"Questions at the Veil"[1]

Philip L. Barlow

In the months after September 11, 2001, essayist and poet Frederick Turner crafted an unpublished tale entitled "The Terrorist Goes to Paradise."[2]

Told in the first person by the terrorist himself, the story recounts the glories and privileges that greet an operative who helped fly a jet into New York's towering World Trade Center. Upon his arrival in heaven the terrorist discovers to his pleasure that, for his heroism, as he presumes, Allah has provided him with all his fantasies and more: movement without restriction, unencumbered by time; scenes of beauty surpassing mortal ability to express; seventy-two voluptuous virgins enacting without restraint his every whim; infinite, incomparable food without satiation; a ministering angel attending to his every request and answering every query. It is all . . . *heavenly*.

Unfortunately, difficulties arise. After the novelty of heaven wears thin, the terrorist grows restless because he lacks a calling, a purpose, some way to contribute. He inquires, restlessly, as to whether he can receive some assignment. His angel forwards the request, but a disappointing word comes back: he is thanked for his offer, but told that he has done "quite enough."

His second problem is the discovery that the afterlife bears an odor. Our hero comes to notice a distracting, then annoying, then putrid, over-cooked, and apparently permanent smell that mars all his pleasures. No matter where he goes—to his virgins, to his feasts, to the wondrous gardens of paradise—he cannot escape the stench. Heaven has its virtues, but how do the others bear this?

Eventually he becomes aware of an additional, final, and overwhelming problem. "Finally," says the paradisiacal terrorist, "to every other feeling was added a sense of pollution, ultimate pollution, as if for all these months I had [somehow been defiling my-

self], as if I were utterly filled up and choked and bloated with myself, as if I had made myself pregnant, like a woman, but pregnant with something foul, inescapable . . . like the smell of the afterworld."

The smell! *That,* at least, "I thought I could finally deal with," the terrorist continues. "[Seeing me upset], my angel hovered anxiously about me, and when I had recovered my voice I demanded, weakly, that he banish the smell, at last." "Oh alas, that I cannot do, my master," he said,

> For our rule in the kingdom of heaven is that everyone be what they have chosen to be, and that even redemption by the Savior cannot enforce a self to be other than what it is—for then it would not be its own self, and God would have become a *Shaitan,* and violated the principle of His being, which is love and freedom. He must go on loving you for what you are, and that means He cannot rip out your soul. For you see, the smell is the smell of *You.* It is not out in the air, but the inner smell of your own head, of your own self. It is not what you *smell,* but what you smell *with.*

Over the years, I have come to believe that a good portion of what we smell, what we see, what we hear, and what we sense is, in actuality, what we smell, see, hear, and sense *with*. The lens through which we see phenomena and gauge evidence is comprised not only of our worldview and wit, but also in considerable measure of our character, attitude, and imagination.

Long before I studied much about religion, epistemology, or postmodern thought in the formal academy, Lowell Bennion impressed upon me the notion that we live in two worlds: the objective world of external reality and the inner, subjective world of values. In the external world, I am small, scarcely of consequence, subject to great forces beyond my control. In the inner world of interpretation and values, however, I play a significant role: I have a measure of choice in what I desire, aspire to, and value. I help fashion the lens through which I interpret the world.[3]

This is true even of professional scholars, who intentionally hone critical epistemologies. As these scholars search out their paths—their systems of belief and action, including their publications and lives in the academy—they are not merely weighing evidence. They are also choosing and defining subjects, selecting evidence and discerning and assigning significance, which are pro-

cesses conditioned by who they are, by what they care about, and by the principles and authorities most persuasive or prestigious to them.

In this spirit, what follows is self-consciously personal: a meditation on an element of Mormon belief. My words amount to an act of "theology." People mean rather different things by "theology": sometimes they mean an exegesis of scripture; sometimes they mean a compendium of what living prophets or some magisterium or council has said. The theological writings of St. Paul or Irenaeus are different not only in content, but also in method and character from those of Augustine or the formulators of the Nicene Creed or Rosemary Radford Ruether's feminist declarations. In a Mormon context, the formal, metaphysical, classically inflected products of Blake Ostler are different in kind from, say, Truman Madsen's abbreviated, lyrical, allusive portraits calculated to inspire, or Bruce McConkie's taxonomy of proper Mormon belief, or the theological aspects of the "Proclamation on the Family," or the search for scriptural support of some ethical position such as we might read in Gene England. If this essay gets to count as "theology," this is what theology means for the next few pages: in my hands, theology is *the art and discipline of meaning-making at the nexus of three ideological streams, which are the revelation and tradition of my Mormon Christian religion, my personal faith and experience, and my interpretations of the observable world.* By the "observable world" I mean "reality," far and near, to the modest extent that I am able to apprehend it by attention to the findings of science, scholarship, direct observation, and the commentary of thoughtful fellow travelers. My theme is "Questions at the Veil."

As a Mormon, I know about claims of revelation. I have been deeply moved by some of the faith's canonized prophetic manifestations. In fact, I think I have encountered inspiration directly. I also do not believe that Mormons have a monopoly on this experience.

It is not lost on me, of course, that Mormonism makes extravagant claims and seems unlikely from certain angles of vision. Short of divine intervention, I do not know how I would have come to this movement if looking at it only from the outside,

though among my friends several of the most sensitive and thoughtful have somehow done so. Who knows where the hand of Providence might lead? More commonly, however, modern critical minds outside the fold find the Church's origins "fantastical," beyond the pale, based as they are on the supernatural visions of a young, obscure, largely ignorant, rural, antebellum American boy. The story of the movement's emergence seems rather too "golden," like the alleged plates from which Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon—before returning them to the angel who disclosed them. The movement's history is controversial, and all too human. Its cosmology seems esoteric, its good-hearted people gullible for marvels and wonders. Its ritual seems secretive, its God anthropomorphic, its theology heterodox and alien.

Yet the phenomenon persists. Despite its strangeness, perhaps because of its strangeness, the religion thrives, nourishes adherents, serves the world, challenges and is challenged by the wider culture, and perplexes its most thoughtful observers. It is nothing if not vital for its engaged community.

If one wishes to understand this curious movement (a pursuit at which I continue to work), it helps to remember that *all* claims that grapple with the contours of reality may seem bizarre when extracted from their context, when superficially engaged, or when viewed through the presumptions of another paradigm. This is so of a Buddhist's sense of recurrent birth, her highest aspiration to "cease to be"; or a Presbyterian's commitment to a mysterious Trinity and to a God enfleshed who walked on water, died, and came back to life; or an atheist's faith in a universe explained as fabulous accident. Unlike the early Christian apologist Tertullian (if we are to construe him literally), I am not a believer *because* the object of my faith is absurd (or "impossible," as may be a better translation),[4] but because the apparent outrageousness of Mormonism has not dissuaded me from rewarding participation and further probing. In this respect the Church parallels the universe itself. As geneticist J. B. S. Haldane observed, "The universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we *can* suppose."[5] And still I find myself a grateful participant in this implausible yet indisputable reality. This paradox holds promise, invites inquiry, and requires imagination. In the words of Annie Dillard, "our faithlessness is a cowardice born of our very smallness, a

massive failure of imagination." Nature abounds in radicalism, extremism, selective anarchy. Were we to judge nature strictly by our common sense, we could scarcely believe the world exists. "If creation had been left up to me," writes Dillard, "I'm sure I wouldn't have had the imagination or courage to do more than shape a single, reasonably sized atom, smooth as a snowball, and let it go at that. No claims of any and all revelations could be so far-fetched as a single giraffe."[6]

In the midst of the odd, unfathomable, tragic, and wondrous reality in which human beings find themselves, we Mormons are "a peculiar people" in both modern and biblical ways. We are, first, *people*, which means it is not hard to discover among us, individually and corporately, shortcomings and foolishness as well as wisdom and nobility. We are humans in union with and yet distinct from others. Like the ancient Hebrews, we may be wayward or—like Job's friends, Christ's Pharisees, or Mosiah's Zoramites—we may be too sure of ourselves, our religious paradigms, and our righteousness, thereby displeasing God. Yet in our imperfection, we are a people trying together, by covenant, to respond to the divine, which we believe calls to us. We are a people comprised of *persons*, and so we are diverse. In any given Sabbath meeting at which I find myself, I am surrounded by those I love and with whom I share much, but who also believe or disbelieve things that I judge differently. So far, room has been made for me in the Mormon tent. In short, I am—quite happily—an eccentric member of a peculiar people on a strange planet.

One entry into this peculiar people's sense of the human place in our bewildering universe is through the concept of "the veil." In Latter-day Saint parlance the veil refers to a barrier of memory and consciousness that separates humans from a wider reality. That reality is "eternity." This eternity precedes or outflanks our birth and the creation of our universe ("preexistence"). It is that into which we shall enter upon death ("afterlife"). Eternity is an enduring realm where God and all who are not in time, or our order of time, dwell ("the other side"). The veil, as the intangible barrier between the temporal and the eternal, is the bounds of our awareness.

Like all language, these terms comprise models that, even

when apt, point to what likely are vastly more complex and capacious actualities. Even our best conceptions resemble two-dimensional maps symbolizing multi-dimensional reality: white lies that tell the truth of the landscape.[7] They are highly impressionistic paintings that as a whole gesture toward something large. Viewed up close, however, the individual strokes may be crude, even errant and contradictory. Joseph Smith's strokes are often crude indeedlike those in a Van Gogh painting.[8] Granting my assumption that external reality entails dimensions unsuspected by human thought, I like the Mormon metaphor of "veil" to describe something of the present human circumstance.

A veil is "something" rather than "nothing," suggesting a barrier but also a reality beyond itself. It is not a window through which one casually discerns the transcendent "out there." Nor is it an impenetrable "wall." A veil may be thick and gauzy, and in this opaque form it may indeed be mistaken for a wall and have something in common with notions of thinkers and artists over the centuries who lament the vacuum of knowledge characterizing the human condition. This sense of "unknowability" inclines some to a resigned indifference to wider horizons for their actions, creating a class of the religiously tone-deaf. In more passionate souls, existential unknowing coupled with a sense of the incongruity of reality can drive one to bifurcation, as with Voltaire: "To believe in God is impossible; not to believe in Him is absurd."[9]

But on some occasions a veil is thinner, obscurely translucent. We have inklings of something beyond what empiricism allows. Perhaps the Mormon notion of the permeable veil that shrouds human minds has limited connection with Wordsworth's "intimations of immortality"—intimations which have thrived across diverse cultures, over millennia.[10] In several short parables, the ever-enigmatic Franz Kafka wrote of a haunting awareness of a message, a presence, a judgment, a *something* he found unshakable but maddeningly indiscernible because it is too peripheral to our predominant senses.[11] Mormon sensibility understands that the veil may even be parted: at death, in ritual, by revelation.

I like the veil for more than its utility as a descriptive image for our mortal relation to a wider reality. I embrace it as a present and potentially useful fact. Unlike some of my fellow believers, I do

not think of it as merely an obstacle to be punctured by revelation. I construe it, rather, as a phenomenon with a purpose, or to which I can assign a purpose: a pithy psychological or metaphysical "something" with which I am in creative and useful tension, like the friction I minimize when lubricating my car, but on which I depend when steering it.

Insufficient regard for the veil can be problematic, even dangerous. We Mormons often are blithe about our revelations. While I prize curiosity, imagination, and the written and unwritten inspiration that points to eternal aspirations and horizons and sometimes helps me pick my way through thickets, I do not believe in encouraging adult naïveté, Freudian projection, superstition, or fanaticism—under the sovereign notion that "more faith is always good." Suicidal and homicidal terrorists, as I suggested earlier, are also possessed by extraordinary faith. For Christians, the scriptural mandate is that we be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves," not harmless as doves and just as dumb.[12]

Nor do I believe in spending much time elaborating the unknown. Every time I hear confident and comforting explanations of "the way things are," I am apt to think, "This doesn't go far toward explaining crocodiles, flesh-eating bacteria, babies born with two heads, or the tsunami that just obliterated more than 250,000 people over yonder." Nor does it account for the conflicting inspirations that various people sometimes profess. My impression is that, informed and animated by a thoughtful faith in a wider horizon, the veil should funnel the bulk of our attention to the here and now—on the time, people, problems, and opportunities of this day, at this moment. Despite the grace offering glimpses of eternal purposes, my life unfolds in tremendous, all-but-complete ignorance of our mysterious universe. The merest dabble into quantum physics, black holes, dark matter and energy, interstellar wormholes, or the Higgs-Boson reminds me of that fact. There is no proving God to others. Ultimate reality is not something I *know*; it is something in which I put my trust.

In Mormon understanding, the veil is necessary to our stage of progression as beings. While we search, listen, and pray for comfort and direction beyond our sphere, the veil—the necessary epistemic distance from this "beyond"—affords us a freedom for

independent action not otherwise possible were we literally and readily able to see God smiling or frowning at each move. The freedom independently to discern and choose between good and evil (morality) and good and bad (quality) is at the core of our purpose.

Although Mormon thought instructs that we are in but one stage of a broader evolution, we are invited through mortal experience to discover, forge, claim, and realize—to make real—our identity and character. In LDS belief the potential of that character for degradation or exaltation is scarcely bounded, and it yields a unique construction of two dimensions of Christ and his atonement: "The potential evil of human beings is of such a depth that the Son of God died in the flesh to confront it; the potential good of human beings is of such a height that the Son of God lived in the flesh to reveal it."[13] On the latter point, distinctively emphasized in Mormonism, the gift of knowledge offered is something in the spirit of Disney's *The Lion King* (from a scene which my young daughter years ago forced me to memorize), in which the deceased King Mufasa speaks from the beyond to his exiled, befuddled, uncoronated, but coming-of-age son: "Simba, you are more than you have become."

Be-veiled as we are—in our confusion and unknowing, our curiosity and vulnerability, our passions, agonies, delights, yearning, choosing, and striving—we humans ask questions. We are hard-wired to do so: our existential circumstances and our natures require it. Unless this impulse is unnaturally driven from us, we are intrinsically interrogative beings. And therein lies a tale: Our native curiosity is itself a clue to our intended response to the experience of being human on this earth.

This curiosity can be distorted. I recall taking my one-year-old nephew, David, out for walks in the forest that lay behind our family home in Utah. Together we delighted at implausible wonders: the November air, crisp as an apple; red ants and black ants resolving some dispute, thereby revealing an appalling lack of multi-cultural sensitivity that was no doubt the result of ethnic prejudice; three distinct trees somehow grown together as one; blue-brown beetles visually as formidable, up close, as any dinosaur. As we walked, we named things. I would say "robin" or "lily" or "dirt"

and David would approximate the sound. I cheered and hugged; David was reinforced. He learned language.

But in time I noticed a change. The focal point of his attention, with my Skinnerian assistance, subtly shifted: from the bird or the flight of the bird, to his own ability to attach conventional sounds to the bird—to name it. Now, acquiring language still seems to me a good idea, but in the process of becoming himself in this way, David diluted—distorted—another part of himself: his unfiltered sense of relation with the world. Over time, and in his case, I am happy to say, temporarily, he learned less about curiosity and experiencing the universe and more about getting A's in school. A similar disease can beset us in the academy, as we compete and perform, and the disease can affect the sorts of projects we take on, even how we spend our careers.

Despite these dangers of distortion, we are, again, natively interrogative beings. We ask questions of life, of the cosmos. We ask questions of the God we believe in, the God we rail against, or the God we do not believe in because we see other people's superstitions, or because God seems inaccessible, or because of the world's hurt, and our own.

Our questions to this God form themselves variously. Among the most common is "Why *me*?"—a protest posing as query. Among them also are "Why, God, don't you show yourself?" And "What does life mean?" "Where do I fit?" "Who am I?" And "What will become of me?"

Many of the most poignant questions present themselves classically in the Bible and other Mormon scriptures. Fueling our awareness of injustice, the scriptures ask, "Why do the wicked prosper?" In excruciating (literally: *crucifying*) times, it may come to "Why hast thou forsaken me?" As a cluster, the questions represent the human search for God or meaning or ultimacy or relief. Sometimes they signify despair; sometimes, human outrage at the human condition.

Such questions are understandable, legitimate, perhaps even necessary for a season. Pursued relentlessly and with vehemence, however, they can cripple our radar. We may rage until we lose hearing. We may forget our station. Our purchase will not be sweet illumination, but only gall.

It helps me at times to shift my perspective: *Our interrogation of God may be fruitfully inverted*. Through this means, the questions may be read not as the human search for God, but as God's search for humanity.[14] Here, the answers to the questions we ask of God, through the veil, come back, through the same medium, as counter-questions—queries put to our souls by God. Latter-day Saints know sacred queries in their temple ritual, but the queries that haunt, or ought to haunt, the human soul are widely accessible. Developing an ear for these soul-queries alters our ordinary epistemological preoccupations and our existentially natural but sometimes self-centered questions. It puts us, rather than God, in the dock. Absorbing questions rather than inexorably posing them may, at times, be a more promising avenue of inquiry.

Such questions have their archetypes in scripture. Some might be put to us as a people: "Have you become of one heart and one mind, with no poor among you?"[15] Others, on which I focus here, come to me as an individual. God asks, "Adam, where art thou?" as if to say, "Man, Woman, where do you stand? What ground do you inhabit? What have you been about? What hast thou done?"[16] Or, more explicitly, He might ask us to ponder, "What manner of men—of women—ought ye to be?"[17]

We have Christ's inquiry of Peter, posed also to us: "Lovest thou me?" And to the disciple's perhaps too-ready answer, the question recurs and recurs, implying an underlying question: "*Really?*"[18]

Alma the Younger in effect expounds upon Christ's query to Peter by asking, "Can ye look up, having the image of God engraven upon your countenances?"[19]

While we march to our carrels and jobs and to our churches and sports arenas, perhaps oblivious to the wounded and bereft around us, Christ may ask, "Have I been so long with you, and yet thou hast not known me?"[20]

To our questions-become-accusations against the Divine, in the midst of our pain, comes the divine question to Everyman, embodied in Job: "Who is this who speaks with words devoid of knowledge?"[21]

To our moral or situational quandaries, perhaps the best question is not "What would Jesus do?" (a rather sentimental and unscriptural presumption), but rather, as Dostoyevsky transposed the query, "What will *you* do, with only His image before you?"[22]

On a stormy sea, the Lord asks, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?"[23]

Under a heavy weight, before a dreaded task, a cup we would have pass from us, comes Mordecai's godly challenge to Queen Esther, whose life and people are in peril: "Who knows but that you have come to your . . . position for such a time as this?"[24]

When in our preoccupations we seek more to be comforted than to comfort, seek compassion only from, and not toward, God, we are asked, "Could you not watch with me one hour?"[25]

It may be that "Christ the Word," as the Gospel of John casts him and as the Greek *logos* connotes, is indeed the "word"—that is, the "reason," the "mind," the "logic" and "expression" of God. But it may also be that Christ is, at last, God's interrogative syntax, enfleshed: "Whom do men say that I am?" "Whom do *you* say?" And implicitly: "So what?"[26] I value my life in the Church. I value also the life of the mind and the academy. In some ways my religious practice and professional efforts are independent spheres. But who I am (and how I answer questions put to me by scripture) naturally conditions how I construe and go about all my tasks.

My personal though Mormon-infused ruminations have it that we are interrogatory beings, that God is a loving but question-asking God, and that the veil through which we and God question one another is an interrogatory medium. Life itself is intrinsically interrogative; and like Wordsworth, I embrace rather than lament the veil that makes it so, even as I am grateful for intimations and prophetic glimpses beyond it.[27]

To whatever religion we subscribe the limits of our knowing, and the human ability and instinct to ponder those limits, implies an ultimate Question that lurks behind all else. Although it may be submerged, the Question is never extinguished, not in any day or moment. Even for those who hold to no God, even to those in the direst circumstances, and even to those who cannot hear or articulate the inquiry, it abides: Life itself asks of us a Question from which there is no escape. Viktor Frankl discovered that the question need not be extinguished, short of death, even in the vise of Hitler's concentration camps.[28] But for me, the ultimate author of the Question that life poses is the Author of creation. Our inescapable reply, the way that we reply, the quality and content of our

reply, is that which creates meaning—and forges the caliber of our souls. We *become* the answer to life's query.

Life, then, is a question, posed by God, through a veil.

How shall we respond?[29]

Notes

1. Preliminary versions of the ideas that follow were presented as lectures at the annual meeting of the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology on September 21, 2012, at Utah State University and at the biennial "Faith and Knowledge" Conference on February 22, 2013, at the Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. Thanks to Terryl Givens for a thoughtful response to an initial hearing and to Cory M. Nani for research, critique, and editorial assistance.

2. Unpublished, copy in my possession.

3. Lowell L. Bennion, *The Things that Matter Most* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1978), 19–22.

4. Tertullian, *De Carne Christi Liber: Treatise on the Incarnation,* trans. by Ernest Evans (London: S. P. C. K., 1956), 18–19, section xviii, lines 23–26. The popularized statement referenced here, "*redo quia absurdum* ("I believe because it is absurd"), simplifies yet neuters what Tertullian may have intended. The phrase in the Latin, "*crucifixus est Dei Filius, non pudet, quia pudendum est; et mortuus est Dei Filius, prorsus credibile est, quia ineptum est; et sepultus resurrexit, certum est, quia impossibile,*" more accurately translates to "The Son of God died; it is immediately credible—because it is silly. He was buried, and rose again; it is certain—because it is impossible." Terryl Givens drew my attention to what may be error in the common translation that has come down through the centuries.

5. J. B. S. Haldane, *Possible Worlds, and Other Papers,* Essay Reprint Series (Freeport, N. Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 286.

6. Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek,* 1st Perennial Classics Edition, Perennial Classics (New York: HarperPerennial, 1998), 146.

7. Mark Monmonier and H. J. de Blij, *How to Lie with Maps,* 2d. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1.

8. Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of Latter-day Saints in American Religion,* updated edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), xxiii.

9. While widely attributed to Voltaire, there seems to be no publication bearing the philosopher's name in which this statement appears as recorded. Nonetheless, its pervasive usage in modern literature suggests some degree of authenticity in origin.

10. Terryl Givens, *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

11. Franz Kafka, *The Basic Kafka,* 159–60, provides an example. More broadly, one can discern in Kafka's "The Castle," "The Trial," "The Burrow," and elsewhere a persistent struggle not merely with his illness, his pathologies, his cloudy relations with his father and with women, his Jewishness, and his entanglement as an employee of the modern bureaucratic state. One can discern beyond all this the grappling of a tortured prophet of "the modern mind" that "knows two things at once: that there is no God, and that there must be God." This God, for Kafka, need not be personal, to be sure. See Roberto Calasso's brilliant interpretation of Kafka: *K.* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006).

12. Matthew 10:16.

13. Philip L. Barlow, "Unorthodox Orthodoxy: The Idea of Deification in Christian History." *Sunstone,* September–October 1983, 18.

14. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1955).

15. Moses 7:18; Deuteronomy 15:4.

16. Genesis 3:9.

17. 3 Nephi 27:27; see also Lynn G. Robbins, "What Manner of Men and Women Ought Ye to Be?" *Ensign,* May 2011, 103–5.

18. John 21:17.

19. Alma 5:14.

20. John 14:9.

21. Job 38:2.

22. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov: A Novel in Four Parts and an Epilogue*, translated by Constance Garnett (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 269.

23. Matthew 8:26.

24. Esther 4:14.

25. Matthew 26:40.

26. Mark 8:27.

27. William Woodsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" in *The Oxford Book of English Verse,* edited by Christopher B. Ricks (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 349–55.

28. Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 108–9.

29. Philosopher Dennis Rasmussen, through rather a different path, asks a related question at the beginning of *The Lord's Question: A Call to Come unto Him* (Provo: Keter Foundation, 1985), 4. While the seeds of my own thought were planted long ago by an encounter with the work of Viktor Frankl, Rasmussen and I share interests. His book poses a series

of questions asked by an all-knowing God to fallible man. If an omniscient and omnipotent deity asks a question to which he already knows the answer, wonders Rasmussen, what response does man actually have? Is the question posed by God more accurately considered a question posed by ourselves, since God knows better than we what the answer ought to be?