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Ten Years Later: A Reply to a Reply from David Haugen and Bryant Keeling; Concerning Charles Hartshorne's Neoclassical Theology and Big Bang Cosmology

Theodore Walker Jr.

Abstract

In the Fall 1993 issue of the journal *Process Studies*, David Haugen and L. Bryant Keeling offered a criticism of Charles Hartshorne's neoclassical theology. In the same issue, this criticism was followed by Hartshorne's less than one-page response, a response Theodore Walker judged to be seriously inadequate. In the Fall-Winter 2006 issue of *Process Studies*, Walker offered a neoclassical response to the Haugen-Keeling-Hartshorne discussion. In the Spring-Summer 2008 issue of *Process Studies*, Haugen and Keeling offered a reply to Walker. Ten years later, in April 2018, Walker offers this reply to the Haugen-Keeling reply.

At issue is whether Hartshorne's neoclassical theology is compatible with big bang cosmology. Walker argues that neoclassical theology is incompatible with classical versions of big bang cosmology, and compatible with non-classical versions of big bang cosmology, including Stephen Hawking's non-classical "no boundary" cosmology.

In the Fall 1993 issue of the journal *Process Studies*, by appeal to big bang cosmology, David Haugen and L. Bryant Keeling offered a criticism of Charles Hartshorne's neoclassical theology. In the same issue, this criticism was followed by Hartshorne's less than one-page response, a response Theodore Walker Jr. judged to be seriously inadequate.

[See "Hartshorne's Process Theism and Big Bang Cosmology" by David Haugen and L. Bryant Keeling, and "Hartshorne's Response" by Charles Hartshorne, in *Process Studies*, volume 22.3 (Fall 1993): 163-71, and 72.]

In the Fall-Winter 2006 issue of *Process Studies*, by appeal to Hartshorne's neoclassical cosmology and Stephen Hawking's non-classical 'no-boundary proposal,' Walker offered a lengthier, and hopefully more adequate, neoclassical response to the Haugen-Keeling-Hartshorne discussion.

[See "Classical and Neoclassical Cosmology: A Neoclassical Response to the Haugen-Keeling-Hartshorne Discussion and Stephen Hawking's 'No-Boundary Proposal'" by Theodore Walker Jr. in *Process Studies*, volume 35.2 (Fall-Winter 2006): 270-90.]

In the Spring-Summer 2008 issue of *Process Studies*, Haugen and Keeling offered a reply to Walker.

[See "Hartshorne's Process Theism and Big Bang Cosmology Revisited: Reply to Walker" by David Haugen and Bryant Keeling in *Process Studies*, volume 37.1 (Spring-Summer 2008): 92-103.]

Ten years later, in April 2018, Walker hereby offers this reply to a reply from David Haugen and Bryant Keeling.

Starting with the Haugen-Keeling abstract for “Hartshorne’s Process Theism and Big Bang Cosmology Revisited: Reply to Walker,” the **first sentence** of the abstract says:

A number of years ago [in 1993] we argued that Hartshorne’s psychicalism and his doctrine of divine memory are *incompatible with contemporary big bang cosmology*.
(Haugen and Keeling 2008: 92 [Italics added].)

Correctly qualified, it would have been better to say, as Walker said: Hartshorne’s neoclassical theology (and cosmology, including psychicalism and divine memory) is incompatible with contemporary big bang cosmology *where contemporary big bang cosmology embraces the idea of an absolute beginning of all that is real (before which there was absolutely nothing and absolutely nothing happening), and where it embraces the idea of an absolute ending (after which there will be absolutely nothing, and nothing happening)* (Walker 2006: 273).

Big bang cosmologies that embrace one or both of these ideas (absolute beginning, absolute ending) are ‘classical.’

Hartshorne’s *neoclassical* theology is *incompatible with classical* versions of big bang cosmology; and Hartshorne’s *neoclassical* theology is *compatible with non-classical* versions of big bang cosmology, including Stephen Hawking’s non-classical “no boundary” cosmology.

The **next sentence** of the Haugen-Keeling abstract says:

Theodore Walker has responded to our objection by arguing [1] that our understanding of psychicalism is flawed and [2] that Hartshorne’s metaphysics has the resources for accommodating what the big bang theory says about the origin and fate of the universe.
(Haugen and Keeling, 2008: 92, brackets inserted).

On this first point [1], Hartshorne’s response is correct, but far too briefly stated. Hartshorne indicated that the Haugen-Keeling’s account of psychicalism suffered the “particular” flaw of “‘close” appeal to “mind-brain analogy” (Hartshorne, 1993: 172). For the sake of rendering this particular flaw obvious, Walker added that Hartshorne had frequently employed mind-*body* analogy, but *not* mind-*brain* analogy.

The second point [2] (about accommodating “what the big bang theory says about the origin [beginning] and fate [ending] of the universe”) needs a distinction between classical and non-classical, between classical big bang theory (cannot accommodate) and non-classical big bang theory (can accommodate).

Unlike the standard (classical/nonquantum) big bang theory considered by Haugen and Keeling, there are big bang theories that affirm no absolute beginning and no absolute ending. For instance, after adding consideration of influences described by quantum theories of gravity to consideration of influences described by classical/nonquantum theories of gravity, and thereby conceiving that the big bang emerged from a quantum smeared singularity (instead of from an unsmeared singularity), Stephen Hawking proposed conceiving that the universe had no absolute beginning and will have no absolute ending; hence, “no boundary” (Hawking 1988; 2005).

The **final sentence** of the Haugen-Keeling abstract says:

In the present article we attempt to show that Walker’s defense of Hartshorne fails.
(Haugen and Keeling 2008: 92).

The Haugen-Keeling characterization of Walker’s response as a “defense of Hartshorne” is partly correct. Walker’s response included defense, and offense. In addition to defending neoclassical thought, Walker described Hartshorne’s 1993 response to Haugen and Keeling in terms of failure and neglect. Walker lamented “Hartshorne’s failure to offer obvious Hartshornean responses” (2006: 270), and he complained that “Hartshorne neglected to say the obvious” (2006: 275). Plus, Walker identified two other instances of Hartshornean “failure” (2006: 283-284). Emphasizing Hartshorne’s failures is not “defense of Hartshorne.”

The main reason Walker judged Hartshorne’s response to be so seriously inadequate is that Hartshorne failed to refute the Haugen-Keeling effort “to establish a dilemma” (Fall 1993: 163). Hartshorne should have said that he saw no real dilemma. The putative-Haugen-Keeling dilemma is a real dilemma “if the general picture of the universe presented by the big bang theory is accepted” (Haugen and Keeling, Fall 1993: 163). The dilemma arises from accepting *classical* big bang theory. Hartshorne’s neoclassical thinking does not accept classical big bang theory. Hence, the Haugen-Keeling effort to establish a dilemma for Hartshorne fails.

More about Mind-Brain Analogy

In their reply to Walker, Haugen and Keeling advanced two arguments for standing by their claim “that Hartshorne not only makes use of the mind-brain analogy, but that it is crucial for his concept of God’s memory” (Spring-Summer 2008: 96).

The first argument is “that typically when philosophers talk about the mind-body problem they are talking about the mind-brain problem” and “[i]f Hartshorne thought that the mind-body problem was something other than the mind-brain problem, he surely would have said so ...” (Spring-Summer 2008: 96). This argument could be convincing if one were already convinced that Hartshorne surely would not have failed to say so. However, awareness of other Hartshornean failures suggests one should not be so convinced. Moreover, in response to Haugen and Keeling, Hartshorne wrote “the world is God’s body” (Fall 1993: 172). Body is essential to deity. In contrast to body, Hartshorne described “brain” as one of many “anatomical details” that

“need not apply” (Ibid), and he wrote “God needs no divine brain” (Ibid). Though he surely did fail to say so in his response to Haugen and Keeling, unlike typical philosophers, Hartshorne did not identify mind-body analogy with mind-brain analogy.

The second argument is that Hartshorne makes explicit use of mind-brain analogy in “many passages,” and “especially clear” are two passages where Hartshorne says [1] that “‘the world-mind will have no special brain but rather that every individual is to that mind as a sort of brain cell’ (LP 197)” and [2] that we “‘set up currents, as it were, in the mind of God, as the activities of our brain cells set up currents in our minds’ (LP 203)” (Haugen and Keeling, Spring-Summer 2008: 96-97). True, speaking of “every individual” as “a sort of brain cell” setting up currents in God’s mind does imply a sort of divine brain. However, where *every* individual (in contrast to some individuals) is “a sort of brain cell,” this is “no *special* brain” (emphasis added, LP 197). Perhaps this implied divine brain should be called a ‘*general* brain’ or a ‘*universal* brain’ because, as Haugen and Keeling say, the “entire physical world functions as God’s brain” (Spring-Summer 2008: 97), and thus, there is no distinction between divine body and divine brain. But Hartshorne does not speak of divine brain. Though he speaks of divine body and divine mind (and world-mind), divine brain is avoided because “brain” implies “special” instead of general-universal and comprehensive. Accordingly, Hartshorne argues that “special brain-organ” contradicts “perfect mind” (LP 198). Because Hartshorne identifies the “brain” as a “special” part of a bodily whole, it is clear that when he says the world-mind has “no special brain,” he means no such special part (nor any other speck or part or “anatomical detail”) is “crucial” for divine memory.

Other concerns

Concerning the Haugen-Keeling account of “Walker’s attempt to show that traditional big bang cosmology is incoherent or unprovable ... in at least three basic ways ... [1] created out of nothing is inconceivable ... [2] first moment of time is incoherent ... [3] the predictions of big bang cosmology regarding the future of the universe are not adequately supported by the empirical evidence” (Spring-Summer 2008: 98):

Walker is persuaded that theories affirming an ‘absolute beginning,’ and theories affirming an ‘absolute ending,’ are incoherent bookends bracketing otherwise coherent theories of an expanding universe.

With regard to the adequacy of empirical evidence for factual claims in cosmology, we should respect Timothy Eastman’s call for “cosmic agnosticism” [See “Cosmic Agnosticism” by Timothy E. Eastman in *Process Studies* 36.2, Fall-Winter 2007]. Nevertheless, no actual or possible observation could witness to ‘created out of nothing’ distinguished from ‘created out of something invisible to us,’ nor to ‘first moment of time’ distinguished from ‘first moments of our time.’ Similarly, we cannot observe ‘something becoming nothing’ distinguished from ‘something becoming something we cannot see.’ Given that ‘something comes of something previous’ and “nothing will come of nothing” (King Lear), affirming ‘something from nothing’ and ‘something becoming nothing’ signals either an undisciplined use of language—where ‘nothing’ refers to ‘something’ other than absolutely nothing, or an appeal to “purely magical causation” (OOTM 58).

Obviously, creaturely creativity is about creating something from some previous things. Thus, whenever we see a ‘creation from nothing’ (loosely speaking), we know there must be an unseen something, perhaps hidden in the magician’s sleeve. Observational science and the philosophy of nature do not favor the magician’s claim to have created something from absolutely nothing (nor do science and philosophy favor the magician’s claim to transform something into absolutely nothing). Accordingly, in philosophical theology, claims affirming divine magic should not be favored over claims affirming divine creativity. ‘God-the-cosmic-magician’ should not be favored over ‘God-the-cosmic-Creator.’

Similarly, in empirical and philosophical cosmology, appeals to cosmic magic should not be favored over appeals to observable and coherently conceivable cosmic processes. And conceptual coherence requires that any entropic running down (or big crunching collapse) of cosmic complexity presupposes a previous creative “‘running up’” to cosmic complexity that “‘cannot be *less* fundamental as a cosmic function, however hidden from us its larger operations may be” (MVG 201). Otherwise, without magic, “‘there would have been no cosmos to ‘run down’ toward the ‘heat death’” (Ibid).

Other Possibilities

I apologize for saying Haugen and Keeling mistook contraries (classical big bang and steady state theories) for contradictories. I am pleased to learn they are “‘happy to acknowledge that there may be other possibilities” (Haugen and Keeling, Spring-Summer 2008: 102). Of course acknowledging other possibilities weakens the case for having expected that Hartshorne would have to favor classical big bang theory over steady state theory (Fall 1993: 168). Furthermore, given other options, including non-classical options, it no longer “‘follows” that Hartshorne “‘must” surrender “‘one of his central metaphysical doctrines [everlasting divine memory and anti-dualist psychicalism] or reject the current state-of-the-art cosmological theory” (Spring-Summer 2008: 92).

The Haugen-Keeling Dilemma Restated and Appreciated

Here restated to avoid the issue of mind-brain analogy, *the dilemma* presented by Haugen and Keeling amounts to this:

Given acceptance of claims favoring the coherence of ideas affirming the absolute beginning and the absolute endings depicted by standard (classical/nonquantum) big bang cosmology, theologians must choose either <everlasting divine memory + dualism> or <anti-dualist psychicalism + divine memory loss>.

Dualism (separating mental-spiritual from physical) is required to preserve everlasting divine memory because physically encoded data cannot survive a universal collapse into a singularity (big crunch) or an everlasting universal expansion (heat death).

Choosing <everlasting divine memory + dualism> entails keeping everlasting divine memory at the cost of surrendering anti-dualist psychicalism.

Choosing <anti-dualist psychicalism + divine memory loss> entails keeping anti-dualist psychicalism at the cost of surrendering everlasting divine memory.

Since Hartshornean theology is committed to keeping both everlasting divine memory and anti-dualist psychicalism, “grasping either horn” will result in being impaled, impaled by dualism or impaled by divine memory loss.

Again, Hartshorne experienced no dilemma, and did no grasping, and was not impaled, because he did not accept absolute beginnings and absolute endings. Nevertheless, Haugen and Keeling are correct about the following: They are correct in perceiving and demonstrating (by way of dilemma) that accepting a claim that it is coherent to affirm the possibility of an absolute beginning or an absolute ending would require theologians to grasp “either horn of the dilemma” (Fall 1993: 163), and this would make Hartshorne’s “entire metaphysical system” and neoclassical theology seem “untenable” (Spring-Summer 2008: 103). In accordance with this requirement, classical theologians (who accept claims favoring the coherence of affirming said absolutes) do grasp a ‘horn’ (everlasting divine memory + dualism), and they do find that neoclassical theology is untenable.

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