



2020

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Akshay Gupta

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Recommended Citation

Gupta, Akshay (2020) "Re-envisioning a Caitanya Vaiṣṇava 'Perfect Being Theology' and Demonstrating Its Theodical Implications via the 'Goodness Criterion'," *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*: Vol. 33, Article 10.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7825/2164-6279.1769>

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Re-envisioning a Caitanya Vaiṣṇava 'Perfect Being Theology' and Demonstrating Its Theodical Implications via the 'Goodness Criterion'

By Akshay Gupta

Abstract: Popular imaginations and receptions of Hinduism often neglect to consider its theological dimensions that conceive of the divine reality along conceptual pathways analogous to those of the major Judeo-Christian religious traditions. Thus, within Western scholarship, there have been no systematic attempts to delineate central doxastic elements within the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition by suggesting correlations with distinctive Christian concepts, and this scholarly lacuna within Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism restricts comparative theological dialogue between Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism and Christianity. In order to address this lacuna, I demonstrate that aspects of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism's theological framework can be conceptualized in conversation with their Christian counterparts.

BY illustrating certain parities between the theological frameworks of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism and Christianity, I also aim to pave the way for further comparative theological dialogue between these two religious traditions. In particular, I propose that Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism's

theological framework enables the tradition to become a suitable dialogical partner to Christianity in comparative theodicy. I also suggest and put into practice a criterion that can be helpful for refining the comparative theodical exchanges between Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism and Christianity.

Introduction

That Hindu religious traditions contain monotheistic strands is often overlooked by those who are not acquainted with the breadth of religious expression that is witnessed within the diverse matrices of Hindu religious life. However, as Ankur Barua notes,¹ Hindu theological frameworks that conceptualize the divine reality as a supremely powerful personal being who generates and sustains cosmic and transcosmic realms have recently begun to receive greater scholarly attention.² One Hindu devotional tradition that conceives of the supremely powerful personal God is the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava³ tradition, which was founded by Caitanya (1486-1534 CE) and has *Kṛṣṇa-bhakti*, or devotion to *Kṛṣṇa*, as its

Akshay Gupta is a Ph.D candidate at the University of Cambridge. His dissertation aims to construct a theodicy based upon the exegetical writings and theological teachings of the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava theologian A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda. His other research interests include Caitanya Vaiṣṇava theology, philosophical theology, the philosophy of religion, and the intersection between theological inquiry and societal amelioration.

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doctrinal and experiential pivot. However, despite the increasing scholarship on the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition,⁴ scholars are yet to comprehensively define central doxastic components of the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition through active conversations with their Christian analogs, thus limiting the scope for comparative theological dialogue between these two religious traditions. Therefore, I will begin to address this lacuna by drawing some conceptual parallels between the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava theological framework and perfect being theology, which most Christian traditions adhere to. I acknowledge that comparative theology does not entail the mere recognition of one religious tradition’s doctrinal tenets within another religious tradition’s theological framework; however, I argue that formulating the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition’s doctrinal tenets by creatively and sensitively employing Christian terminology can enhance the hermeneutical potential of comparative theological exchanges between Caitanya Vaiṣṇavas and Christians. In particular, I will discuss the comparative theodical implications of recognizing the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition’s adherence to perfect being theology.

Examining God’s Triune Divine Attributes in the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava Tradition

In this article, I first aim to illuminate the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition’s theological framework by suggesting certain analogies with distinctive Judeo-Christian theological motifs. Christianity, as well as the other Judeo-Christian religions, adhere to a theological framework known as ‘perfect being’ theology, according to which God is characterized as the greatest possible being who exhibits maximal perfection.⁵ Perfect being theology also

conceptualizes God as a ‘triple-O’ personal God, which indicates that God, the supremely personal being, is omnipotent (all-powerful), omnibenevolent (all-good), and omniscient (all-knowing).⁶ Although perfect being theology is generally associated with the Judeo-Christian religious traditions, I argue that it is not limited to them and can also be found within certain Indic religious traditions. For instance, as I will now demonstrate, the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava theological framework can be best categorized as a perfect being theology.

Since it is well established that the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition views God as the supreme person,⁷ I will not defend this particular claim in great depth. Instead, drawing from a) the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava theologian A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda’s (1896-1977 CE) exegeses on the *Bhagavata Purāṇa* (c. 9th century CE) (henceforth *BhP*),⁸ a foundational text for the Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti* traditions, as well as b) the *BhP* itself, I will locate the theological views that explicitly state God’s possession of the triune divine omni-attributes.

The first divine attribute that I will examine is God’s omnibenevolence. Prabhupāda is particularly explicit about his belief that Kṛṣṇa is the omnibenevolent God in his commentary on verse *BhP* 10.10.40, where he succinctly writes, “Kṛṣṇa, God, is all-good.”⁹ The *BhP* itself also describes the omnibenevolence of Kṛṣṇa. Thus, *BhP* 8.3.17¹⁰ states that God is *bhūri-karuṇa*, meaning the one whose compassion (*karuṇa*) is superabundant or great (*bhūri*). Prabhupāda translates *bhūri-karuṇa* as “unlimitedly merciful” further reinforcing his view of God’s omnibenevolence.¹¹

BhP 10.87.22¹² describes God as a benefactor (*hita*), dear (*priya*), and the very self (*ātman*) for a living being, and *BhP* 7.1.1¹³ adds that God is a

self's well-wisher (*suhṛt*) and is equal to all living beings (*sama*). I argue that this equality should be understood not in terms of an ontological parity between the human self and the divine self but in the light of *Bhagavad Gītā*¹⁴ (henceforth *BhG*) 4.11:¹⁵ "I share my love with individuals in the same manner as how they submit themselves to me. Humans follow my path universally, O Pārtha." Therefore, Kṛṣṇa's equal treatment of all living beings indicates that he reciprocates their love according to how they approach him (this motif is also reiterated in *BhP* 10.32.20-22¹⁶).

However, one may note, as Barua does,¹⁷ that if God merely responds to the actions of the devotees, there can be no unmerited, free-flowing acts of grace performed by God. In response to this, I argue that 1) there is an element of grace present within God's reciprocal exchanges with the devotees, and this is because God gives the devotee more than what they deserve in God's reciprocal exchanges with them. The *BhP* also indicates that the actions of Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti* are in a different ontological category than ordinary actions, and thus the actions of Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti* are not structured by the same proportionality principle that *karmic* mechanisms putatively possess. For instance, *BhP* 10.80-81¹⁸ explains that Kṛṣṇa gave one of his devotees named Sūdamā unimaginable riches simply because Sūdamā gave Kṛṣṇa a few morsels of rice, *BhP* 10.81.35¹⁹ states that Kṛṣṇa magnifies the importance of whatever his devotees offer him, and *BhP* 1.2.15²⁰ states that the actions of Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti*, such as remembrance of God, can destroy one's *karmic* residues.

I also argue that 2) there is an element of grace through God's voluntary descent to this world as an *avatāra* (literally 'one who crosses

down'). God's voluntary descent into this world, or the doctrine of the *avatāra*, is described by the *BhP*, although the earliest formulation of it is found in *BhG* 4.5-9.²¹ A broad Christian equivalent of this theme would be the doctrine of incarnation, though a distinction needs to be carefully made between the terms 'incarnation' and 'avatāra.' Whereas the incarnation of God in Christ takes place only *once*, the *avatāras* of the divine reality repeatedly descend to this world across different cosmological cycles (*yugas*).²² Moreover, while the doctrine of the incarnation asserts that God descends to this world at *one* specific historical conjuncture and becomes physically embodied in a particular human individual called Jesus of Nazareth, the *avatāra* doctrine, as conceived by Caitanya Vaiṣṇava theologians such as Prabhupāda, asserts that God descends to multiple transcendent, macrocosmic, and microcosmic planes in a non-physical, supramundane body that is unlike ours.²³ Barbara Holdrege therefore states that the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition holds that Kṛṣṇa, as the *avatārin* (the source of all the *avatāras*) is able to produce multiple embodied forms by which he can manifest his divine presence for specific cosmological purposes, whilst maintaining his divine personhood (each *avatāra* is not an ontologically distinct person from Kṛṣṇa) and preserving the cosmic prowess of his original supramundane body.²⁴

The *BhP* states that God descends to our world in order to facilitate our soteriological progress. Verse 1.8.35²⁵ explains that one of God's motives for descending is to prepare instances that would facilitate our hearing, remembrance, and worship of God as we are individuals who are afflicted in the world by ignorance, desire, and *karman*. This is significant because Hindu devotional traditions centered

on devotion to Kṛṣṇa (such as the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition) believe that selves can gradually become emancipated from this physical world and return to God through the performance of *bhakti* or devotion, which centers extensively around the remembrance of Kṛṣṇa’s activities and wondrous *līlā*.²⁶ This salvific component of God’s descent to this world thus illustrates God’s compassionate longing to have us return to God and escape our worldly sufferings. God’s descent as an *avatāra* also signifies that God graciously intervenes in our world so that selves can further their soteriological process.

Prabhupāda also asserts his belief that God possesses the divine attribute of omnipotence. For instance, in his commentary on *BhP* 6.8.32-33, he succinctly writes, “the Lord is omnipotent.”²⁷ Establishing the centrality of the motif of God’s omnipotence in the *BhP* is quite straightforward. For example, verse 8.3.19²⁸ describes God as *ananta-śakti*, or the one whose power is unlimited, and verse 10.3.17²⁹ states that God is *sarvātma*, or the one whose self is everything. Furthermore, several verses throughout the *BhP* such as 10.3.19³⁰ assert that the creation, the maintenance, and the destruction of this world occur because of God, thus indicating God’s complete sovereignty over the world.

Lastly, I wish to demonstrate that God possesses omniscience as a divine attribute within the theological frameworks of the *BhP* and the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition. Prabhupāda explicitly asserts the view that God is omniscient in his commentary on *BhP* 6.8.32-33,³¹ and verse 6.8.33³² itself also describes God as omniscient (*sarva-jñā*).

Thus, as we can see, God is viewed as the perfect being within the theological frameworks

of the *BhP* and the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition’s important theologians such as Prabhupāda. The tradition’s adherence to perfect being theology is significant for the purposes of comparative theology because it situates Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism and the Judeo-Christian religions on a similar theological spectrum. One implication of this conceptual resonance is that one of the biggest challenges to Christian theism, the problem of evil, which presupposes perfect being theology, pertains to the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition as well. Thus, the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition can act as a dialogical partner with Christianity in what Francis Clooney has termed ‘comparative theodicy,’ which he describes as “the construction of a broad, cross-cultural and cross-religious set of theodicies that support and refine one another on the one hand, and, on the other, reveal and deconstruct unquestioned sets of presuppositions about evil and what counts in explanations of it.”³³ This indicates that the theodical resources that Christianity or Christian philosophers have developed in response to the problem of evil, such as ‘Skeptical Theism’ or Alvin Plantinga’s ‘Free Will Defense’ can also be hermeneutically reconfigured by the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition in order to bolster its own response to the problem of evil. Conversely, the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition’s theodical responses, which I am developing in other academic projects, can also be utilized by the Judeo-Christian religious traditions so that these traditions can mutually reinforce their own theodicies. Within the doctrinal milieus of comparative theodicy, theologians from both Christianity and Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism can also better understand their own theodicy’s conceptual flaws by reference to the theodical framework of the dialogical other, and thus, each religious tradition can work to

refine, rework, and strengthen their respective theodical response.

The 'Goodness Criterion'

Although it is beyond the scope of this article to provide an extensive theodical comparison between the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition and a particular Christian tradition, I can briefly highlight some comparative theodical dimensions that can open up when it is established that the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition adheres to perfect being theology. In order to refine the process of comparative theodicy, I propose the following criterion for cross evaluating the conceptual strength of two theodicies, and I define this criterion as the 'goodness criterion.'

If God's goodness is shown to be greater in theodicy A than in theodicy B, then I propose that theodicy A is a stronger theodicy than theodicy B, all else being equal. For instance, according to this criterion, a theodicy without gratuitous suffering would be stronger than a theodicy with gratuitous suffering, given that God's goodness is maximized if God doesn't cause creatures to suffer unnecessarily and instead ensures that every instance of suffering ultimately serves a beneficial purpose. The goodness criterion challenges the theodicist to go one step farther than merely addressing the problem of evil. If the theodicist wishes to participate in comparative theodicy, they are also challenged to demonstrate how their theodicy is *stronger* than competing theodicies or how their theodicy has certain features that are conducive to the construction of a stronger theodicy. My reasoning for this claim is as follows.

If a theodicy A presupposes that God is all-good, then it must be able to illustrate that there

is no other conceivable theodicy B in which God's goodness is greater. Otherwise, the goodness of God in theodicy A is inferior to that of God in theodicy B, and if the conceptualization of God in theodicy A is less good than another conceptualization of God, then theodicy A fails to satisfy the premise that God is the most benevolent being conceivable.

My argument can be laid out as follows:

1. A triple-O God is not only omnibenevolent but is also the *most* benevolent being in existence as well as the most benevolent being that can be conceived.
2. A being that possesses the *most* goodness must be more benevolent than any other being.

Conclusion: Therefore, if a theodicist is going to assert the existence of a triple-O God, they must be prepared to show that there is no conceptualization of God with greater goodness than one's own; otherwise, this alternative conception of God with greater conceivable goodness implies that the theodicist conceives of God as being non-maximally good.

By employing the goodness criterion in comparative theodical exercises, theodicists can evaluate and refine the strength of their theodicy vis-à-vis engagement with other theodicies, resulting in illuminating theodical dialogue between both parties. I will demonstrate one instance of such dialogue by placing the Caitanya tradition and Christianity in active comparative theodical conversation with one another by using their notions of post-mortem existence as the locus of comparative theodical inquiry. The Caitanya tradition holds that following the death of their physical body, finite selves, who are immaterial and ontologically distinct from their physical body,

transmigrate into another physical body.³⁴ Moreover, selves do not begin each life as a *tabula rasa* but can instead continue to make moral and soteriological progress in each successive lifetime.³⁵ Thus, as selves continue to transmigrate across various physical bodies, they can gradually develop greater moral character and spiritual purity, enabling them to one day attain soteriological perfection as a result of this cumulative spiritual advancement. According to Prabhupāda, God is also willing to take all selves back into his company, thus suggesting a vision of universal salvation.³⁶

In contrast, many, though not all, Christian traditions hold that selves possess only one life in which they can attain soteriological perfection.³⁷ Many Christian traditions also hold that selves are eternally damned if they fail to attain salvation through Christ in this one life, although there are some Christian thinkers that believe in universal salvation.³⁸ Thus, according to the Christian traditions that believe in a one-life modality of existence paired with eternal damnation, there is no opportunity for selves to continue to make soteriological progress across multiple lives. They must instead attain salvation in this very life or face eternal damnation.

One Christian philosopher who has defended the co-existence of a triple-O God and a one life modality of existence paired with eternal damnation is Jerry Walls. Walls argues that because selves possess libertarian free will, God cannot compel or force them to accept God, and therefore, selves are free to reject God and any opportunity given to them for salvation.³⁹ He also argues that certain individuals choose to embrace evil wholeheartedly and consequently continue to reject God eternally.⁴⁰ In Walls’s eschatological framework, selves exercise their

volitional capacities in going either to heaven or to hell after their earthly existence. Thus, even though Walls’ conceptual framework has a post-mortem existence, selves cannot become embodied as humans working towards their own salvation on earth again.⁴¹

Even in the light of Walls’s argumentation, I argue that a Caitanya Vaiṣṇava post-mortem framework has greater theodical strength than one life modality existence paired with eternal damnation. I accept the notion that God cannot force the self to embrace God. However, it does not follow that this constraint causes certain selves to be eternally damned. In order to substantiate his argument for eternal damnation, Walls must assume that these selves in hell are causally determined to never want to leave hell. As Thomas Talbott points out, however, this assumption is inconsistent with the idea of libertarian free will to begin with.⁴² If the self is causally determined to choose a life of sin eternally, then it does not, in fact, have libertarian free will. I therefore reason that if a self is to possess libertarian free will, it must have the option to be able to choose God again, and the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava theological framework indeed provides selves with this opportunity by allowing them to be repeatedly reborn as humans who can work towards their liberation.

Nevertheless, for argument’s sake, let us say that the circumstances of hell are such that the self *could* escape hell but *volitionally* does not choose to — a view that preserves libertarian free will. It is not clear to me how, according to the goodness criterion, Walls’s theological framework is more morally defensible than a theological framework that provides an individual with multiple subsequent human lives in which it can grow spiritually and acquire

another opportunity to embrace God. In a one-life modality of existence, the selves who do not choose God are eternally condemned, even if this 'condemnation' is sustained by their own volitional choices. However, in the multiple-lives modality of existence found within Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism, an individual who does not attain liberation in one life can get a chance to do so in a future life. Therefore, over time, each self will continue to receive further opportunities for salvation. Moreover, through the process of transmigration, selves gradually learn soteriologically beneficial lessons by which they can grow spiritually, so, even if selves fail to attain salvation in one life, they can continue their soteriological journey in their next life. Therefore, in such a conceptual framework, selves can progress in their spiritual journey from lifetime to lifetime until they finally attain liberation. Furthermore, since selves are not causally determined to reject God eternally⁴³ and have their desires substantially reconfigured across time until they choose to make God the sole locus of their desires, there is always a possibility, even if it is slight, that the self can turn to God in any one of its lives. Although I have not come across any Caitanya Vaiṣṇava theologian who has explicitly stated that all selves will return to God, I argue, based on my own reasoning, that given an infinite amount of time, which is present within Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism's cosmological framework, any possibility, no matter how small, will be actualized. Since it is possible that selves can eventually turn to God within any one of their lives, I argue that all selves *will* eventually be liberated. Thus, I argue that within Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism's theological framework, God's goodness is greater than in a one-life modality of existence that allows certain selves to

experience eternal damnation, since in the former, *all* selves will eventually enjoy beatific intimacy with God.

Therefore, while a Christian theodicist may be able to explain how a triple-O God can support a one life modality of existence paired with eternal damnation, they do not seem to be able to explain that this theological framework reinforces God's goodness to a greater extent than a theological framework like that of the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition. However, by engaging in comparative theodical dialogue with Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism, the Christian theodicist can interrogate their theological presuppositions more critically and refine their theodicy.

Yet, the Christian theodicist is not the only party that can benefit from the abovementioned comparative theodical exchange — the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava theodicist can also learn from their Christian interlocuter. For instance, although the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava theodicist can defend God's supreme goodness through an appeal to the putative existence of their multiple-lives framework, they may come to realize, through comparative theodical dialogue with the Christian theodicist, that a modality of existence in which finite selves have repeated chances to attain liberation can devalue the soteriological importance of any one given lifetime. In contrast, within Walls's theological framework, selves, understanding that their salvation rests upon their decisions in *this* very lifetime, have a greater incentive to take their soteriological pursuits very seriously. Therefore, the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava theodicist can understand the conceptual drawbacks of a multiple lives framework and work to bolster their theodicy by emphasizing the importance of one's soteriological pursuits in this very lifetime. For

instance, they could highlight the notion that soteriological progress is best achieved while embodied as a human,⁴⁴ and they could also draw attention to how rare it is for a self to acquire a human rebirth.⁴⁵ By doing so, they can ascribe greater soteriological importance to one's current life so that individuals do not become lethargic in their attempts for liberation. Yet, they can continue to uphold a multiple lives modality of existence so that their theological framework can support a vision of universal salvation.

Finally, I acknowledge that someone may also view the goodness criterion as too simplistic. Admittedly, it can be difficult to employ the goodness criterion because it is not always possible to compare one facet of theodicy A to one facet of theodicy B while keeping everything else equal. For instance, there can be distinctive benefits to both a one life modality of existence and a multiple lives modality of existence. Thus, attempting to demonstrate that one is superior to the other can neglect the fact that they each have their own relative merits and drawbacks. Therefore, I acknowledge that the goodness criterion is not perfect. However, I argue that it can be a helpful tool for stimulating comparative theodicy conversations and can be one theoretical pathway by which theodicians can interrogate the presuppositions of another theodician's theological framework.

Further suggestions for improving the quality of comparative theodical exchanges are beyond the scope of this article. However, by

illustrating the Caitanya tradition's adherence to a perfect being theology, I believe that I have demonstrated how the Caitanya tradition can be a comparative theodical dialogical partner to other religious traditions that too adhere to perfect being theology. Moreover, by proposing the goodness criterion, I hope that I have been able to contribute to an ongoing process of refining such comparative theodical exchanges.

Conclusion

Thus, I argue that the thematic parities between the theological frameworks of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism and Christianity that I have outlined can provide a stronger basis for both of these religious traditions to engage in mutually enriching discourses, particularly in the context of theological and philosophical inquiry that relates to perfect being theology, such as the problem of evil. I have also provided one criterion, namely, the 'goodness criterion,' which can be employed in order to facilitate comparative theodical exchanges between Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism and Christianity. Although the goodness criterion may have its own conceptual difficulties, I argue that it is nevertheless a steppingstone towards the refinement of comparative theodicy. Such refinement is not an overnight process and will require careful consideration by scholars. However, I hope that this article has brought us at least one step closer towards achieving this aim.

Notes

¹ Ankur Barua. 2010. "The Dialectic of Divine 'Grace' and 'Justice' in St Augustine and Śrī

Vaiṣṇavism" *Religions of South Asia* vol. 4, no. 1: 46. <https://doi.org/10.1558/rosa.v4i1.45>.

² See Anne Hunt Overzee. 1992. *The Body Divine: The Symbol of the Body in the Works of*

Teilhard de Chardin and Rāmānuja. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Francis X. Clooney, 1989. "Evil, Divine Omnipotence, and Human Freedom: Vedānta's Theology of Karma." *Journal of Religion*, vol. 69, no. 4: 530–48, <https://doi.org/10.1086/488203>; and Eric J. Lott, 1981. 'The Conceptual Dimensions of Bhakti in the Rāmānuja Tradition.' *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies* vol. 2: 97–114.

³ It should be noted that the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition encompasses several smaller sub-traditions. In this article, when I speak of the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition, I will be specifically referring to those Caitanya Vaiṣṇava sub-traditions that have engaged with the systems of philosophical inquiry and soteriological practice known as Vedānta.

⁴ For a comprehensive survey of the extant scholarship, see Lucian Wong, 2016. "Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Studies: Mapping the Field." *Religions of South Asia*, vol. 9: 305-331. <https://doi.org/10.1558/rosa.v9i3.32197>.

⁵ Michael Murray and Michael Rea, 2008. *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 8.

⁶ William Rowe, 2007. "Divine Power, Goodness, and Knowledge" in William Wainwright (ed.) 2007. *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 15.

⁷ See Ferdinando Sardella, 2012. *Modern Hindu Personalism: The History, Life, and Thought of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati*. New York: Oxford University Press, 182-184.

⁸ The edition of the *BhP* I will be referring to when I refer to it is: Kṛṣṇaśaṅkara Śāstrī (ed.), 1965-1975. *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, with multiple Sanskrit commentaries. 13 Volumes. Ahmedabad: Śrī Bhāgavatavidyāpīṭha.

⁹ Swami Prabhupāda. 1998. *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam: Canto 10 Part 1*. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedānta Book Trust, 693.

¹⁰ *mādrk prapanna-paśu-pāśa-vimokṣaṇāya muktāya bhūri-karuṇāya namo 'layāya / svāmśena sarva-tanu-bhṛn-manasi pratīta-pratyag-dṛśe bhagavate bṛhate namas te //*. Text taken from Śāstrī, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa Canto 8*, 63.

¹¹ Swami Prabhupāda, 1998. *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam: Canto 8*. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedānta Book Trust, 117.

¹² *tvad-anupatham kulāyam idam ātma-suhṛt-priya-vac carati tathonmukhe tvayi hite priya ātmani ca / na bata ramanty aho asad-upāsanayātma-hano yad-anuśayā bhramanty uru-bhaye ku-śarīra-bhṛtaḥ //* Text taken from Śāstrī, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa Canto 10 Volume 6*, 1137.

¹³ *samaḥ priyaḥ suhṛd brahman bhūtānām bhagavān svayam / indrasyārthe katham daityān avadhīd viśamo yathā //*. Text taken from Śāstrī, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa Canto 7*, 63.

¹⁴ One of the foundational texts of the Caitanya tradition. It is held to have been compiled around 200 BCE to 200 CE.

¹⁵ *ye yathā maṃ prapadyante tāms tathaiva bhajāmy aham / mama vartmānuvartante manusyaḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ //*. Text taken from Graham M. Schweig, 2007. *Bhagavad Gita: The Beloved Lord's Secret Love Song*. New York: HarperOne, 292.

¹⁶ *nāham tu sakhyo bhajato 'pi jantūn bhajāmy amīśām anuvṛtti-vṛttaye / yathādhano labdhadhane vinaṣṭe tac-cintayānyan nibhṛto na veda //* (10.32.20). Text taken from Śāstrī, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa Canto 10 Volume 3*, 686.

evam mad-arthojjhita-loka-veda svānām hi vo mayy anuvṛttaye 'balāḥ / mayāparokṣam bhajatā tirohitam māsūyitum mārhattha tat priyam priyaḥ // (10.32.21). Text taken from Śāstrī, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa Canto 10 Volume 3*, 695. *na pārāye 'ham*

niravadya-saṁyujām sva-sādhu-kṛtyaṁ
vibudhāyūṣāpi vaḥ / yā mābhajan durjara-geha-
śṛṅkhalāḥ saṁvr̥ścyā tad vaḥ pratīyātu sādhunā //
(10.32.22). Text taken from Śaṣṭrī, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa Canto 10 Volume 3*, 695.

¹⁷ Barua, "The Dialectic of Divine 'Grace' and 'Justice' in St Augustine and Śrī Vaiṣṇavism", 45.

¹⁸ Śaṣṭrī, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa Canto 10 Volume 6*, 439-613.

¹⁹ kiñcit karoty urv api yat sva-dattaṁ suhṛt-
kṛtaṁ phalgv api bhūri-kārī / mayopaṇitaṁ
pṛthukaika-muṣṭiṁ pratyagrahīt pṛīti-yuto
mahātmā //. Text taken from Śaṣṭrī, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa Canto 10 Volume 5*, 564.

²⁰ yad-anudhyāsīnā yuktāḥ karma-granthi-
nibandhanam / chindanti kovidās tasya ko na kuryāt
kathā-ratim //. Text taken from Śaṣṭrī, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa Canto 1*, 137.

²¹ Noel Sheth, 2002. "Hindu Avatāra and Christian Incarnation: A Comparison." *Philosophy East and West* 52, no. 1 (January): 98; for detailed descriptions of the avatāra doctrine as it pertains specifically to Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism, see Barbara Holdrege, 2015. *Bhakti and Embodiment: Fashioning Divine Bodies and Devotional Bodies in Kṛṣṇa Bhakti*. New York: Routledge, 22-23; 45-73; and Sushil K. De, 1961. *Early History of the Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Bengal, from Sanskrit and Bengali Sources*. Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyaya, 250-251.

²² Sheth, "Hindu Avatāra and Christian Incarnation: A Comparison," 16.

²³ Swami Prabhupāda, 1974. *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*. New York: Macmillan, 293-294.

²⁴ Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment: Fashioning Divine Bodies and Devotional Bodies in Kṛṣṇa Bhakti*, 46-47.

²⁵ bhava 'smin kliṣyamānānām avidyā-kāma-
karmabhiḥ / śravaṇa-smaraṇārḥāṇi kariṣyann iti

kecana //. Text taken from Śaṣṭrī, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa Canto 1*, 408.

²⁶ David Haberman, 1988. *Acting As a Way of Salvation: A Study of Rāgānuga Bhakti Sādhana*. New York: Oxford University Press, 66.

²⁷ Swami Prabhupāda, 1998. *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam: Canto 6*. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedānta Book Trust, 488.

²⁸ tasmai namaḥ pareśāya brahmaṇe 'nanta-
śaktaye / arūpāyuru-rūpāya nama āścarya-karmaṇe
// Text taken from Śaṣṭrī, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa Canto 8*, 54.

²⁹ evaṁ bhavān buddhy-anumeya-lakṣaṇair
grāhyair guṇaiḥ sann api tad-guṇāgrahaḥ /
anāvṛtatvād bahir antaraṁ na te sarvasya
sarvātmana ātma-vastunaḥ //. Text taken from Śaṣṭrī, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa Canto 10*, 497.

³⁰ tvatto 'sya janma-sthiti-saṁyamān vibho
vadanty anihād aguṇād avikriyāt / tvayīśvare
brahmaṇi no virudhyate tvad-āśrayatvād
upacaryate guṇaiḥ //. Text taken from Śaṣṭrī, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa Canto 10*, 497.

³¹ Swami Prabhupāda, *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam: Canto 6*, 488.

³² tenaiva satya-mānena sarva-jño bhagavān
hariḥ / pātu sarvaiḥ svarūpair naḥ sadā sarvatra
sarva-gaḥ //. Text taken from Śaṣṭrī, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa Canto 6*, 270.

³³ Clooney, "Evil, Divine Omnipotence, and Human Freedom: Vedānta's Theology of Karma," 548.

³⁴ Swami Prabhupāda, *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 119.

³⁵ Ibid. 166.

³⁶ Swami Prabhupāda, 1998. *Caitanya Caritāmṛta: Madhya Lilā*. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedānta Book Trust, 2391.

³⁷ Jeffrey Trumbower, 2004. *Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in*

Early Christianity. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 110.

³⁸ Ibid. 121-122.

³⁹ Jerry Walls, 2004. "Eternal Hell and the Christian Concept of God" in Michael Peterson and Raymond Vanarragon (eds.), 2004. *Contemporary Debates in the Philosophy of Religion*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 272-273.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 274-277.

⁴¹ Ibid. 277.

⁴² Thomas Talbott, 2004. "No Hell" in Michael Peterson and Raymond Vanarragon (eds.), 2004. *Contemporary Debates in the Philosophy of Religion*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 289.

⁴³ It is beyond the scope of this article to elaborate upon the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition's notions of free will. However, given the continued exhortations within Caitanya Vaiṣṇava scriptural texts to worship God, it can be understood that selves have the volitional capacity to choose God.

⁴⁴ Swami Prabhupāda, 1998. *Caitanya Caritāmṛta: Ādi Līlā*. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 354.

⁴⁵ Swami Prabhupāda, 1998. *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam: Canto 7*. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedānta Book Trust, 353.