved in constant flow and change, God — one of whose main roles was to continually integrate everything else that was happening into an organized whole — of necessity likewise had to be involved in growth and change.

Whitehead’s God stood in stark contrast to the God of the Western European Middle Ages, whose major traditional attributes were to be completely eternal and unchanging. The word “eternal” in medieval Latin philosophy and theology usually meant *static*, that is, not altering in any kind of way at all.<sup>8</sup> One can immediately see the philosophical difficulty that would arise from taking a God who was completely static and unchanging, and then trying to make sense of any claim that he was a warmly personal being who knew us human

beings as individuals, and related to us with love and compassion in our ongoing daily problems.<sup>9</sup>

### **Charles Hartshorne**

The spread and influence of process philosophy was however probably due more to the work of an American philosopher, Charles Hartshorne, 1897-2000 (these dates are correct, by the way, he lived to the age of 103, and was still writing when he was in his nineties). Like Whitehead, he came from an Anglican background — his father was an Episcopal priest in Pennsylvania, and his maternal grandfather had also been an Episcopal priest — but he eventually became more closely attached to the Unitarian Universalist Church, in which his wife Dorothy had been raised. He volunteered for the U.S. Army during the First World War, to serve as a hospital orderly.<sup>10</sup> He spent twenty-three months in the Army Medical Corps in France.

At all points in his philosophical development, he took for granted the terrible reality of pain, suffering, and tragedy, as a counterpoint to the goodness, love, and beauty in the universe. During those war years, he could see the victims of war lying in their beds, but almost simultaneously look out at the beauties of the French landscape. Both were a real part of life and the universe. Most importantly, however, he became convinced that a world of purely material things, devoid of all emotion and feeling, could not be claimed as the first and immediate datum of experience. All our sense impressions, even our awareness of particular colors, *were* feelings — feelings of joy, pleasure, and attraction, or distaste, unpleasantness, and repulsion. Pure materialism was a pale abstraction created in the mind, drawn

from what we actually prehended and perceived, and what was really there.<sup>11</sup>

When he returned home to the United States, he went to Harvard, and finished three degrees in four years, a B.A., an M.A., and a Ph.D. After traveling abroad for two years, listening to the lectures of the great philosophers of Europe, he was made a research fellow at Harvard, and spent one semester grading papers for Alfred North Whitehead.

It would nevertheless be a mistake to regard him simply as Whitehead's disciple. Hartshorne had already come to many of the same conclusions on his own, well before he met the English philosopher. And in particular, Hartshorne had, at the heart of his own system, a basic image of God as the World Soul, a view of the divine which Whitehead always soundly rejected. Hartshorne spoke of his own system as a kind of "neoclassical theism," in which God was to the universe as the human consciousness was to the human body, a way of looking at the divine that went back two millennia to the ancient Stoics and Neo-Platonists.

Hartshorne's prolific writings gained him a large number of followers. Among the Methodist theologians, this included John B. Cobb, Jr., and my own seminary teacher, Schubert Ogden. But his ideas have had a far wider impact than that, influencing Christian theologians from a number of other denominations, and certain important Jewish thinkers as well, along with some of the current New Thought authors. Process thought remains one of the vital themes within American philosophy and theology, with a large number of devoted followers: the journal of *Process Studies*, for example, which began being published in 1971, is still going strong.

## **Process philosophy and Boston Personalism: limitations on God**

There were in fact many similarities, and even links between the process philosophers and the Boston Personalists. There was a period in Boston when many students were shuttling back and forth to hear E. S. Brightman lecture on personalism at Boston University and Alfred North Whitehead lecture on process philosophy at Harvard. Brightman and Hartshorne carried on a correspondence for many years, which has recently been made available in a volume published by Vanderbilt University Press.<sup>12</sup> There were many important places where the two of them held identical or at least closely similar philosophical positions. In particular, Brightman and Hartshorne both agreed that there were necessary limitations as to what God could and could not do.

Actual religious experience, Brightman argued, required us to hold to a kind of “finite theism,” in which God’s freedom to act was always to some degree opposed by “The Given” (as he called it) within God’s own nature:<sup>13</sup>

There is within [God], in addition to his reason and his active creative will, a passive element which enters into every one of his conscious states ... and constitutes a problem for him. This element we call The Given. The evils of life and the delays in the attainment of value, in so far as they come from God and not from human freedom, are thus due to his nature, yet not wholly to his

deliberate choice. His will and reason acting on The  
Given produce the world and achieve value in it.

Hartshorne pushed this idea much further, and gave careful philosophical explanations of why it was necessary to include, within God's being, what many traditional theologians would regard as strong limitations. The clearest and simplest account of this was given in the introduction and conclusion to a book called *Philosophers Speak of God*, which he and W. L. Reese put together in 1953.<sup>14</sup>

When I began seminary in 1961, I was at first filled with great foreboding. I had done both a B.S. and half of the course work for a Ph.D. in physical chemistry and nuclear physics, and based on this training as a scientist, I could see no way that a theological education could go much further than some sort of glorified Sunday School classes. Three books totally changed my mind: Paul Tillich's *Dynamics of Faith* and *Courage to Be*, and this book by Charles Hartshorne, *Philosophers Speak of God*. Hartshorne's book contained numerous excerpts from a long string of philosophers and theologians from all eras of history and a vast number of different religious traditions, including not only pagan Greek and medieval Christian authors, but also Muslim, Jewish, and ancient Egyptian authors, along with a host of modern thinkers. In addition, at the beginning and the end, Hartshorne explained what the real philosophical and metaphysical issues were, and why they were so important. But beyond that, he also showed me that the most significant questions of philosophical theology could be explored at the highest levels of intellectual inquiry, and with the same degree of scientific precision with which one would pursue the fundamental questions in philosophy

of science. In fact, the two areas are closely connected and interrelated.

One way perhaps to explain what Hartshorne saw was at stake, is to repeat the old conundrum raised by people who are attacking the concept of a loving and compassionate God. The underlying argument goes back to the Epicurean philosophers of ancient Greece, but the clearest and best statement of the argument which I have ever read, is that given in David Hume's skeptical work entitled *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779). This was another work which I read during my first year in seminary. I think that every philosopher or theologian who wants to write about this issue should be compelled to first read and make a careful study of Hume's book. It is one of the most powerful collections of skeptical and atheistic arguments ever assembled. But if you cannot get past his arguments, there is no point in trying to write a defense of theism at all.

This particular part of Hume's attack on the concept of God is put in the form of a set of statements, followed by a question:

1. If God is omniscient (all knowing)
2. and omnipotent (all powerful)
3. and God is also loving and compassionate,
4. then where do evil and suffering come from?

Charles Hartshorne dealt with that argument by seizing the horns of the dilemma, and qualifying *both* of the first two claims: (1) If the universe is constructed in such a way that genuine novelty appears, so that the future is never completely knowable in advance, then a God who knows *everything that it is possible to know*, will of necessity

know the still uncertain future only as “still uncertain.” He will NOT know everything about every single future event with absolute certainty. (2) And a God who rules over a universe in which real change and novelty can occur, and in which human beings are granted some degree of free will and choice, will have additional limitations on his power, because he will find things happening in the universe which are not his doing — things which he could not step in and arbitrarily make come out different, without removing the possibility of real novelty and true human free will.

### **Meaningless statements and logical incompatibilities**

In the medieval universities, students were regularly presented with the paradoxical sounding statement that “not even God can make a square circle,” and asked to explain why that statement was true. To understand why it is necessarily true, we need to pose the statement in two other equivalent forms, where the difficulty can perhaps be more easily seen:

“God can make a square circle.”

“God made a square circle.”

The basic problem is that neither of these two statements mean anything. They are quite literally nonsense statements. That is because the words “square circle” do not mean anything intelligible in English. If I said “God can make a goobah woobah,” this would

likewise be a nonsense statement, because the words “goobah woobah” do not mean anything intelligible in proper modern English.

Now it is true that the words “square” and “circle” both mean something in English, but it is still nevertheless true that if something can be described in English as a square it cannot simultaneously be described in English as a circle, and vice versa. So of the following three statements:

- (1) God can make a square.
- (2) God can make a circle.
- (3) God can make a square circle.

The first two statements are both possible statements, but the third one has no meaning, and could not describe any intelligible state of affairs.

What Hartshorne does in *Philosophers Speak of God* (and elsewhere) is to point out other sets of statements, which he likewise believes are incompatible. In both of the following sets of statements, he argues, we must choose either number one or number two, but we cannot have both being true simultaneously.

- (1) Genuine novelty and real creativity occur at various times and places during the course of history.
- (2) God foresees (and hence controls) every last detail of everything that is going to happen, through the entire infinite future, so that nothing ever happens or will happen which was not absolutely predetermined in advance.

(1) Human beings have free will. On those occasions when human beings think at a fundamental level about the kind of basic moral principles and values they are going to live their lives by, these are genuine choices which they make, and at least part of their decision for the good or for the evil is not controlled or determined by anyone or anything except the individual human who makes that decision.

(2) Human beings have no free will at the ultimate level. God foresees (and hence controls) every last detail of the infinite future, so that nothing ever happens which was not absolutely predetermined in advance. This means that human beings move and act in fact like puppets on strings, and it means that when we spend hours thinking that we are weighing our moral options, our belief that we actually have the power to decide anything is all an illusion.

### **The limitations placed upon a loving personal God**

If a personal God, out of love, chose to create a universe in which real novelty would occur, and in which real creativity could take place — and if such a personal God, out of love, also chose to create a universe in which beings would evolve who could make real choices about values and moral issues — and if such a personal God, out of love, also chose to create a universe in which the flow of time would occur, where new things came into being as old things passed away — then this God would have to self-limit his own power and allow

numerous things to happen which involved his creatures in pain, evil, and destruction, and would also find that even he would not know in advance all the future events which were going to occur.

Can the universe we actually live in, be construed as the creation of a personal God who in fact is loving and good? It depends on what we decide demonstrates the greatest amount of true love and goodness. If we think that real love and goodness means that no human being would ever be allowed to make any choice except the absolutely correct one, and if we think that real love and goodness means that nothing which exists can ever be allowed to die, be destroyed, pass away, or disappear, and if we think that real love and goodness means that nothing genuinely new or creative or unpredictable is ever allowed to happen, then I suppose one could argue that the God who rules over the universe we actually live in, is neither good nor loving. But if we decide that a truly loving God would therefore have to give his creatures the ability on occasion to think and choose for themselves and pick their own values, and the ability to engage in real creativity and innovation and scientific discovery, then the kind of universe which God has in fact given us is one of the greatest gifts which one loving personal being could give to another.

The important issue that Hartshorne raises is that we have to take a choice as to what we are going to regard as the most loving kind of behavior. We cannot have it both ways. We can have (A) a universe in which we have human free will, the flow of time, and the possibility of novelty and creativity, or we can have (B) a universe in which God absolutely controls every single thing that happens. But we cannot have both simultaneously. If statement B accurately describes the real universe, then it is difficult, given the presence of evil and pain and

suffering, to describe God as loving and compassionate. But if statement A is the correct one, we can describe the evil, pain, and suffering as the necessary concomitants of a universe in which free will, time, and real novelty occur.

### **Good, evil, freedom, and a universe composed of more than one person**

When I was a seminary student, I had the privilege to hear Charles Hartshorne speak. He was in his late sixties by then. He came up to Dallas from Austin, where he spent his retirement years as Ashbel Smith Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at the University of Texas. Like Tillich — perhaps not as strongly but still distinctly present — there was an almost visible aura around the man. Again, I saw what medieval artists were trying to convey when they painted halos on the holy men and women who had been in such an intimate connection with the divine. Somehow or other, the eternal numinous power had entered their hearts and souls and dwelt in them in a special way. Tillich had been a chaplain riding on the ambulances in the First World War on the German side. Hartshorne had been an orderly in a military hospital in back of the lines on the U.S. side. Both had been involved in a world filled with enormous horror and suffering, but both had learned how to turn to God and rise above it, and lead lives afterwards where they did good for other people.

I remember that in the question and answer period after Hartshorne's lecture, someone in the audience told him about a friend who had died horribly of some disease at a very young age, and asked

Hartshorne how he made sense of that. With sadness and compassion, Hartshorne said simply, “He was unlucky.”

Does this seem cold and hard, and lacking in love and compassion? In the twelve step groups, it is not uncommon for situations to develop where, for example, a member might tell the others at a meeting about some great tragedy that has just struck — perhaps a medical diagnosis that the person has some painful and fatal disease, and that there is almost nothing that the doctors can do for him or her — and one can hear statements like the following: “I turned to God and I screamed, ‘Why me?’ And then I remembered my program, and I thought to myself, ‘Why not me?’”

When Hartshorne was ninety-three, he published his autobiography, with the very interesting title, *The Darkness and the Light: A Philosopher Reflects Upon His Fortunate Career and Those Who Made it Possible*.<sup>15</sup> In the preface, he calls his book “a celebration of life.” But sometimes we manage things badly instead of well, and sometimes we have bad luck instead of good. That too is part of life.

The root of evil, suffering, misfortune, wickedness, is the same as the root of all good, joy, happiness, and that is freedom, decision making. If, by a combination of good management and good luck, X and Y harmonize in their decisions, the AB they bring about may be good and happy; if not, not. To attribute all good to good luck, or all to good management, is equally erroneous. Life is not and cannot be other than a mixture of the two. God’s good management is the explanation of there being a cosmic order that limits the scope of freedom and hence

of chance — limits, but does not reduce to zero. With too much freedom, with nothing like laws of nature (which, some of us believe, are divinely decided and sustained), there could be only meaningless chaos; with too little, there could be only such good as there may be in atoms and molecules by themselves, apart from all higher forms. With no creaturely freedom at all, there could not even be that, but at most God alone, making divine decisions — about what? It is the existence of many decision makers that produces everything, whether good or ill. It is the existence of God that makes it possible for the innumerable decisions to add up to a coherent and basically good world where opportunities justify the risks. Without freedom, no risks — and no opportunities.<sup>16</sup>

Freedom is the root of all evil, but also the root of all good. Is this in itself a great evil? Hartshorne says not at all, that we live in a fundamentally *good universe*, where “the opportunities justify the risks.” But poor decisions are made by human beings, chance and randomness are real, and we live in a universe where there is not only a personal God presiding over all, but also countless human beings who are persons too, and — as Hartshorne would argue strongly — animals and birds and other creatures which are also to varying degrees personal beings. (Dogs, for example, feel love and hate and all the other emotions, and in their own way make choices and decisions. Hartshorne believed deeply that philosophers who had no love and respect for animals and birds as living and feeling creatures

could never, in the long run, understand the highest and noblest part of what made human beings fully human.)

[The universe is not] the expression of a single will only ... it is a community of countless wills, whose supreme Will is not a tyrant, however benevolent or otherwise, nor yet the contriver of an all-inclusive machine, but the supreme inspiring genius of the Great Community of partly self-determining creatures. How this could be without risk of incompatibility and hence suffering in the innumerable decisions out of which existence is woven I at least cannot see. But I can see, I think, how sublime beauty and pervasive zest can and do result.<sup>17</sup>

For Hartshorne, the price of the “sublime beauty and pervasive zest” which we experienced in this universe, was the risk at all times of also having to undergo pain and suffering. Was this risk the greatest of all evils? Remembering that I could avoid that risk only by sacrificing all my own freedom, as well as everyone else’s, so that I would become nothing other than an unfeeling puppet on a string, a machine programmed by an internal computer. Even as an old man in his nineties, Hartshorne proclaimed that the beauty and the joy of life were entirely worth the necessity of also experiencing dangers and hardships. As long as he could hear the music of the birds singing — his other great love in addition to philosophy — he knew that the universe was good, and he quietly rejoiced in it.

## The Great Adventure

A fool demands a universe in which no one else has any freedom except me, a world in which people in foreign countries never do terrible things, a world in which the people in authority are always wise and honest, and no one in my family ever dies. And if I am a fool of that sort, I then proclaim myself as an atheist, denying that God exists, because God refuses to dance instantly at my bidding and make the rest of the universe obey me. Of all the beings in the universe, only I am to be allowed to do ignorant or cruel or uncaring things.

A coward whimpers for a universe in which there will never be any pain or discomfort or blighted hopes, for me at any rate, at whatever the cost. If I am a coward of this sort, I would in fact be willing to sacrifice all my own freedom in order to obtain it, and would willingly throw myself into the oblivion of all thought and feeling. Many men and women of that sort become alcoholics or drug addicts, while others commit suicide, or otherwise flee from reality and from having to feel their own feelings and emotions.

But heroes instead display the courage to live life as an adventure, *the great adventure* that we read about over and over again throughout the history of the world: Moses leading his people through the trackless desert, King David struggling for his throne, the prophet Elijah confronting Queen Jezebel and the prophets of Ba'al, the apostle Paul undergoing savage beatings and rejection in city after city, the brave death of the noble Socrates, and so on. In the field of science, think of Galileo fighting the ignorant opponents of the new science in seventeenth-century Italy, and twenty-two-year-old Charles

Darwin signing on for the five-year-long voyage (1831-36) in which the sailing ship HMS Beagle, a three-masted barque only ninety feet (27 meters) long, ended up sailing entirely around the world. This trip was one of extraordinary danger, both at sea and in some of the places where they landed. Scientists have to show courage too, in order to carry out the great adventure of life.

At the level of popular culture, the American cowboy in the old-time movies and novels held his head high and rode the trail unflinchingly all the way to the finish, just like the knights of old. Real cowboys and real knights always knew that the trail eventually came to an end. In James Earle Fraser's famous sculpture, "The End of the Trail" (1894), the Native American's horse has his head bowed with fatigue, but he is still on his feet, and his rider is slumped but is still hanging on. The end of the trail is hard — no matter who you are, you finally get to the point where you are weary to the bone and have no more strength left in you — but even then you try your best to go down, if you can, with the same bravery with which you rode the rest of the trail.

What both the Boston Personalists and the process philosophers emphasized was that, at every step of the trail, our song can be *Immanu'el*, "God is with us," for the Divine Person is both our lord and our ever loyal companion on this adventure.

## NOTES

1. Mary Whiton Calkins, who published ten books over the course of her long career, was educated at Harvard and taught philosophy at Wellesley for forty-two years, as well as being one of the pioneers who (along with William James) worked to establish the study of psychology as a separate academic field. She became the first woman to serve as president of the American Psychological Association (1905-06), as well as serving as the first woman president of the American Philosophical Association (1918-19), of which she had been a charter member.

2. Thomas A. Langford, *Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 119-124.

3. Borden Parker Bowne, *The Immanence of God* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1905).

4. Selections from Bowne's *The Immanence of God* in Thomas A. Langford, *Wesleyan Theology: A Sourcebook* (Durham, North Carolina: Labyrinth Press, 1984), 151-161.

5. See Langford, *Practical Divinity*, 175-177.

6. Selections from Edgar S. Brightman, *The Problem of God* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1930) in Langford, *Wesleyan Theology: A Sourcebook*, 182-193.

7. Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, where I was a student from 1961 to 1965.

8. The word "eternal" did not necessarily have that kind of totally static connotation in the Greek philosophy and theology of the eastern Mediterranean. Eusebius of Caesarea for example, who lived in the fourth century and provided the only sophisticated alternative in the ancient and

medieval world to Augustine's philosophy of history, described the *Aiôn* (eternity) as *chronos achronos*, that is, as "nonchronologically-organized chronological flow," or pure process itself. Chronological time arose, Eusebius said, when this pure undifferentiated process — the *Aiôn*, which was the flow of ultimate reality as it was in itself — was organized by the human mind by turning it into a sequence of objectified phenomena arranged in chronological order, linked by cause and effect.

9. This is not necessarily impossible. But Whitehead's disciple Charles Hartshorne argued that it was impossible to do without creating the idea of an omniscient and omnipotent God who had both foreseen and foreordained everything that was to take place in a universe in which no true novelty could ever appear. Human free will and choice would of necessity be no more than an illusion in a world ruled by that kind of static and unchanging God, and one can certainly question whether time itself would be much more than an illusion of some sort, if no true novelty could ever appear.

10. Charles Hartshorne, *The Darkness and the Light: A Philosopher Reflects Upon His Fortunate Career and Those Who Made it Possible* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp. 124-125.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 150-151.

12. Randall E. Auxier and Mark Y. A. Davies, eds., *Hartshorne and Brightman on God, Process, and Persons: The Correspondence, 1922-1945* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2001).

13. Langford, *Wesleyan Theology: A Sourcebook*, p. 184; see also Langford, *Practical Divinity*, p. 177.

14. Charles Hartshorne and W. L. Reese, *Philosophers Speak of God* (University of Chicago, 1953).

15. Charles Hartshorne, *The Darkness and the Light: A Philosopher Reflects Upon His Fortunate Career and Those Who Made it Possible* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

16. Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (State University of New York Press, 1983), p. 18.

17. Charles Hartshorne, *The Logic of Perfection and Other Essays in Neoclassical Metaphysics* (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1962), p. 316.

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