Finitism and the Problem of Evil[1]

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ACCORDING TO TRADITIONAL THEISM, God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent. If God were omnibenevolent, he would want to eliminate evil. If God were omnipotent, he would be able to eliminate evil. So why should there be any evil? This problem is, by far, the most discussed subject in the philosophy of religion. In this paper, I argue that rejecting the traditional notion of God is the best way to deal with this problem. First, I explain the nature of the problem, pointing out that it is really three different problems. Second, I explicate the terms involved in the traditional notion of God and the nature of the doctrine of *finitism.* Third, I examine the traditional solutions to the problem and show how they fail. Fourth, I show how those same solutions can work when coupled with the claim that God is finite. I will also show how God's finitude can explain pointless evil. Finally, I respond to objections given to finitism along the lines that it requires that God be too finite.

1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As J. L. Mackie points out, "God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false."[2] Of course, Mackie explains, the contradiction does not follow right away, but rather we need a couple of very plausible assumptions in order to reach the contradiction. Indeed, if we suppose that *(i) if X is omnipotent then X could eliminate evil, (ii) if X is wholly good then X would desire above all else to eliminate evil, and (iii) for any state of affairs, S, that X desires, X will bring about S, unless X cannot bring about S or there is a desire which*

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1. Presented at the 1999 Salt Lake City Sunstone Symposium.
2. J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind* 16 (1955): 64, 200–12.

overrides X's desire to bring about S, then it follows from the existence of evil that there is no God. This version of the problem of evil is often called "the logical problem of evil," because it claims that the existence of God is logically inconsistent with the existence of evil.

Many philosophers believe that the logical problem of evil can be solved: One only need show that it is *possible* that there be an omnipotent, wholly good God and there be evil. However, advocates of the problem of evil have insisted it is not enough just to show there is some possibility in which God exists and in which evil exists. Instead, one must show that such a possibility is not significantly less likely than one in which the sort of evil exists and there is no God. Indeed, we may grant that there is a possible world in which God allows the sorts of evils that we see in this world, but we may still argue that God's allowing such evils is very unlikely. The kinds of circumstances justifying the existence of the Holocaust, for example, would be very rare indeed. Thus, the very existence of evils such as the Holocaust count as evidence against the existence of God, even if they do not show that there is some inconsistency in supposing it. This version of the problem of evil is often called "the evidential problem of evil."

Finally, there is a concern often discussed in conjunction with the other problems above: Real evil occurs and people have to face this evil. Sometimes they are victims of it. How should they deal with it? How does it affect their belief in God? How do we best help them overcome the affects of this evil? This is not really a philosophical problem for the existence of God. Evil may make us angry with God, but our anger alone is not reason to reject his existence. Moreover, the existential problem of evil is obviously one that must be faced by atheists and theists alike, since both suffer evil and must learn to deal with it in some way. So we will say nothing more of the existential problem of evil in this paper, turning our attention to the logical and evidentiary problems of evil alone.

2. DEFINITIONS

It might also seem that we should make our terms clear at this point. We don't really have to define evil itself. Whatever definition we give, practically everyone believes there is evil in the world. However, it is important to draw a distinction between *moral* and *natural* evil. The former is any evil resulting from, or part of, what an agent does. Natural evil is any evil that is not moral evil. So the Holocaust would be moral evil, while the suffering caused by tornadoes in Oklahoma is natural evil. Some people deny the existence of natural evil. Everything nature does is supposedly morally neutral, according to such a view. Yet this seems clearly wrong when we consider the fact that we often try to avoid or

correct things in nature. For example, we cured small pox because we believed small pox to be a bad thing. Moreover, most people would think it would be a bad thing for a comet to hit the earth, but a comet is certainly not an agent. So there are very good reasons to believe in both natural evil and moral evil.

Not only do we need to make some clarifications about the nature of evil, but we should also clarify what we mean when we say God is either omnipotent or finite. The claim that God is *omnipotent* in some way amounts to the claim that God is unlimited in power. Likewise, the claim that God is *finite* is a denial of the claim that God is omnipotent. So where we have different definitions of omnipotence, we will also have different definitions of finitism. We do not want to say that God is omnipotent in the sense that there is no sentence like "God cannot do X," where X is replaced by the description of any action. Such an understanding of unlimited power winds us into logical contradiction. The traditional problem of whether God can create a rock so large he cannot lift it illustrates this contradiction. Moreover, when you say to me, "You cannot create a round square," you really haven't slighted my power in any way since the object you propose is impossible. Similarly, to say that there are some true claims of the form "God cannot do X," where X involves a logical contradiction, is not to impose substantive limitations on God. Logical limitations are not substantive ones.

Given these considerations, we should say that God is *omnipotent* if and only if he can bring about any logically consistent state of affairs. This is a common way of spelling out the idea that God is unlimited in power. There are some fairly technical problems even with this definition—i.e., it is not clear that it avoids contradictions—one of which we will discuss below, but this definition is good for now. Given this definition of omnipotence, we can define finitism in the following way: S is *finite* if and only if there is some logically possible state of affairs, A, such that S can do nothing to bring about A. Notice this does not say much about how powerful S is. I am finite and so are you, but extremely powerful "deities" such as Zeus are also finite. Interestingly, a being can be finite and yet "almighty" in the sense that the being has some power and influence over all beings.

3. TRADITIONAL SOLUTIONS

There have been many traditional attempts to solve the problem of evil; we cannot discuss them all here. However, two solutions seem to be the most popular among philosophers of religion. The first of these is the so-called "soul-building theodicy." The second is the "free will defense." We will take these in turn, but first we should explain what these solutions attempt to do. Essentially, they try to show that even if God were

omnipotent and wholly good, he would not necessarily eliminate all evil. Thus, these theodicies must disagree with one of our aforementioned premises, (i)–(iii). We will see that the most questionable premise is (ii), the idea that God would want to eliminate all evil.

The basic idea in the soul-building theodicy is that God allows evil because it makes us better persons, i.e., evil is instrumental in bringing about the greater good of turning us into God-like creatures. The analogy often raised concerns a parent and her daughter: The parent has the choice of sheltering her child from the world and denying her the opportunity to learn or of allowing her child to suffer the many defeats and traumas of the real world in order that the child may become a better person. Likewise, God allows us to suffer through disasters because it gives us the opportunity to become better persons through helping the victims or learning to cope with such suffering.

There are some well-recognized problems with this theodicy. For ease of reference, I will give these problems names. The first will be called *the incoherence of instrumental evil*. It is not at all clear that there can be such a thing as instrumental evil. Instrumental for what? Presumably, it is instrumental for some greater good. If we are consequentialists of any sort, then the incoherence is obvious at this point, but even if we are not consequentialists, we can recognize the problem by focusing on the analogy often offered by the soul-making theodicist: The parent allows the child to undergo difficult experiences in order to help her become a better person. Is the parent doing something wrong? Clearly not. Are these difficult, painful, and even traumatic experiences evil? It's difficult to say they are. They serve to help the child. However, if there were a really bad thing that might happen to the child, and the parent both knew about it and could stop it, then she should. So it is not even clear that those "bad" events we undergo to become better persons are in any real sense "evil." If this is right, then the soul-building theodicy denies the very existence of evil.

Even if we grant that there may be some evil which is instrumental toward a greater good, it would remain the case that the soul-building theodicy would face problems. One example is *the soul-building minimum problem*. Here it is postulated that not all evil in the world really contributes to soul-building. We all know of cases where victims of accidents or crimes have become worse persons as a result of their trauma. Moreover, some suffering doesn't help the victim because the victim dies; nor does it help anyone else if no one knows about the death of the victim. Finally, it is not at all clear that if there were just the smallest bit less evil in world—for example, if the fall experienced by my daughter this morning had not happened—that the world would be any less soul-building than it is. Some minimum amount of evil is sufficient for the sort of soul-building God wants, and we have reason to think that the

evil in this world exceeds that minimum, i.e., there could be less evil and yet we would still "soul-build" just as well. However, if the soul-building theodicy works, then the amount of evil in the world is certainly at the soul-building minimum.

The soul-building theodicist might respond that the evil in our world is indeed at a soul-building minimum despite appearances. This response certainly works against the logical problem of evil, since it shows it is possible that God would allow the evil in the world. Yet it may not respond to the evidential problem, since it seems more likely than not that the world could have had less evil and yet still have a sufficient amount of evil for us to soul-build. Certainly God, being omnipotent, would be capable of bringing this about.

The third problem is *the soul-building without evil* problem. God, being omnipotent, could clearly create us perfect in the first place; we wouldn't then need to build our souls. If the result were all that mattered, as the soul-building theodicist seems to think, then things would be better this way. One might object that we are better off if we have built our souls ourselves. This may be right, but certainly God could do this without any real evil. All he need do is put us in virtual-reality machines which would make the world appear exactly as it now does. Then he could cause us to experience apparent evils in these machines and allow us to try to overcome them. Of course, these evils wouldn't really occur, so we would learn the same lessons without those evils actually existing.

The fourth problem is *the problem of hell*. Not every soul achieves that state which God intends it to achieve. Some end up in hell, so to speak. However, if the soul-building theodicy is correct, then evil can only be justified if everyone eventually benefits by it. If God is omnipotent, he can make it such that everyone is saved. A natural response to this problem, and perhaps to some of the others, is "What about free will?" Note we are not yet considering the free will defense; we are considering merely the soul-building theodicy. If we also have to assume free will, then the soul-building theodicy alone doesn't work.

Now let us consider the free will defense. The central idea behind the free will defense is that the presence of evil in the world can be explained by the existence of free will. God believes (correctly) that a world in which we have free will is better than one in which we do not, even if that free will sometimes lead to evil. Thus God may not eliminate all evil in the world because it would require him to also eliminate free will. Here the evil is not quite instrumental, since it does not directly result in a better state of affairs as it does in the soul-building theodicy. Instead, the evil is a by-product of something which a good God has to allow.

The central problem with the free will defense is *the possibility of correct choice*. It is surely possible, if we have free will, that we all might choose to do the right thing. If God is omnipotent, then he can bring

about any possible state of affairs. So God should be able to make it so that we are both free and we choose to do the right thing.

Alvin Plantinga, a Calvinist philosopher, has given an extensive and somewhat technical response to this objection.[3] He argues roughly as follows: God's omnipotence does not entail that God can bring about any logically consistent state of affairs. Indeed, God cannot bring it about that we are both free and we choose to do the right. Plantinga considers an example like the following: Suppose that in the actual world, Saul T. Lake offers Olympus a bribe of $1,000 for Olympus to hold his annual convention in Saul's hotel. Olympus declines. Saul then wonders, "What would he have done if I had offered him $2,000?" Clearly, it is true that either (a) if Saul had offered Olympus $2000, then Olympus would have accepted, or (b) if Saul had offered Olympus $2000, then Olympus would have declined, but not both. If Olympus is free with respect to this act, it is just as clear that both are possible. Whichever one is true, there is a possible world which God could not have actualized, since if (a) is true, then it is beyond God's power to make it such that Saul offers Olympus the $2000 bribe, God makes Olympus free with respect to this decision, and God ensures that (b) is true. That is, it would be beyond God's power to create a world in which both Saul makes the offer and Olympus declines.

This is not yet enough to defend the free will defense against our criticism. We might argue that when God is deciding whom to create, he can create someone, S, of whom all the true counter-factual conditionals have S doing what is right. It would also seem possible that God could create only people who are like S in this way. Plantinga would respond to this by postulating that in every possible world that God could actualize, it is possible that everyone would go astray.[4] He calls this *transworld depravity*.[5] I have argued elsewhere that it is possible for each and every person to do the right thing in all cases.[6] This does not contradict Plantinga. Rather, Plantinga argues that God cannot make it so that we all do right. Plantinga's free will defense may already sound a bit like finitism, since he says there are possible worlds, which God cannot actualize. However, I believe his position is not finitistic. Recall that by "omnipotent" we mean a God who is unlimited in power; thus, there are no

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3. Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974)

4. Notice he cannot just say that *someone* will go astray, since presumably in this world everyone does. A world in which one person goes astray is better than one in which everyone does.

5. Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, 186.

6. R. Dennis Potter "The Myth of Inevitable Sin," forthcoming in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, and "Moral Dilemmas and Inevitable Sin," forthcoming in *Faith and Philosophy*.

substantive limitations on God's power. We already noted that not being able to make a contradiction true is not a substantive limitation of God's power. This seems to indicate that God can do anything logically possible. We cashed this in by saying that God could bring about any logically possible state of affairs. However, Plantinga has shown us that this definition is contradictory, rather than showing us that God is not unlimited. If God could bring about any logically possible state of affairs, then God could bring it about that God does not exist. This is clearly impossible, even though it is possible that God does not exist. So what we should say instead is that God is omnipotent *if and only if* God can bring about any possible state of affairs that does not involve a contradiction in the process. With this understanding of omnipotence, there may be possible worlds which an omnipotent God cannot actualize.

Plantinga's free will defense is the most sophisticated response to the logical problem of evil in the literature. Most philosophers, including most atheists, believe that it works. However, it is not a response to the evidential problem of evil. Here it seems more likely that transworld depravity is false rather than true, i.e., that there is at least one possible world, which God could actualize in which we all choose the right. After all, there are quite a lot of possibilities out there, and we need only one. Moreover, when we note that transworld depravity entails that every world possibly created by God is one in which *everyone* goes astray, the likelihood seems to diminish even more.

However, I am skeptical of the free will defense's ability to respond to the logical problem of evil. What worries me is the coherence of the doctrine of transworld depravity. Plantinga argues that this doctrine is *possibly* true, and that is all the argument he needs, but if we can show the doctrine to be contradictory, then his defense does not work. Elsewhere I have argued that the very nature of moral obligation entails that we *can* do right.[7] We can live perfect lives if we so choose. This is because the fact that I *ought* to do X implies that I *can* do X. Let us call this *Kant's principle* after the famous philosopher who emphasized it. This is a principle which applies to individuals. It implies that for each individual there is a possible world in which he does right, but it does not imply that for each group of individuals there is a possible world in which *every* member of the group does right. Only a collective version of Kant's principle would imply this: If there is a rule that each member of a community ought to obey, then the community can obey this rule conjointly. That is, if I shouldn't kill you and you shouldn't kill me, then it is possible that you don't kill me and I don't kill you. If the collective version of

7. Potter, "Moral Dilemmas."

Kant's principle were true, then it would follow that for any group of possible persons there is a possible world in which they do what they ought to do. Let us call this *the doctrine of morally perfect alternatives*.

The doctrine of morally perfect alternatives does not yet entail that transworld depravity is false. Yet notice what happens if transworld depravity holds: Then any possible world where we are created by God is one in which we will all inevitably fail in our moral obligations. That is, it is impossible that there be a God and we also do what God commands. This seems very strange indeed. Moreover, the same reasons we might have for wanting to reject the doctrine of inevitable sin are also reasons we would want to reject the conclusion that God can give us commandments which we cannot keep. In other words, in Plantinga's view, God ought to give us commandments and we ought to keep them, but we cannot fulfill our obligations if God fulfills his. This contradicts the doctrine of morally perfect alternatives. If we are right, then there must be some world in which God can fulfill his obligations and we ours. Thus, transworld depravity must be false given the nature of moral obligation. Before we consider finitism, it might help to consider another problem for traditional theodicies. This problem, *the problem of practice*, is that theodicies which explain evil in terms of a greater good seem to imply that we should not eliminate evil ourselves since this would undermine God's plan. If these evils are for the greater good, then we make things worse by eliminating them. Yet surely we should eliminate evil when we can. Hick has a response to this problem in *the claim of epistemic distance*. He says that God and we are so far apart with respect to what we know that we cannot be in a position to know what it is that makes these evils allowable. Thus, we should try to eliminate them.[8]

However, this response will not work since it remains the case that we should work with God's plan, and we *do know* that all evil is part of God's plan. So even if we cannot see why, we should still allow the evils that we allow. We will see below that finitism offers a better solution to the problem of practice.

4. FINITIST THEODICY

We should point out that the logical problem of evil, as it is usually stated and as it is stated in this paper, is solved immediately once we adopt the premise that God is not omnipotent. Indeed, some proponents of the problem of evil claim that finitism is quite enough to avoid the prob-

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8. John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (reprint, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), parts 3 and 4.

lem of evil altogether.[9] Yet this picture is too simple. Even if God is not omnipotent, it does not follow that we have shown his existence to be consistent with the existence of evil. It may be that God is "omni-po-beneficent," a being who has just enough power to eliminate any evils which actually occur. Since we have good reason to suppose that God might be quite powerful after all, we also have to deal with the problem of evil.

Now I want to show that the problems encountered by the soul-building and free will theodicists can be solved if we adopt the additional premise that God is finite. First, let us consider the soul-building minimum problem, which says that the world could have been a little better than it is and still have had the same amount of soul-building value. Then God should have made things that much better. However, if God is finite, it is perfectly possible that, while he can keep the amount of evil at the level that it is in the actual world, he couldn't reduce it without that amount dipping below the soul-building minimum. This is not an option for an omnipotent God, since it is certainly logically possible that the amount of evil in the world could be just a bit less than it is. Next, let us consider the soul-building without evil problem. It seems possible for God to build souls with only the semblance of evil, so why doesn't he do so, if he is omnipotent? The finitist answers that God doesn't do so because any deception would not be as valuable a learning tool as the real thing. The omnipotent God, of course, can pull off a deception which is indistinguishable from the real thing.

The problems of hell and the incoherence of instrumental evil are more complicated. In the case of the former, it is clear that we must employ the existence of free will in an attempt to solve this problem—either that or we must countenance pelagian universalism.[10] But finitism helps the free will defense immensely. Remember that the problem with the free will defense was the possibility of correct choice. Plantinga had to propose his sophisticated doctrine of transworld depravity to respond to this problem, but we don't need any such complexities once we have the finitist assumption. Indeed, if God is not omnipotent, we can simply deny the possibility that God gave us free will and also ensured that we were in a situation where we would do right.

As for instrumental evil, it seems clear that if God is finite, it might be that he can only accomplish certain things by using evil means. If God is finite, then these evil means might not be logically necessary, since the

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9. See Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," for example.

10. This is the doctrine that not only are all saved, but all are saved because they choose to do things which would bring about the fact that they are saved. I am sure that Pelagius was not a universalist.

result could have been brought about in another way, but not in a way available to the finite God.

There is a further problem with both the soul-building theodicies and the free will defense which we have not yet mentioned: It seems that perhaps some evil is pointless, by which we mean that it neither helps in the soul-building process nor is it a product of free will. The traditional theodicist has to deny that any evil is pointless, but this is hard when we are faced with examples. I have already mentioned the case of someone who suffers a very painful (but natural) death without anyone else knowing about it. This death might have natural causes and, hence, is a natural evil. Yet it does not help the person who suffers it, nor does it help other people.

However, if God is finite, then the existence of pointless evil can be explained. Here we do not employ the use of the soul-building or free will theodicies; God's finitism is the sole explanation. In some sense, God cannot eliminate the pointless evil that exists. Importantly, this means that God cannot eliminate *all* the pointless evil that exists. It does not mean that God cannot eliminate a particular instance of pointless evil, but we will come back to this later in our discussion of the objections to the finitist solution to the problem of evil.

Now let us recall the problem of practice: If evil is an instrument to greater good, we cannot explain why we should try to eliminate it. However, notice that we have argued that there is such a thing as pointless evil. Given the claim of epistemic distance between God and us, we can never be sure that any case of evil is one which is not pointless. Thus, we should be actively engaged in eliminating any evil that we can since any of it may be pointless. If finitism were not true, there could be no pointless evil, and thus, without finitism we cannot respond to the problem of practice.

5. OBJECTIONS TO FINITISM

The first objection to finitism is *the problem of an unsuccessful God*. The problem here is that if God is not omnipotent, then he might very well fail in his plans. We cannot, therefore, be sure that God can successfully save us and ensure that justice reigns. Although the claim that God is omnipotent entails that God will be able to succeed in any logically consistent plans, the claim that God is not omnipotent does not imply that he can fail in his plans. We might claim that God is *redemptively sovereign*,[11] wherein God is sufficiently powerful that he can ensure our redemption and salvation. Getting the exact definition here is a bit tricky. It is not enough to say that S is redemptively sovereign if and only if S can

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11. David Paulsen, Professor of Philosophy at Brigham Young University, invented this term for the purpose of responding to this very problem.

carry out his plans since S might have very minimal plans. Nor can we say that S is redemptively sovereign if and only if S can carry out her plans, *whatever* they may be since this would imply omnipotence, at least. Instead, we must say something like the following: S is redemptively sovereign if and only if S has substantive plans for the salvation of mankind and can carry out those plans. Clearly God can be redemptively sovereign and yet be finite. This is enough to respond to the problem of the unsuccessful God.

There is one possible problem with redemptive sovereignty: It might raise a new version of the problem of evil because it makes a substantive claim about the amount of power held by God. When we make the negative claim which finitism makes about God's power, we avoid the problem of evil because it can always be a result of God's limitation. However, when we couple this with a positive claim about God's power, we run the risk that the amount of evil existing exceeds the amount that should be allowed by a being with so much power. For this very reason, I think we should reject the alternative, non-absolutistic definitions of omnipotence, which have sometimes been offered. For example, one might say that the Mormon God is omnipotent if and only if he can do whatever is consistent with the nature of eternal existences.[12] Or better: God is omnipotent if and only if God can do whatever is physically possible. The problem is that much of the evil that exists might not be physically necessary, and thus the non-absolutistic definitions of omnipotence (besides confusing the issue) do not make much headway. I don't know what to conclude about redemptive sovereignty. I am inclined to think that God is redemptively sovereign, but I am also tempted by the idea that God's plan is what William James says: a wonderful one with great result should it succeed, but also a risky one with a real chance for failure if we do not cooperate.[13]

The second problem is *the problem of cured evils.* Sometimes humans do a good job of getting rid of evil themselves, but such evil existed before humans were capable of eliminating it. If the fact that God allows evil were explained by his inability to eliminate it, then it would seem to follow that God would be less powerful than humans in this respect. This objection has been made by P. J. McGrath, who used the aforementioned example of the elimination of small pox.[14] Given the way we have described finitism, it should now be clear that the problem of cured evils is no problem at all.

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12. For example, see David L. Paulsen, "Joseph Smith and the Problem of Evil," *BYU Studies* 39, no. 1 (2000): 590-60.

13. William James, *Pragmatism,* ed. Bruce Kuklick (Hackett Publishing Co., Indianapolis, 1981), 130.

14. P. J. McGrath, "Evil and the Existence of a Finite God," *Analysis* 46 (1986): 1, 63–64.

Finitism does not merely explain evil by claiming that God cannot eliminate it. In some cases, this is indeed the explanation as with pointless evil. However, much evil is such that God could only eliminate it by causing greater harm, like eliminating opportunities for growth or eliminating free will. Thus, using the finitist's solution, God can allow evils that we can eliminate and still remain more powerful than we are.

One may press the problem of cured evils further, by focusing on pointless evil. One would argue that some pointless evil exists which humans have eliminated, or could eliminate, and which God does not eliminate. For example, consider the case of the five children who died in a car trunk recently. Certainly, if God is godlike at all, he must have been able to release the latch of the trunk, and yet he failed to do so. If one of the neighbors had become aware of the children's plight, she could and certainly should have released them. So why does God fail to act in such cases?

The response here must be different. We cannot say that God fails to eliminate evil because he would also have to eliminate the opportunity for growth or free will since we are considering pointless evil. To see how we can respond, consider *the case of the over-burdened doctor*. This doctor has three patients: The first is seriously injured and can be saved with a long, involved operation. But if the doctor spends time on the first, she won't have time to get to the second and third patients before they die. The second and third both have life-threatening injuries, but saving them is less complicated. If the doctor treats the second and saves him, she can also treat the third and save him. Obviously, the benevolent doctor can save the second and third without being held morally accountable for the death of the first even though she could have saved the first and would have done so if she could have also saved the others. Sometimes God may be in a similar situation to the overburdened doctor. There are evils, which God could have averted but which occur at a time in which it is more important for God to attend to other matters. It is hard to know what could be more important than saving the lives of children dying in a car trunk, but it is certainly not hard to imagine that there is possibly something.

Peter Appleby gives an objection to finitism that is very similar to the problem of cured evils.[15] He argues that if God could do the miracles described in the scriptures, then there are certainly many evils present in the world today, which he could and should eliminate. So for finitism to work, God must be less powerful than we think him to be. Yet this seems wrong, and our response is similar to that for the problem of cured evils. First, we don't know which of the contemporary evils are ones that con-

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[15]Peter Appleby, "Finitist Theology and the Problem of Evil," in *Line upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine*, ed. Gary Bergera (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989).

tribute to soul-building or are by-products of free will. Secondly, we can claim that for some of such evils, God is busy "helping other patients."

Another, less convincing objection to finitism is that if God is finite, then he is not worshipable. This objection is more amorphous than the other objections. Indeed, I am not even sure what it claims. The advocate of this objection surely must give us a non-trivial criterion of worshipability. Furthermore, why would we think that this would have to include omnipotence? I'm not sure what to say in response to this criticism until the objector clarifies the problem, but clearly the burden of argument is still on the shoulder of the objector. I can point out that if a God is redemptively sovereign, then we would seem to have good reason to worship him since he is perfectly benevolent and very effective in achieving his goals.

6. WHY GOD IS FINITE ANYWAY

You might wonder: "This is all well and good, but Mormonism believes in an omnipotent deity, and so we cannot opt for finitism. After all, it says that God is omnipotent in the Book of Mormon" (Mosiah 3:5). It is one thing for the Book of Mormon to use the word "omnipotent" to describe God and another thing to use it in the traditional sense explicated above. In that sense, Mormon theology denies that God is omnipotent because it would contradict what Joseph Smith tells us about God. God, we are told, is embodied. I therefore argue that God must be finite. The argument is simple: Let a body be any space-time region which is filled with enough fundamental material to be such that we can run up against it, so to speak. Now, whatever is embodied is—by virtue of that fact—located wherever its body is. So if God is embodied, he is located in a particular space-time region. Let us take any given time, and God will be at one and only one location at that time. Thus God cannot be multiply located. For example, the property of redness is located in my daughter's fire engine truck and in my sleep-deprived eyes simultaneously. So it follows that there is something which is logically possible which God cannot accomplish. This, I submit, shows that God must be finite.[16] Couple this with the fact that finitism nicely solves the problem of evil, and it follows that Mormons should no longer ignore this very reasonable aspect of their brand of theism.

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[16]This argument needs a lot more to fill it out. For example, the definition of a body is neither rigorous nor uncontentious, but I submit that any rigorous definition will inevitably entail that bodies are at only one place at one time. This is the key to the argument.