

“Mutable God”: Hartshorne and Indian Theism

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Introductory and historical remarks

This paper is part of an ongoing, fieldwide endeavor to integrate Eastern thought into a single world history of philosophy. My aim here is to reveal conceptions that unite, as well as issues that divide, Western process theism and Indian theism. After surveying the relevant history, I shall focus on, in particular, Charles Hartshorne and the Indian philosopher, Aurobindo, as representative figures.

In the context of comparative efforts concerned with process thought and Eastern systems, this essay enjoys notable antecedents. Charles Hartshorne has identified certain Buddhist conceptions as closely consonant with his own, including views on causality, identity over time, empathetic cognition, and an ontology of “occasions” as well. There is also a similarity between Hartshorne’s “rationalist” methodology and that advanced by Buddhists who subordinate “revelation” to reason and experience.^[1] This along with the conceptual consonances identified has facilitated much thoughtful dialogue between process theologians and modern Buddhist theorists—the latter chiefly several Japanese professors of the “Kyoto school.”

In contrast, there has been much less mutual study and dialogue between process thinkers and Indian theists. Since Whitehead and Hartshorne are theists, one might have expected that the long and rich tradition of theism in India—now that for decades many of its central texts have been accessible in translation—would have spurred process philosophers to lively comparative and evaluative efforts. Similarly, one might have expected, in reverse, many modern Indian theists to have taken a keen interest in Whitehead and Hartshorne. But in fact, there has been to date, with one outstanding exception, little work along either line.^[2]

Now Hartshorne himself has made excursions into “Hindu” thought, criticizing the venerated eighth-century monist and illusionist, Śaṅkara, for instance.^[3] He has even identified the theology of the (moderately obscure) sixteenth-century Bengali Vaiṣṇava, Jīva Goswāmī, and his “Bengali school,” as espousing a concept of God closely resembling his own.^[4] But his mentions of Jīva Goswāmī are disappointing. They seem casual, and Hartshorne’s discovery that the Bengali joins him in espousing a “mutable God” (who “feels all feeling”) serendipitous only.^[5] To my knowledge, neither Hartshorne nor any process theologian has tried to draw an extended and illuminating comparison. None has tried to engage the Indian theist, of whatever stripe, Bengali-Vaiṣṇava or any other, classical or modern, in comparative and philosophic debate.^[6]

There are serious obstacles to such engagement. Jīva Goswāmī, for example, is one of the more “systematic” of Vaiṣṇava theologians in the late classical age. But he

turns—as do also his most immediate predecessors, Vallabha (c. 1450) and Caitanya (c. 1500)—to revelation, and not reason, as the grounds for his theological views. Jīva Goswāmī sees his several “scriptures”^[7] as “suprarational,” as presenting views that not only are beyond what reason, unaided, can achieve, but that also are not strictly comprehensible (*acintya*) by the rational faculty or “*buddhi*.” The views are not so much to be defended, or even “believed,” as they are, in their very incomprehensibility, to guide the soul of the devotee to a suprarational and “mystic” comprehension—in a trance devoid of intellection.^[8] Hartshorne commends Jīva Goswāmī for seeing, and he does see—much better than most in his tradition—that from the supposition that God is continually creative, that Bhagavān upholds the world at all times as immanent in world processes and directs the broad lines of change, it follows that God changes, too—at least in God’s “consequent state.” (Jīva Goswāmī posits a dual nature for God, and holds that “in essence” [*svarūpe*] God does not change.) But the supra-rationalism the Vaiṣṇava endorses remains a block to extended engagement between the two theological points of view.

Methodologically, the Naiyāyikas (“Logical-Realists”) offer process theists the best entrée into classical Indian philosophic theism. But again there are obstacles to “engagement.” Udayana (c. 1000) presents several “clusters” of argument for the existence of God, all broadly speaking “cosmological.” The premier “Navya” Naiyāyika, Gaṅgeśa (c. 1325), develops some of these, reformulating them in the refined terms of his revolutionary “New” Logic. Gaṅgeśa’s reasoning is also exclusively cosmological. I know of no “ontological argument” put forth by a Naiyāyika, of either the Old School or the New.^[9] But it is not primarily this absence that presents a block to meaningful engagement with the Naiyāyikas on the part of a theologian of Whitehead’s and Hartshorne’s camp. The Naiyāyikas are thorough-going “Aristotelians,” and uphold concepts of enduring “substance” as ontologically fundamental. Historically, the Naiyāyikas are the chief antagonists of the Buddhist “process theorists.”

Furthermore, it is these “substance theorists,” and not the Buddhist “*kṣaṇabhāṅgī*-s,” “proponents of continual change,” who—in the Indian context and “historical judgment”—clearly win. The Buddhists fail to see that some wholes are more than their constituent parts, and are unable to explain “emergent” attributes. They insist on dividing a realm of experience and a realm of concepts (all concepts are considered “abstract”), and are unable successfully to rejoin them. And they stumble in their analyses of self-consciousness and of recognition (“This is the same Devadatta I saw yesterday”), imperiled by, and ever about to succumb to the skepticism of their influential left wing, the Mādhyamikas (e.g. Nāgārjuna), or to the phenomenalism of their right wing, the early logicians (e.g. Vasubandhu and Dignāga). The Naiyāyikas score on all these issues, and others as well, particularly in epistemology, offering a theory perceived to have greater power of explanation, and one less in conflict with common sense. The Naiyāyikas carry the day argumentatively, and their victory may be counted as one factor in the eventual disappearance of Buddhist philosophic traditions in India.^[10]

Of course, process philosophy avoids many of the mistakes of the Indian Buddhists, and shows e.g. in its analysis of an “occasion” surely much more sophistication than the

Buddhists with respect to their “*kṣaṇa*,” i.e. “momentary event.” But in an attempt to take on the Nyāya, process theorists would in general find themselves (bored) rehearsing their arguments (based on science) against what Hartshorne calls (Western) “classical metaphysics”; or, in an effort to appreciate the Naiyāyika objections to “event-talk” in their own unique context, the (non-sanskritist, non-specialist!) process philosopher would encounter a (frustrating) system of technical terms seemingly impossible to decipher. Nevertheless, Nyāya’s blend of theism, refined logical apparatus, and familiarity with Buddhist “process” theory remains a spur to the interest of theologians of the Hartshornean camp.

At this point in the history of scholarship, a process philosopher would do best to focus on a modern representative of Nyāya, for example, B. K. Matilal.^[11] But unfortunately, Matilal—who is almost alone among scholars of Nyāya in trying outright to defend it, though many try to present the school in a favorable light—is not much concerned with the *theistic* claims of the classical reasoners. This is true of most other scholars as well. These moderns apparently see the epistemological and ontological accomplishments of the Naiyāyikas as separable from the theological. (It may be they think such separation makes Nyāya more palatable—more about this below.) I know of no prominent twentieth-century theist who has digested, or works from, classical Naiyāyika suppositions.^[12] But we may hope one appears soon.

I have said that Buddhist “process philosophy” disappears in the later periods of classical thought. But this is not entirely correct. Much disappears as “Buddhist” but reëmerges as “Tantric,” recast and assimilated to Hindu ideas. The problem with Tantric thought is that though rich conceptually it lies outside the mainstream of philosophic debate in Sanskrit. Scholars believe that particularly in Kashmir, where Mahāyāna remained strong much longer than in most centers of population and culture, Buddhist thought helped shape Tantric views. Nevertheless, Tantric writers appear largely unschooled in the centuries of reflection that precede them.

Further, while Tantric texts are not, to be sure, devoid of argument, even the most theoretic usually seem to belong to a genre other than “philosophy.” (Works by Abhinavagupta [c. 1050] are exceptions, as are some by Appayya Dīkṣita [c. 1550], and by a few others as well.) Most experts in the philosophic traditions have ignored them. Whereas Naiyāyikas argue with every sentence, Tantrics tend simply to propound a world view, and that with much admixture of myth, legend, and “spiritual advice.”

In this respect, Tantric thought is, on the whole, worse than Vaiṣṇava theology, and has much less right to be counted as philosophic theism.^[13] On the other hand, Tantric “metaphysics” is dominated by a concept of a mutable God, much more so than Vaiṣṇava theology—a “Shiva” who, one with a creative energy or “Shakti,” self-transforms and exceeds continuously in time a false “perfection” of a state of “static transcendence.” Thus I would think a process theologian would find herself more at home in this tradition than in any other that is both theistic and Indian, the odd and parvenu qualities of Tantrics—in the context of the broader history of Indian culture—notwithstanding. Some interesting work could be done here, especially with regard to Abhinavagupta and the more intellectual of his followers.^[14]

I mentioned that I know of no “ontological argument” advanced by a Naiyāyika, the “mainstream” philosophic theist in classical times. But classical Indian thought does contain “proofs” of a “necessary being.” These seem particularly fecund for comparative analyses. The influential eleventh-century metaphysician, Śrīharṣa, puts forth, in a variety of formulations, an ontological argument as the centerpiece of the positive side of his reasoning.^[15] (Śrīharṣa is more famous for his “destructions” of others’ views.) But Śrīharṣa and the other classical proponents of such a proof are (at least to my knowledge) all (or almost all) Advaitins,^[16] espousing a concept not of God, but of *brahman*, the Absolute and the One, as the “necessary being” proved. That this “Absolute” is a Creator is categorically denied. Further, that “worship” is not the appropriate attitude towards *brahman*, many in the tradition make plain. In this way, the Advaitins distinguish themselves from Indian theists properly so-called.^[17] Nevertheless, the Advaitins’ “ontological proofs” deserve close inspection by Hartshorneans, and all those who are interested in the similar arguments proffered in the West.

In the sections below, I leave the classical tradition to take up the thought of Aurobindo, who, to my mind, invites scrutiny from a process-theological perspective as much as or more than any other twentieth-century Indian theist. Modern Indian thought, particularly that expressed in English, presents some obvious advantages over the classical tradition. But there are still obstacles. The contemporary Indian religious scene is dominated by theism, and a theism as multifaceted as might be expected in a nation of eight hundred million persons with culturally diverse regions and states. But there is also a peculiar feature of “Hinduism” that may be seen as in large part responsible for the variety in current theological opinion, i.e. as generating distinct theological points of view. This is the phenomenon of the “guru,” who, credited by disciples with unchallengeable authority, makes, by selection and emphasis, his/her own sacred tradition, almost invariably expounding his/her own unique view. Most of the religious philosophies of the classical period survive in the twentieth century in some form, and numerous recent “spiritual preceptors” have modified, reformulated, and/or combined earlier perspectives into a multiplicity of current religious world views. To just which modern Indian theist should the process theologian target an effort of meaningful comparison and philosophic engagement? I intend to answer this question. But the plasticity of Indian theism, and the virtual singularity of any and all spokespersons, must be kept in mind.

Further, one must distinguish between the philosophy of university professors and that of “spiritual preceptors.” Professional philosophers in Indian universities espouse as wide a range of positions as do philosophy professors in the West. They are all trained in the history of Western thought, and their medium of expression is almost exclusively English. Among them are found creative Marxists or “humanists,” phenomenologists, neo-Kantians, existentialists, analytico- (or “piecemeal”) metaphysicians, and others, taking their philosophic orientations from the West. Some address aspects of the classical, or contemporary, Indian religious scene; but, with the outstanding exception of one group, none tends to speak *from its heart*, so to say. The exception is modern Advaita. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, K. C. Bhattacharya, T. V. R. Murti, P. T. Raju, Kalidas Bhat-tacharya, and T. M. P. Mahadevan are exceptional among a host of eloquent twentieth-

century academicians who have found new ways of defending—or have originated philosophies in close consonance with—the classical monism and illusionism of Śaṅkara. Indian theism is much, much less well-represented in the universities (though there are now some “Aurobindonists” and a few others as well^[18]). This is surprising in the face of the prevalence of theism in the broader culture. But it is not so surprising in the face of the “Europeanization” of Indian universities, the sense that theism is *passé* (or falls, in its Indian varieties, to objections familiar in the West), and the attraction of the uniquely Indian quality, and the “clear austerity,” if I may coin a phrase, of Śaṅkara’s system (it is so clear that the world disappears!) In general, one has to look beyond the universities to the “folk” tradition of the “spiritual preceptors” to find the best spokespersons for the theism today.

Hartshorne and Aurobindo: two modern theists, Western and Indian

In this and two other sections, I shall compare, along certain lines, the theologies of Charles Hartshorne and the twentieth-century “guru,” Aurobindo. While drawing out conceptual and justificational similarities, and some significant dissimilarities as well, I shall try to make a few points of assessment. But no summary evaluation of either view will be hazarded.

I assume the reader of this volume is familiar with Hartshorne’s life and thought, but not with Aurobindo’s. So let me begin with a few facts about the Easterner’s life.

Aurobindo was born Aravinda Ghose, in Calcutta, in 1872, the son of a Bengali physician. Aurobindo’s father was an ardent anglophile, and sent “Aravinda Akroyd” along with his two brothers to Manchester when Aurobindo was seven. Without returning to India, Aurobindo completed a Western education at King’s College, Cambridge University (as a student, nine years Whitehead’s junior), where he held two scholarships. The young gentleman returned to his native land in 1893 with much knowledge of Western culture but little of Indian. A nationalist and early proponent of independence, he supplemented a political activism with a personal cultural activism, mastering Sanskrit and several modern Indian languages. Aurobindo read widely in Sanskrit, but his study of philosophy was much more limited than his study of the epics, drama, and religious literature of the classical civilization. He especially delighted in the profuse religious imaginings of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas*. He did read works by the great Advaitin, Śaṅkara, and carefully examined treatises by Śaṅkara’s followers as well, some of them quite late (and thus tutored by Naiyāyikas). But Aurobindo learned little directly about Nyāya, nor about the Nyāya/Buddhist debate. After a career as a journalist and a nationalist politician, which landed him in jail for more than a year, Aurobindo declared himself a “yogin,” a mystic, and exiled himself, in 1910, in the French colony of Pondicherry, in South India: there he would be both undisturbed by his British adversaries (a fresh warrant for his arrest was issued soon after he was released from prison) and at leisure to pursue his personal spiritual quest. He began publishing works of “spiritual philosophy” in 1914, and wrote voluminously the rest of his life. He died in 1950, in Pondicherry.

As a representative of Indian theism and a target for meaningful engagement from a process-theological perspective, Aurobindo presents particular advantages and disadvantages. Most encouraging is the wealth of concurrence in at least the broad lines of the world views, as Satya Prakash Singh has made plain with respect to Whitehead and Aurobindo.^[19] Further, like Hartshorne and Whitehead in the context of traditional theology in the West, Aurobindo is a breath of fresh air in the Indian context. In marked distinction from all classical theists, save certain Naiyāyikas, he accepts no “scripture” as unfailingly true, guaranteed as spoken by God. He may be termed, like Hartshorne, a “natural theologian,” although, like the classical Buddhists and unlike Hartshorne (who does not, I think, take up the question), he includes “mystic” perceptions among the data from which a metaphysician builds. His mysticism restores his place in the mainstream of Indian theism, which his naturalism might otherwise challenge. Like other “gurus,” he is eclectic, viewing several “scriptures” as “holy”—because they are, he interprets, the records of mystical experiences had by his spiritual predecessors. Aurobindo is eclectic or, to use a less negative term, “synthetic” in a larger sense as well, recognizing the success of science and endorsing various views originating in the West.^[20] One has to distinguish sharply between all classical theists and such moderns as Aurobindo, chiefly with respect to science and the encounter with the West. In this, he has more in common with university philosophers than with the “folk” tradition, though on the whole we must say he belongs to the latter.^[21] Further, Aurobindo is no exegete, while all the classical theists, again with the exception of the Naiyāyikas, see their principal task as writers to be illumination of sacred texts. Nevertheless, I repeat, Aurobindo stands firmly in an unbroken continuum of Indian theism because of his mysticism, and because through his mysticism he finds himself able to endorse many ancient and classical conceptions. The ideas Aurobindo uses to interpret his special experiences are almost exclusively Indian and theistic.^[22]

Allow me now to state frankly the obvious and significant differences between these two theists—Hartshorne and Aurobindo—as *writers*, differences that are reflected in their philosophies and that will help us to see quickly the one view in the other’s light and vice-versa.

Charles Hartshorne is a modern professional philosopher. He has worked out in detail a world view that connects with science and is deeply “categorially coherent.”^[23] Or, to downplay his originality, we might say he is a leading spokesperson for a world view that is one of a very few metaphysical systems alive among professional philosophers in our time, a veritable contender in the current metaphysical arena—including “anti-systematic-metaphysics” metaphysics. Though he has a talent for addressing a popular audience (and teaching those untrained in philosophy), he writes chiefly as a professional for other professionals. And while he has failed to convince every colleague of his process theism—his “ontological arguments” are seen by some as successful only within a conceptual frame that is not theirs—he obeys the canons of professional discourse, I say to set up a contrast, revealing patient scholarship and an acumen informed by scholarship, to speak more directly to the point. Hartshorne’s texts, as philosophic texts, are much more refined—by professional standards—than Aurobindo’s.

Even in the Indian theist's most abstract work, *The Life Divine*,^[24] where he spends more than a thousand pages laying out, with explicit argumentation, his world view, Aurobindo writes as a "spiritual preceptor," in a long tradition of intellectual, but hardly academic, "gurus." Except for his layman's command of science, Aurobindo as a metaphysician is more like much earlier figures in Western philosophy than any twentieth-century professional.

To speak for myself, Aurobindo's appeal lies not directly in his philosophizing, but in his philosophizing as informed by his mysticism. He gives us a free-thinking mysticism and a putatively *empirically* based (religious) world view. It is a theism that faces special problems as a mystic philosophy, to be sure. But the question of the "cognitive value" of mystical experiences is an open question, and a good one, I believe. In my opinion, some such "trans-sensual" empiricism may be called for in matters of religious belief. Aurobindo's philosophical talent is his singular ability to generalize the evidence of *mystical* presentations. And in such a project, he takes himself to speak philosophically for a long line of "spiritual" theists.

On the other hand, whatever one may think on the issue of the value of "mystic information" for philosophy, and whatever one may think about a mystic propounding his own metaphysics, I must add—to be fair—that Aurobindo, despite his lack of philosophic professionalism, is surely an unusual mystic in his ability to argue, an ability he displays in some places with great skill. Although motivated to read Aurobindo by his reputation as a mystic, I have become interested in his reasoning, finding several arguments worth abstracting, reconstructing, and examining at length. Further, Aurobindo claims that what he calls "pure reason" is able to arrive at (many of) the "spiritual" truths he feels he has mystically discovered (though personally I am dubious about this, so far as I understand it). And his world view has an extraordinary "categorical coherence," especially given his ideative context. His philosophy, like Hartshorne's, is an attempt to explain every experience and fact, connecting, like Hartshorne's, with science. And he addresses issues—free will, causality, particulars and universals, matter and mind, appearance and reality—that have engaged metaphysicians of both East and West over the centuries, although the breadth of his treatment of long-standing Western problems is surely deficient compared to Hartshorne's.

God as "self-knowing"

It is impossible to expound fully in a short paper either Aurobindo's or Hartshorne's world view. I shall focus on the two theists' concepts of God and of God's mutability.

Both philosophers discern a fundamental distinction of "nature," or "aspect," in God, "primordial" and "consequent" with Hartshorne, "essential" and "manifest" with Aurobindo.^[25] Both also see God as mutable: Hartshorne holds that God has accidents in God's consequent state; Aurobindo holds that what he calls "evolutionary manifestation" is a manifestation *of* God. Both believe that God "includes" or "contains" our world of "becoming," and that God changes as it changes. (For both, it is a necessary truth that everything is "within" God's awareness, "prehended" by God.)

But concerning the sense in which God is *immutable*, there is sharp disagreement: the concepts of a “primordial God” and of an “essential Divine” are hardly a neat match. Once this is clear, it will be seen that, despite the similarity at first blush, each conceives “divine mutability” quite differently, too.

The key differences may be brought out with respect to ideas on “God’s creativity” and an argument Hartshorne makes. For Hartshorne, God not only necessarily is but also necessarily creates. Aurobindo, in contrast, believes that God need not have created anything at all.

Hartshorne believes that the notion of a Creator without a creation makes no sense. But he should not be construed as holding simply that the terms ‘Creator,’ etc. connote a relational complex. The issue, he doubtless would admit, could be framed in a neutral way—for example: Is God necessarily a Creator? or: Could God have existed without creating? Indeed, Hartshorne supports his view that God is necessarily creative with several interlocking lines of argument, framed in the interlocking terms of his system.^[26] As with Whitehead, the concept of “creativity” is with Hartshorne as central as that of “God.” (Whitehead: “In the philosophy of organism this ultimate is termed ‘creativity’; and God is its primordial, non-temporal accident.”^[27])

The argument on which I shall focus—as particularly well-suited for contrast with Aurobindo—hinges on Hartshorne’s view that a characteristic of “perfect knowing” is intrinsic to God. (That is, we must conceive God as necessarily a perfect knower.) Hartshorne then asks: What would there be for God to know if there were only God’s “own existence?”^[28] For Hartshorne, God’s “own existence” would lack a sufficiently rich content to qualify an exclusively “self-cognizing” God as a knower. The idea makes no sense. “Existence” is an abstraction from the actual. Without characteristics, what would there be to exist, much less to know? Note that Hartshorne’s own concept of a “primordial state” of God is, in his view, an abstraction from God’s actuality, that “aspect,” namely, that prefigures “infinite potentialities of being.”^[29] God does not “know” even (Whiteheadian) “eternal objects” (such as numbers) *apart from* knowing the world. (Though “thicker” than a concept of bare “existence,” “Primordial God” is in no way prior—conceptually or in any other way—to God as God is actually. The “primordial,” “consequent,” and “superjective” aspects each presuppose the others, as does “knowing perfectly” as well.) Indeed, “knowing perfectly” is an abstraction from God as God fully is. But we may take Hartshorne to say that it is by focusing on this aspect that we can see what nonsense is the idea of a merely “self-cognizing God.”^[30]

Let me add that while God is considered necessarily a perfect knower, not everything about God is so construed. Much of God’s knowledge is contingent on contingent events. Further, what is contingent is, in Hartshorne’s view, what might not have been. But contingency is not itself contingent, since the idea of a perfect knower demands that “Contingency must be *somehow* actualized, but just *how* or *in just what* it is actualized: *that* is the contingency.”^[31]

Aurobindo’s “self-existent” (*svayambhū*) God, or “Brahman,”^[32] has a triad of necessary, or “essential” characteristics.^[33] The mystic uses the Upanishadic term ‘*saccidānanda*,’ “Existence-Consciousness=Power-Bliss,” to characterize this

“essential nature” (or “*svarūpa*”): Brahman is self-existent and self-creative (*sat*), self-conscious and conscious of a power to “loose forth” contingencies (*cit* or, in an alternative formulation—indicating Tantric influence—*cit-śakti*), and blissful in itself (*sānanda*).

To understand Aurobindo’s position, we need to review a concept of “knowledge by identity” that is expressed early in Indian thought, and that has known marked importance in several Indian schools: in Sanskrit, “*svayamprakāśamāna*,” literally, a “self-illuminating.”^[34] Aurobindo holds that a capacity for such a “non-dual” knowing is an intrinsic characteristic of a “self,” whether God or a contingent being. He claims this “self-knowing” is continuous but “subconscious” for most humans at most times, and clearly evident during a type of self-absorbed meditation, i.e. in a mystic trance facilitated, he says, by *yoga*.

Perhaps it does violence to English usage to call such a state a “knowing.” But Aurobindo could respond that is it a peculiar “awareness” or native “potentiality of awareness.” It is presumed an awareness devoid of sense-mediated, affective, and mental content—“mental” not in a sense of “cognitive” but in the psychological sense of “thinking act.”^[35]

Now Aurobindo holds that Brahman is not only necessarily existent (*sat*) and aware of its self-existence (*saccit*), but also intrinsically blissful (*sānanda*) and aware of its supreme bliss (*ānandacit*). Brahman is presumed to have necessarily a hedonic tone in its self-existence and self-awareness, an essential (and non-relational) “ecstasy” or “bliss.”^[36] The importance of the *ānanda* attribution in our context is that it allows—supplementing Aurobindo’s claim about “knowledge by identity”—the Easterner to make at least something of a response to Hartshorne’s argument: “divine self-knowing” need not include knowledge of actual contingencies while having more content than of a bare “own existence.”

But two questions would arise immediately in an “engagement” with Hartshorne: (1) Is it, all things considered, really conceivable that there be a “knowing,” or an “awareness,” that has as content nothing other than the “self-knowing” together with a hedonic tone of non-relational “bliss?” and (2) Why should one attribute such powers, or characteristics, to God “essentially?” Hartshorne sees God’s knowledge as the “intimate” type we have of our own bodies. God is not an aloof witness, watching the events of the world like a movie. But the Westerner’s “body-in-mind” metaphor falls short of the absolute “intimacy” of God’s “self-cognition” on our Easterner’s theory.

For Aurobindo, the two questions are difficult questions, though a response to the first is not too difficult to reconstruct. One would be unable successfully to challenge Aurobindo, or any mystic attesting to the personal experience, about the possibility of *something like* “knowledge by identity” and “non-relational bliss,” that is, about the possibility of the extraordinary (yogic) experiences that are taken to make an unmediated self-awareness and *ānanda* evident. The response would be that actuality proves possibility. Of course, one might rightly challenge the correctness of these and whatever characterizations were offered. But surely the basic move—namely, that an actual human state, albeit exceptional, demonstrates a divine possibility—is a good one. The move

may nonetheless appear inadequate to a Hartshornean—and, apart from systematic considerations, for a reason I suspect it would seem perplexing to anyone who is not a mystic of Aurobindo's yogic type (it is perplexing to me!) Can a non-mystic make sense of such claims, not having an analogue in her own experience? I have probed the issue in another work,^[37] and do not wish to repeat the entire argument. My conclusion is that, with certain restrictions, a non-mystic can understand such claims, but also that the lack of personal acquaintance gives her a reason to be especially dubious about putatively “mystically warranted” propositions. In any case, the latter question (2) takes us more directly to the heart of both philosophies, since it pertains to methodology. I shall presume that Aurobindo could answer the first satisfactorily, and that the dialogue could move on from “meanings” to “reasons.”

But first note that if we allow this presumption, then Hartshorne's argument does not go through. Aurobindo's response would block Hartshorne's complaint, the Westerner's contention that divine knowledge could not possibly be limited to God's own being. Aurobindo conceives God's necessary aspects as richer than just a “bare existence,” though not as rich as Hartshorne's “perfect knowing.” And he would insist certain human experiences demonstrate the possibility of such a non-relational “knowing” and “bliss.” If Hartshorne's reasoning hinges on the inconceivability of a “knowing” restricted to God's own being and character apart from creation, it would seem to fail.

Consider now (2) above. The short answer is, as I read Aurobindo, that certain mystical experiences require, to be intelligible, the *saccidānanda* characterization of an essential Divine. But let us not go so fast. It is important to see that methodologically Aurobindo and Hartshorne do not much disagree.

Both theorists advance converging lines of argument about why a theistic world view should be embraced. Both hold that a philosophy of (a divine) creativity provides the best explanation of the way the world is, as well as why there is anything at all. Aurobindo, unlike Hartshorne, offers no explicitly ontological argument.^[38] But with regard to the theory of God's nature, both proceed on at least these two fronts: (a) the theory must be sufficiently rich to explain the broad lines of world phenomena (including “mystic phenomena,” with Aurobindo), and (b) once we have accepted a set of interlocking explanatory concepts and claims, we may reason out analytically their implications. There seems to be also a third front with Hartshorne, and apparently with Aurobindo, too: (c) we may unpack the notion of God analytically with respect to what a “Perfect Being” must be. Just as we may conclude that God necessarily exists by examining this concept, so also we may tease out God's necessary aspects by inspecting our (Anselmian) idea of “that than which nothing greater can be conceived.”

Personally, I am most dubious about this third line (c). We do not all have the same concept of God. Thus with regard to a teasing out of divine characteristics from the idea of a perfect being, I would feel at a loss to adjudicate a dispute: I have inherited no pellucid idea of divine perfection! Should we not be open to altering any concept whatsoever as facts demand, that is, any concept used in either a characterization or an explanation of actualities?—in other words, any concept that is not *merely* abstract and formal? (This is not to say there are no necessary truths about things, but only that we may not be entirely

sure we have discovered them.^[39]) Indeed I believe we should be prepared to make conceptual modifications as we review our explanatory propositions with regard to what we know and to the logical relations among them. Thus I see Aurobindo's best response to (2) to be that the "self-knowing" and "*ānanda*" attributions are required to explain certain lines of mystical experience. And I do not believe that a *purely* analytic defense can be decisive here.

Let me place these observations in a wider context, the context of the intellectual pluralism that obtains today, even (or especially!) in academia, and even (or especially!) among professional philosophers. Although I would not wish to restrict in some general way the possibilities of dispute, in some areas a pluralism of theory appears unmitigable. In the metaphysical arena in particular, it seems in certain cases that not only do the fundamental principles advanced in one theory compete only indirectly with those of another, but also that views that do compete as wholes cannot be decisively assessed without begging a "criterion" question. This is not a new point. But it does appear that especially with the highly abstract conceptions and explanations typical of metaphysical systems, there can be more than one good way of conceiving and explaining phenomena. And my sense is that this, whether just or not, has been the main thrust of the opposition to Whitehead and Hartshorne.^[40]

Of course, not any theory will wash. Coherence considerations sometimes give a view an advantage. Also, there must be an epistemic route from experience to theory, as well as a route back. We rule out views, even some metaphysical views, because they lack sufficient support, or because their implications are in conflict with what we know. Physicists have good reasons for preferring a Riemannian geometry of physical space to Euclid's, for example. And we have discovered that a whale is not a fish. To my mind, many claims of Hartshorne's "neoclassical" theism exhibit similar advantages over "classical" theism. (The old thinkers did not have science to inform their world conceptions; thus they stand at a severe disadvantage vis-à-vis Hartshorne in conceiving God's relation to the world.^[41]) Further, in the breadth of its integration of science, and of contemporary outlooks in the humanities as well, Hartshorne's theism has a marked advantage over Aurobindo's, too. But Aurobindo's mysticism may well recapture some of this advantage. The mystic philosopher claims an arsenal of (putatively) empirical reasons for this or that position, reasons that Hartshorne ignores. Thus while the response to Hartshorne, "That's one way of looking at things," may be unanswerable, such a response may miss the mark with Aurobindo.

Yet despite this (vague) possible disadvantage with respect to mysticism, there are routes open for Hartshorne decisively to show his view of God, and specifically of divine creativity, to be superior to Aurobindo's. Our initial question was—given the confines of our imagined dialogue and "engagement"—whether God should be viewed, with Hartshorne, as having to create some world or other, or, with Aurobindo, as not having to create at all. To bring the disagreement into sharper focus, we reviewed Aurobindo's concept of an "essential Divine" and the imputed attributes of a "self-knowing" and a "supreme bliss." We discovered a reason to reject—from an Aurobindonist perspective—Hartshorne's attack on the contingency of God's creating: the argument

presupposes “requirements” on a “divine knowing” that the Indian theist does not accept as true requirements. (Inheritors of Indian theologies work from a [complex of] concept[s] of God distinct from the Western, and some have empirical reasons, Aurobindo believes, to prefer the *saccidānanda* characterization.) Nevertheless, there remains here, it seems, a problem of coherence inviting Hartshornean attack. Or, to put matters less contentiously, a Hartshornean could try to patch up one significant disagreement between what are, after all, two largely concurrent views, by pointing out an incoherence in Aurobindo’s notion of an “essential Divine.” To have (and one may only think one has) special, mystic reasons for a position does not exempt it from requirements of overall coherence. Aurobindo’s theory that God is necessarily, and is necessarily aware of, a power to *create*, to “loose forth” particulars that need not be, seems the attribution—and not the two we have so far reviewed—that makes here the Hartshornean case. How could this be “essential” to God, and God be only contingently creative? How could there be such awareness without God’s actually creating some world or other? And since Aurobindo’s project is to provide a comprehensive explanation of the way things are (at least on my reading), what point could there be to presuming God aware of a power of creation without necessarily creating something or other? To these questions, let us now turn.

God as Creator

Let me supply a bit more of Aurobindo’s ideative context, his “philosophic problem-space,” so to say. Our Indian theist spends tens of pages in *The Life Divine* attacking the Advaitin Śaṅkara and his concept of *brahman*. Time and again, Aurobindo asks why Brahman, conceived broadly in line with Advaita, should be thought *incapable* of “finite, contingent self-manifestation.” Aurobindo considers several responses, revealing understanding and sympathy for the tradition; but of course he rejects each.^[42] One appeal made by Aurobindo seems to be to a (culturally) deep-set notion of Brahman’s perfection: an incapacity to create could not belong to “the One who is Perfect.” For myself, this reasoning is indecisive, because, again, I fail to see the validity of isolated conceptual analysis if one is trying to explain actualities. But often Aurobindo’s sympathy for Advaita appears to grow out of a conviction, and putative experience, that a mystic can realize her identity with *brahman* apart from all other contingent determinations. Then within this frame of (mystically) empirical agreement, Aurobindo argues that the Advaitic “identity” experience does not support Śaṅkara’s “incapacity” attribution.

But vis-à-vis Hartshorne, Aurobindo would line up with the Advaitins: the paradigmatically “Advaitic” mystical experience provides a reason to regard Brahman as possibly existent without creating. The fact of world phenomena is the premier reason the Advaitins are wrong, Aurobindo holds.^[43] We must suppose Brahman actually a Creator to make sense presentations intelligible. But we should not suppose Brahman to be necessarily a Creator, Aurobindo would argue against Hartshorne.

Yet it would seem right for a Hartshornean to reply—if only with a mind to patch up the disagreement—that Aurobindo’s position here is incoherent. To repeat: on the one

hand, Aurobindo attributes a power to create, and an awareness of the power, to God essentially; on the other, he denies what this entails, namely, some actual creation or other. Aurobindo appears guilty of “reifying” an abstraction, and this contradiction is a mark of the fault. The solution would be simple and would not involve Aurobindonists in much theoretic emendation: God should be conceived as a unity, and the notion of a Brahman that could have remained “self-absorbed” should be excised.

Aurobindo does not appear to be unaware of the “contradiction,” or “conceptual tension,” if a tension it be. One may read his theory of “Supermind” as put forth to show it resolved. The problem is long-standing in Indian theology, as old as the *Īśā* and other Upanishads. Indian theists have typically wanted to view God both as essentially immutable (*svarūpe*) and as the author of changes in Herself—in “loosing forth” the world as Her body. The problem is long-standing, but much in Aurobindo’s “Supermind” theory is his own contribution.

According to Aurobindo, Supermind is God’s faculty of creation and creative awareness. (The concept is somewhat like that of a “Divine Logos” found in the West.) Supermind is the bridge between a Divine that must be what She is and finite, contingent “manifestations.” All potentiality is governed by what God is: not every (humanly) conceivable possibility is inherent in *saccidānanda* (for example, a world of unending pain is not really possible, since it is incompatible with the intrinsic *ānanda*, Aurobindo reasons^[44]). But within the set of infinite possibilities compatible with (or in a sense “inherent in”) *saccidānanda*, things that need not be come into being through an (atemporally conceived) “series” of choices:^[45] “first” (or “most fundamentally”) on the part of God as God is in God’s self,^[46] “next” by Supermind, and finally (within a spatio-temporal “manifestation”) by finite things (such as human beings) all endowed with (at least a minimal) creative power of their own. (Like Hartshorne, Aurobindo sees every contingent thing as potentially creative, and God’s power over events as limited by a “surrender” to the wills of finite things.^[47]) God, as God is necessarily, is presented with a single timeless choice, the option to allow Supermind to emerge or not.^[48] With an affirmative “choice,” Supermind (timelessly) emerges, and creates, or not, further inessential determinations. Timelessly “choosing” Supermind, God comes to be Supermind and to know as Supermind all that Supermind knows (namely, again, possibilities of further inessential “manifestation” compatible with God’s intrinsic nature as *saccidānanda*, and all the realities that Supermind “looses forth” as well).

Further, Aurobindo appears to hold that given that Supermind has created, or is creating a “world,” a spatially and temporally extended manifestation of Brahman, it is possible that God revoke the primordially affirmative choice. Our world would then disappear—to speak metaphorically—and not even God would be aware that it had been. (In a sense, it would not have been, because a temporal perspective would not be.^[49])

Thus for Aurobindo, God’s “immutability” amounts to a timeless status where God cognizes only God’s own essence, including a continual (or timeless) option to become or not—and to become aware of or not—inessential determinations. God is necessarily “mutable” in that God cannot forsake being faced with the option of unfurling the divine body in, and as, our time and world. But God need not undergo such change. It is true

that were God to recoil into a Divine trance of “self-absorption,” destroying the world, that also would be, in a sense, a “mutation” in what God is: God’s choosing not to change would itself be a change (timelessly figured). And so God is, strictly speaking, necessarily mutable, in Aurobindo’s conception. But loosely speaking, God is, on his view, only contingently mutable.

To put this in terms more familiar in the West, we may say Aurobindo is a theological “voluntarist”: God’s “primordial” will is both inscrutable and, more importantly in our context, not determined by God’s “mind.”^[50] Indeed, God’s “mind,” i.e. Supermind, is viewed as itself contingent upon a policy option. In a sense, God is necessarily mindful of possible creations: God is considered necessarily aware of an indeterminate “something more.” But the full faculty of divine knowledge is considered itself (timelessly) contingent on God’s will and positive choice. According to our Indian theist, God is a “force” (*śakti*) of creative will. She can hold Herself back, absorbed in what She is necessarily, or loose Herself forth and create “worlds.”^[51] To venture further into the realm of metaphors and to try one of my own: the emergence of Supermind may be figured as a “second,” or more distant (but still “timeless”), round in a spiral of self-creation. In Her most fundamental “policy” enactment—that which makes possible everything else—God allows Herself to behold and become potentialities of Herself (as *saccidānanda*), through attending to, and at once “surrendering” Herself to, Her inherent Divine Mind, or “Supermind.”

Clearly, all this is a far cry from the sense in which, according to Hartshorne, God transcends God timelessly: for Hartshorne, the “primordial state” of God is an abstraction from what God is actually, albeit an explanatorily rich abstraction.^[52] The problem seems to be that Aurobindo speaks too facetiously of “timelessness” and “priorities” in the divine nature. Aurobindo, for his part, would insist that these are not abstractions, but realities demanding the metaphors he has used.

It is hard to say more without saying a lot more. To take Aurobindo at all at his word, the (imagined) Hartshornean charge of incoherence would have to be admitted correct: Aurobindo does hold that God—as God is in God’s self—is aware of an indeterminate possibility of “something more.” Whether God “chooses” to make manifest this “something more” or “chooses” not to do so, the option chosen would be in a sense created. Further, it would seem mute (at least without more context provided) to defend God’s right not to be the Creator. What could be the point? On the other hand, Hartshorne’s (imagined) complaint would be viewed by Aurobindonists as on the whole dismissible, in that they would take themselves to be able to conceive something like the “primordial choice,” postulated by Aurobindo, as indeed governing the possibility of God’s knowing our world, or any “world” so minutely determinate. And they would see the purpose of the concept as its rôle in the explanation of certain (mystical) experiences.^[53]

Thus our imagined “engagement” would have to broaden to other areas of theory. To proceed otherwise would risk oblique speech, and a worry about common suppositions—whether these be sufficient to enable meaningful debate. Just the exposition required to complete a very much more telling “engagement” would demand a long

book.

I have compared Hartshorne's and Aurobindo's theologies only in certain respects. Obviously, more can be accomplished. And I hope it will. Charles Hartshorne speaks for much of what is best in the traditions of Western philosophic theism and Western religion. Aurobindo, on his part, speaks for much that is of value and worth preserving in Indian theism and traditions of *yoga*.^[54]

In a broader perspective, it is not an exaggeration to say the only "world religions" that are not Western (indeed, not Semitic) in origin are Buddhism and Hinduism. Since Buddhists deny there is a God who is a Creator, it is in the theism of Hinduism where one finds the most promising Eastern religious thought for reflection on issues in common with the religious philosophy of the West. Apart from the mystical dimension of Indian theism (an interest in Indian religious thought is necessarily in some part an interest in the mystical), there are especially several lines of "cosmological" argument, unexamined here, that deserve careful investigation. Of course, process theists can learn, as can anyone, from philosophers, such as the Indian Buddhists, who do not share their basic suppositions. But engagement between Western and Indian theists is bound to shed light on problems whose solution is critical to the survival of any "God-oriented" world view.

NOTES[†]

[†]I wish to thank Arabinda Basu of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre for Education in Pondicherry, who spoke at the Hartshorne Conference in Austin in February, for his gracious help with my work.

1. Prominent Buddhist writers—of all periods and Buddhist cultures—deny that scriptural tradition (*āgama*) is an independent source of knowledge, irreducible to perception and inference. The Buddha's statements are viewed as authoritative because they are taken to reflect a breadth and depth of personal experience (to include mystic perceptions) and great power of reason.
2. The exception is the fine book on Whitehead and Aurobindo by a professor of Sanskrit at Aligarh Muslim University, Satya Prakash Singh: *Sri Aurobindo and Whitehead on the Nature of God* (Aligarh: Vigyan Prakashan, 1972).
3. "Śāṅkara, Nāgārjuna, and Fa Tsang, with some Western Analogues," an unpublished paper read at the 1984 conference, "Interpreting Across Boundaries," sponsored by the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, Honolulu.
4. *Philosophers Speak of God*, co-edited with William L. Reese (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1953), p. v, "Theism in Asian and Western Thought," *Philosophy East and West* 28, no. 4 (October 1978), pp. 401-11, and *Omnipotence and other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York, 1984), p. 108.
5. Until recently (see note eight below), Jīva Goswāmi's views were largely inaccessible to non-sanskritists. Hartshorne read a University of Chicago dissertation, "The Philosophy of Śrī Goswāmi," by Mahanam B. Brahmācari (1938), which is what he quotes in *Philosophers Speak of God*.
6. As mentioned, there has also been little interest in the reverse direction—with the (most notable) exception of Satya Prakash Singh and his book noted above. Here I shall tend to write

as a Westerner looking East, but I hope that some of what I say will be informative for future comparative efforts originating in India.

7. Jīva Goswāmī recognizes many texts as sacred and “revealed,” but he argues that “for our age” the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is supremely authoritative.
8. Stuart Elkman has edited and translated one of the Vaiṣṇava’s principal works: *Jīva Goswāmī’s Tattvasandarbhā* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986). See pp. 72-73, 127-33, and 162-68, in particular, for the “meta-” position described.
9. Since the tradition is, particularly in the later centuries of the pre-modern age, most extensive and largely unexamined by philosophers writing in the contemporary languages of scholarship, it could be that one will be found. There is nothing in Nyāya that precludes such an argument, and the Nyāya concept of God is amenable to one.
10. Nyāya is far and away the greatest philosophic accomplishment of the classical culture. I say this because Nyāya is underappreciated. (Arguably, less centrally a religious philosophy than the Vedāntic and Buddhist schools, Nyāya has not enjoyed as much interest in our time as the more exclusively “religious” of India’s philosophies.) The greatest of the Buddhist Logicians, Dharmakīrti (c. 620), rivals the greatest of the Naiyāyikas, Gaṅgeśa (or Raghunātha Śīromaṇi [c. 1500]). But there can be no question that the Naiyāyika tradition as a whole outpaces that of the Indian Buddhists. Such broad judgments, I realize, are hazardous, particularly since they are liable to be misunderstood. Western “philosophy” is a unique series of works and intellectual events, albeit one impossible to delineate without controversy. Indian “*darśana*,” or “*anvikṣī*,” or “speculative, eristic, and metaphysical thought” is also unique. The comparisons implicit in the use of such a term as ‘philosophical accomplishment’ are therefore by nature risky. Still, I stand by my judgment.
11. In particular, Matilal’s *Perception* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1986).
12. The technical apparatus of Navya-Nyāya proliferates throughout the intellectual world of late classical times—it is used by Advaitins trying to show their central claims compatible with Nyāya, as well as by authors in Hindu law, medicine, aesthetic theory, other areas, too. But it is not part of a modern Indian education.

Here we may note two outstanding contributions to the study of Nyāya theology, both by Indian scholars (one, Vattanky, who belongs to the Society of Jesus and teaches at a Jesuit university in India, De Nobili College): John Vattanky’s *Gaṅgeśa’s Philosophy of God* (Madras: Adyar, 1984), and George Chemparathy’s *An Indian Rational Theology* (Vienna: Gerold, 1972).

13. It is true that Tantrics and Vaiṣṇavas both rely on revelation more than on reason (with a distinct body of texts regarded as revealed). But the Vaiṣṇavas tend to know much more about the history of debate among Indian schools than do Tantrics, and to have profited by their study. (Even such a stellar figure as Abhinavagupta seems somewhat isolated from the wider ideative currents; this is less true of Appayya Dīkṣita.)
14. See Karl Potter’s *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, Vol. I, rev. ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980), for a bibliography of Abhinavagupta’s and Appayya Dīkṣita’s works. Also, there are a few articulate modern defenders of a Tantric perspective, for example, V. A. Devasenapathi: *Śaiva Siddhānta* (Madras: University of Madras, 1958) and *Of Human Bondage and Divine Grace* (Chidambaram: Annamalai University, 1963) are among his principal works. (I hope that modern Tantrics soon will discover the resources of process theology—perhaps a more foreseeable development than an arising of interest in the opposite direction.)
15. Śrīharṣa’s masterwork, the *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādyā*, has been both translated and critically examined: Ganganatha Jha, *Śrīharṣa’s Sweetmeats of Refutation* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications [reprint], 1971), and Phyllis Granoff, *Philosophy and Argument in Late Advaita*

(Dordrecht: Reidel, 1978). See Jha, pp. 25ff, 44-46, 59ff, and 75-76 for Śrīharṣa's "ontological arguments."

16. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan claims that Vyāsa's *Bhāṣya* on *Yogasūtra* 1.24 expresses an argument similar to Anselm's: *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1940), p. 369.
17. Indeed, Advaitins have even less right, in my own (albeit sweeping) judgment (the tradition is centuries-old and hardly monolithic), to be termed "theists" than have the Mahāyāna Buddhists who have sparked, more than other Eastern theorists to date, the interest of process theologians. (But of course, the classical Mahāyānins expressly declare themselves "atheistic," presenting, in the Indian context, a host of "refutations" of theism.)
18. One example is the Tantric, V. A. Devasenapathi, mentioned in note fourteen above. S. K. Maitra and Haridas Chaudhuri may be counted as the foremost of the academic followers of Aurobindo.
19. Singh, op. cit.
20. Though not schooled in philosophy, Aurobindo read widely in the history of Western thought, mainly in English, some in Greek, as for example Plato: Aurobindo was an accomplished classicist when he left Cambridge, having won University prizes for his work in Greek.
21. As mentioned, there are now a few Indian academic philosophers in his camp. But Aurobindo himself was no academic, though from 1899 to 1901 and from 1903 to 1905 he was a professor of English and French.
22. It should be noted that the practices of "yoga," "self-discipline," that Aurobindo took up are the time-honored practices of the Indian mystic—yet not exclusively of the theist: many of these bridge such divides as Buddhist/Hindu and illusionist/theist.
23. For a superb explanation of the notion, see the opening section of Whitehead's *Process and Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1969), pp. 5ff.
24. *The Life Divine* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1973).
25. More precisely, there is a triad of fundamental "states" with Hartshorne, as with Whitehead. God's "superjective state," according to process theism, would be, in Aurobindo's terms, an aspect of God's manifest nature, namely God's continual transcendence of Herself in time.
As will become clear, Aurobindo is more subject to a charge of positing a division in the divine essence, than is Hartshorne or Whitehead. (See Hartshorne's defense of Whitehead against the charge: "Whitehead's Conception of God," *Actes: Segundo Congreso Extraordinario Inter-americano de Filosofía* [1961], pp. 163-70.)
26. These arguments appear in many of Hartshorne's works, and the concept of "creativity" is elucidated in several places: see in particular, *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method* (London: SCM Press, 1970), pp. 1-18, *The Logic of Perfection* (Lasalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1962), pp. 164-66, and a paper read originally in India, "The Idea of Creativity in American Philosophy," *Journal of Karnataka University* (Social Sciences) 2 (May 1966), pp. 1-13. The argument I shall focus on appears in *Omnipotence and other Theological Mistakes*, pp. 82-83.
27. *Process and Reality*, p. 10.
28. *Omnipotence and other Theological Mistakes*, p. 82
29. See e.g. "Whitehead's Conception of God," op. cit. p. 164.
30. We may note that our "neoclassicist" metaphysician sees God's necessary characteristic of divine knowledge as the "infallible power to know whatever in particular could exist, and the certainty of knowing its existence be this existence a fact." *Omnipotence and other Theological Mistakes*, p. 82.

31. *ibid.* p. 83.
32. For Aurobindo, the terms ‘God’ and ‘Brahman’ are interchangeable.
33. This “essentialist” talk should not be taken as “apriorist” in Aurobindo’s philosophy. He believes certain necessary truths (in particular about God) are empirically—mystically—discovered. And let me say I agree in general with the approach: ‘Pleasure is good,’ ‘The Morning Star is the Evening Star,’ and ‘Water is H₂O’ are all necessary truths but empirically discovered.
34. The term ‘*svayamprakāśamāna*’ becomes standard only in classical times. But the idea is as old as the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (c. 800 B.C.E.), where at 4.3.9 the self is said to be “*svayamjyotir*,” “illuminated by its own light.”
35. Aurobindo believes that the state is conceptualizable and “cognitive” in the sense of indicating the reality of a certain state of affairs. But he believes it involves no “thought.” In an alternative psychological characterization, he borrows, as have many Indian mystics and mystic philosophers before him—Advaitic, theist, Buddhist, Jain, and others—a term central to the *Yogasūtra* (a classical manual on the practice of *yoga*), namely, ‘*cittavṛttinirodha*,’ “the cessation of mental fluctuations,” or, in Aurobindo’s English, “mental silence.”
36. Aurobindo follows a long tradition in his use of the term ‘*ānanda*.’ In the Upanishads, the term has sexual connotations: it is used to express the bliss of conjugal union considered “non-dualistically,” e.g. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* 4.3.21-33 (“As a man in the embrace of a beloved wife knows nothing within or without, so this person in the embrace of the self-conscious Self knows nothing within or without.”)
37. “Mysticism and Metaphor,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* **23**, no. 1 (1988), pp. 17-41.
38. But see the chapter in Book One of *The Life Divine* entitled, “The Pure Existent,” pp. 71-79, where Aurobindo’s reasoning falls just short of an explicit formulation.
39. See again note thirty-three above.
40. Hartshorne’s “modal” argument for God’s existence is a good example of the general problem. The argument relies on a premise that it is possible that necessarily there be a perfect knower. From this, Hartshorne reasons that it is not possible that a perfect knower not exist. (From $\Diamond \Box G$, it follows that $\Box G$ —given the theorem, $\Diamond \Box p \equiv \Box p$. And from $\Box G$, it follows that $\sim \Diamond \sim G$.) But surely it is conceivable that there be a material universe with no consciousness or life, and no God. Thus I would deny *either* the premise *or* the modal system in which the inference is carried out.

Of course, within the “world” that Hartshorne imagines this seemingly (to us!) possible world where God does not exist is not possible. Are there truths that are necessary in some possible worlds but not in others? I am no expert in modal logic, but I am tempted to say “yes.” (Denial of $\Diamond \Box p \rightarrow \Box p$ would allow this, I think.) This would mean that our modal logic would permit “access” to Hartshorne’s “world,” but then Hartshorne with his modal system would not have “access” to our world. Thus I think the better option is to deny the theorem $\Diamond \Box p \equiv \Box p$, preserving only: $p \rightarrow \Diamond p$. (One would also deny $\Diamond \Box p \rightarrow p$. Hartshorne’s opening argument in *The Logic of Perfection* appears to rely on the former theorem, but in other formulations he uses only this latter “entailment.”) However, my contention is only that the possibility that God not exist is more intuitive than *both* (1) possibly necessarily God exists and (2) the modal theorem needed, viewed together—take your pick which to reject! (Cf. Robert Kane’s discussion, “The Modal Ontological Argument,” *Mind* **93** [1984], pp. 336-50.)

Note that Aurobindo believes that certain conceivable states of affairs are not “really possible”—e.g. a world of meaningless suffering—because they are not compatible with

God as *saccidānanda*.

41. Hartshorne believes he has *a priori* reasons as well. But again, I see these as just as circular as the “classical” arguments he attacks (and thus as not cogent from a “neutral” perspective).
42. *The Life Divine*, pp. 441-78.
43. *ibid.* p. 472, in particular. Also, Aurobindo claims to have had personally the “Advaitic” experience “sublated” by a distinctly theistic mystical experience. See my discussion in *Aurobindo’s Philosophy of Brahman* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), pp. 118-20.
44. *The Life Divine*, p. 605, in particular.
45. The best I can do to make the “atemporality” intelligible is to draw analogies that do not quite work. The divine choices seem to be something like social policies or practices that govern or make possible other practices. Or, consider the decision of person A to help B who is expressing pain. In A’s particular choice, could there be implicit a choice of moral policy that is not localized to the particular moment, the encounter with B, or any set of moments of time?
46. On an alternative reading, this would be a choice in the highest “level” of Supermind, which then would belong, in this part, to the Divine as the Divine is necessarily.
47. Hartshorne holds that “creativity” is the “positive side” of contingency, *The Logic of Perfection*, p. 75. Aurobindo agrees: *The Life Divine*, pp. 86-88, 400, and 1037-38, in particular.
48. On the alternative reading, which has the highest “level” of Supermind as part of what God is necessarily, this would be the option of transcendentally empowering, or not, Supermind to do what it will.
49. “World dissolution,” *pralāya*, has been a prominent religious notion since the *Bhagavadgītā* (see esp. 8,18-19). Classical exegetes interpret it in several different ways, some agreeing with Aurobindo, and some not, that God has the power so utterly to absorb the universe as not to leave a trace.
50. Aurobindo sees that the “reason” God makes an affirmative choice has to be, strictly speaking, indeterminable. But his view would allow incorporation of a (roughly) Hartshornean thesis that greater value would be instantiated in the affirmative choice. And the Indian theist does speculate that the reason may be divine self-enrichment. See *The Life Divine*, pp. 91ff and 834-35.
51. Of course, Aurobindo is not as “voluntarist” as many in the West: he uses, for example, the notions “looses forth,” “manifestation,” etc., in conjunction with his view that “creation *ex nihilo*,” is not possible even for God.
52. This type of “transcendence” is for Hartshorne distinct from a second (the two make up his doctrine of “dual transcendence”), namely, that God in time continually exceeds what God was—a thesis that Aurobindo endorses, too.
53. The comparable “religious” strength of Hartshorne’s view is, as the philosopher has often pointed out, that it would ground “worship.” Who other than a perfect being would be worthy of this most fundamental, or most noble, religious attitude? Aurobindo, on the other hand, does not believe worship to be the best of human attitudes towards God. As indicated, the Easterner sees the point of his philosophy as providing intellectual support for *mystic* endeavors. Each theory’s “categorical coherence” with these respective religious aims would have to be a key issue in a more broadly evaluative effort. But let us note briefly that Aurobindo’s view would also ground religious worship. In fact, one might argue that since in the Indian theology God has the power to withdraw into unmanifest *saccidānanda*, the fact that God is not choosing that option provides an additional reason to worship, or at least to be

grateful.

Nevertheless, the Hartshornean position appears clearly superior in grounding worship: it would provide assurance that God takes seriously human values. To be sure, Aurobindo's view is only comparatively deficient on this score. For the Indian theist, God's essential nature as *saccidānanda* constrains what is a true possibility of inessential determination. I repeat that no world not in harmony with *saccidānanda* is really possible, according to Aurobindo. Indeed, he argues that our world would contain too much suffering to be compatible with the essential Divine were it not evolving—in part through the instrumentality of suffering—to a “diviner” life. Aurobindo breaks with his tradition in finding “meaning” for evil in the progressive accomplishment of a “diviner” life. However, the requirements on progressive betterment are surely stricter on Hartshorne's hypothesis, since the Westerner starts with a notion of a temporally perfect God, a God that necessarily becomes better at each moment to the fullest extent, and “better” according to human standards. The Westerner's conception of God's perfection would guarantee that God is maximally empathetic with human values, while Aurobindo would allow Brahman to neglect human fulfillments in the interest of another evolutionary goal. (He speculates in a few places that the human species may be “transitional” to a race of “more spiritual” beings, beings he envisages as realizing superior possibilities of divine manifestation.) Thus Aurobindo's theological voluntarism is inferior to Hartshorne's “perfectionalism” in grounding confidence that God is striving for what is—from a human perspective—the best that can be. Does this mean that Aurobindo's “Brahman” would not be worthy of worship? In some cases, perhaps indeed Brahman would not.

54. I see among the interesting topics—in addition to the crucial question of the veridicality of mystical experiences—views on “prehension” and “consciousness,” theodicy, and questions of values, God's and the human as well.