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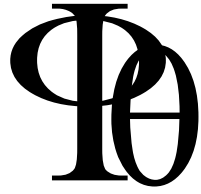

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THE SOCIETY FOR MORMON PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

Element is the official publication of the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology. The Society brings together scholars and others who share an interest in studying the teachings and texts of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It facilitates the sharing and discussion of work by sponsoring an annual conference and publishing this journal. More information about the Society can be found at www.smpt.org.

EDITORIAL STATEMENT

The editorial philosophy of *Element* is to provide a forum for philosophical and theological reflection as it relates to the beliefs and practices of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The journal takes seriously both the commitments of faith and standards of scholarship by encouraging academically productive dialogue between various theoretical perspectives both within and beyond the Latter-day Saint community.

SUBMISSION AND REPRINT INFORMATION

Submissions should be sent as attachments via e-mail to James M. McLachlan, editor, at jmclachla@email.wcu.edu in Microsoft Word format. An abstract of no more than 150 words should accompany each submission along with full contact information, including name, title, institution, phone numbers, e-mail and mailing addresses. All articles will be subject to blind review and editorial modification.

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Mormonism and Process Cosmology: A General Introduction

by David Grandy

Process cosmology values more than change; it prizes ontological *progress*. According to Alfred North Whitehead, with each passing moment nature grows richer and more complex, thereby constituting a "creative advance into novelty."[1] Present reality is not fully determined by antecedent causes, if only because final causes feel important as we participate in reality, and the present moment feels new, although fleetingly so. Judging from what Whitehead called "the ordinary stubborn facts of daily life," more is going on than what materialistic metaphysics would have us believe.[2]

Mormonism also values progress, rejects any metaphysical determinism that rules out human freedom, and opts for a cosmos responsive to both antecedent and final causes.[3] But aside from these broad similarities, to what extent does Mormonism find common cause with process cosmology? The short answer is that, at the general level, Mormon thinkers[4] rarely feel threatened by process thought. Indeed, process thought seems the right fit for

1. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 349.

2. Ibid., xiii.

3. For an LDS defense of free will *vis a vis* causal determinism, see Blake T. Ostler, "Mormonism and Determinism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 32, no. 4 (1999): 43–71.

4. Throughout this paper I frequently make claims about the beliefs of "Mormon thinkers" and "Mormons" in general (terms I use interchangeably); all of these, however, are to be understood only as claims about the beliefs of Mormon writers

Mormonism, considering each tradition's rejection of such classical Christian doctrines as creation *ex nihilo* and a static, impassible God whose absolute perfection estranges him from His imperfect creation.

The long answer is more nuanced. One challenge is that Mormonism shies away from a formal theology, leaving many questions officially unresolved. To be sure, many members of the Church speculate about them by citing scripture and statements from Church leaders, but these citations are often open to interpretation. Consequently, ecclesiastical consensus never obtains on certain issues. A related difficulty is that Mormon theology remains fluid and open to outside influences, some divine. A fundamental teaching of Mormonism states: "We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God" (A of F 1:9). The principle of ongoing revelation keeps Mormon thought from fully crystallizing. This orientation alone gives the religion a process dimension, but it also leaves members susceptible to non-process ideas that prevail in the broader Christian tradition. I refer specifically to the growing tendency among some Mormons of adopting the absolutist language of mainstream Christianity to talk about God.[5]

These caveats notwithstanding, Mormonism is characterized by distinctive and even innovative religious principles, most of which stem from its origins and set it apart from other Christian denominations. Thus, it is possible to speak confidently about the degree to which Mormon cosmology approximates process thinking. Others have already attended to this task,[6] and this essay broadly recapitulates previous efforts to identify similarities and differences between the two traditions. It will also introduce the more specialized thesis-driven articles that follow, all of which assume general familiarity with Mormon thought.

In what follows, the Mormon concept of a progressive God is elaborated against a cosmological backdrop. To a striking extent, Mormonism prizes

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with well-documented and citable sources since only these are verifiable, given the impracticality of polling the general Mormon populace.

5. For example, see Kent E. Robson, "Omnis on the Horizon," *Sunstone* 7, no. 1 (1982): 17–25; and O. Kendall White Jr., *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy: A Crisis Theology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Book, 1987).

6. See, for example, Floyd Ross. "Process Philosophy and Mormon Thought," *Sunstone* 7 (Jan-Feb 1982): 17–25; Garland E. Tickmeyer, "Joseph Smith and Process Theology," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17, no. 3 (Autumn 1985): 74–85; James M. McLachlan, "Fragments for a Process Theology in Mormonism," *Element: The Journal of the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 1–40; and Daniel W. Wotherspoon, "Awakening Joseph Smith: Mormon Resources for a Postmodern Worldview" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate University, 1996).

physicality and does not starkly dichotomize matter and spirit. It also rejects creation *ex nihilo*, opting for a God who organizes uncreated matter, and who lifts reality to higher realms of experience. Finally, there is in Mormonism a strain of thought that ascribes intelligence to all creation, thereby letting everything share in God's salvation drama.

This cosmology portrays the universe as a good place, both for this life and forever. As more than a stage for mortality, the universe accompanies humans as they continue their progression after death. Never transcending physicality (in Mormonism physicality is a mode of transcendence), Mormons inhabit this or some cosmos—perhaps "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1).

This outlook, of course, raises questions regarding space-time, particularly because physicality cannot be conceived outside of it. These questions and others will be taken up in turn as I elaborate on points where Mormons and process thinkers agree. It bears repeating that this picture is not doctrinally binding for Mormons. Beyond subscribing to the divinity and physical personhood of both God and the post-mortal Christ, Mormons are generally free to chart their own cosmology and ignore distinctive theological elements within their tradition. I should note also that the cosmology delineated below is religious rather than scientific, which necessitates ongoing attention to theological and philosophical concerns. Whitehead's *Process and Reality* establishes the pattern here.

In the final section I indicate how Whitehead could help Mormons think more clearly and creatively about their own faith, particularly as that faith intersects with the naturalism of modern science. I also offer a Mormon critique of Whitehead's apparent indifference to divine revelation and his reliance (or overreliance) on rationality: a very humane rationality, to be sure, but still one that rules out divine intervention and leaps of faith. My assessments are not definitive but merely ways of sparking the kind of discussion that could benefit both groups.

PROCESS INTIMATIONS

Process thought is notably associated with Whitehead, who backed into theology from the vantage point of science and mathematics. So oriented, he sought a system consistent with science. Miracles did not figure into Whitehead's outlook, if they were regarded as contraventions of natural law. There might be a miraculous aspect to the world, but this would arise from God's *unceasing* involvement in the world, not interruptions of the natural order. Divinity, not standing aloof from nature but forever iterated into its details, is the mundane rule rather than the grand, otherworldly exception.

This may not sound very scientific, but Whitehead felt a need to step beyond the mechanical materialism of modern science, which, in his opinion, was too stark to account for life's complexity. So while it was important to remain faithful to science, it was also important to distinguish science from science-spawned ideologies, some of which could never explain "that ultimate rationalism which urges forward science and philosophy alike."[7] Indeed, this "urg[ing] forward," this teleological aspect of reality, also demands explanation, and Whitehead traced it back to a God in creative process—one not fully arrived, but continually striving toward higher levels of aesthetic experience.

From a Mormon perspective, much of this sounds right. Mormons have historically taken a favorable attitude toward science, sometimes describing God as the Master Scientist who implemented laws at the creation of the world, which were derivable from the uncreated metaphysical structure of the universe.[8] Many, though not all, subscribe to the view that those laws are binding even on God. He cannot contravene them, even though his perfect or near-perfect knowledge of them allows him to do things that may strike mortals as miraculous. Still, he is limited by principles which reach back to the time that God became God.[9]

The claim that God *became* God is startling to most non-Mormon Christians, but it marks a point at which Mormonism verges toward process theology, if only in its characterization of God as a progressive being. Joseph Smith, the Church's first prophet and chief conduit for its doctrinal innovations, taught that "God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man."[10] In other words, God "worked out his kingdom with fear and trembling,"[11] and it is now our opportunity to do the same.[12] Godhood is an achievement, and perhaps (opinions differ here) one that never fully culminates: it may be that

7. Whitehead, *The Function of Reason* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), 61.

8. For a favorable early twentieth-century view of science, see Nels L. Nelson, *Scientific Aspects of Mormonism; or, Religion in Terms of Life* (New York: G. Putnam's Sons, 1904). Some, however, claim that LDS enthusiasm for science has dimmed in the past century. See, for instance, Richard Pearson Smith, "Science: A Part of or Apart from Mormonism?" *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19, no. 1 (1986): 106–122.

9. For a discussion of this point with reference to Charles Hartshorne, see Blake T. Ostler, "The Mormon Concept of God," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17, no. 2 (1984): 64–93.

10. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1970), 345.

11. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 347.

12. This notion that God became God is concisely captured in a couplet coined by Lorenzo Snow, fifth President of the Church: "As man is now, God once was; as God is now, man may be." Quoted in Eliza R. Snow, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow*. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Co., 1884), 46–47.

even God is ever growing, learning, and becoming more godlike.[13] To draw an analogy with an infinite number set, God's infinite aspect may subsist in the unending process of ascent, not in any finite state or term along the way.

Representative of the general LDS view of God as a growing, progressing being is this statement by Wilford Woodruff, fourth president of the Church:

> If there was a point where man in his progression could not proceed any farther, the very idea would throw a gloom over every intelligent and reflecting mind. God himself is increasing and progressing in knowledge, power, and dominion, and will do so worlds without end; it is just so with us.[14]

While this view levels the playing field for God and man, most Mormons do not talk as if God himself is in crisis when he attends to human crisis, or that he approaches things with an open, evolving agenda. Granted, he is with us in our extremities, but since, after all, he *is* God, he is more like an all-wise, helpful, caring parent who has already passed through the trials of mortality than a fellow-sufferer experiencing them afresh. This attitude, however, is subtly challenged by scriptural episodes that put one in mind of a profoundly passible God who intimately participates in others' pain and uncertainty. Some Old Testament narratives qualify on this score,[15] but the most striking instance for most Mormons occurs in one of Joseph Smith's visions of the antediluvian prophet, Enoch. This prophet foresees evil multiplying amongst humanity and the consequent heaven-sent destruction. It is not surprising that Enoch weeps while beholding this calamity; what astonishes Enoch, however, is that God also weeps: "And Enoch said unto the Lord: How is it that thou canst weep, seeing thou art holy, and from all eternity to all eternity. And . . . number[ing] . . . millions of earths like this . . . would not be a beginning to the number of thy creations" (Moses 7:29–30).[16]

While the second part of Snow's couplet clearly implies the doctrine of deification, there is some controversy among Mormon thinkers over how to interpret the first part, as it may seem to imply that there was once a time when God *was not*. Some thinkers, like B. H. Roberts, propose an infinite regress of Gods. I should note also the tension between the word *God* as a singular noun and the LDS assertion of a plurality of Gods. This tension has prompted the suggestion that *God* refers to single class of beings, all of whom are Gods.

13. See Gary Bergera, "Does God Progress in Knowledge?" *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15, no. 11 (1982): 179–81.

14. *Journal of Discourses* 6:120; hereafter abbreviated as *JD*.

15. This is well documented in Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001).

16. See Eugene England, "The Weeping God of Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 35, no. 1 (2002): 63–81; and Daniel C. Peterson, "On the Motif of the Weeping God in Moses 7," in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of*

From this passage, we see that millions of other earths notwithstanding, God remains vulnerable to the desecration of a single earth. Moreover, as we read on we learn that the calamity is felt by the earth, which cries out for relief from evil. Enoch then receives a promise from God to strive with the human race so that it might be protected from similar catastrophe in the future. Throughout the narrative, God acts sympathetically with creation. He is not a coercive sovereign bent on a single course of action; rather, he responds to reality *as it occurs*, which may require adjustments on his part.

Published in 1830, the Book of Moses offers glimpses of a God whose creative work continues forever and whose self-fulfillment is not distinct from that of his children. What is more, all of this is found within a context that is explicitly cosmic. There is a profound emphasis throughout the Pearl of Great Price, in the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham, on planets, stars, and other astronomical bodies, as if to say that this material universe is our present *and* future home, whether in life, death, or the resurrection. For example, we read in Moses that although God created "worlds without number" (Moses 1:33), his creation is never finished: "And as one earth shall pass away, and the heavens thereof even so shall another come; and there is no end to my works" (v. 38). God then states why worlds unceasingly come and go: "For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (v. 39). God's work and glory is fully bound up, it seems, with the exaltation of humankind. These passages do not secure the proposition of a process God, but for perceptive readers they point in that direction. God advances by bringing about the advancement or exaltation of humankind, and this work unfolds in a cosmic setting as "worlds without number" come and go endlessly.

By situating God in the universe among astronomical bodies, these passages (and others) invest the physical sphere with immense significance. For Latter-day Saints, our human bodies are an endowment we acquire at birth that facilitates, rather than retards, spiritual progression. In this regard, Mormon thought falls into line with the process view that God's experience, as well as our own, has a physical pole or orientation. Whitehead's ideas on this point are more nuanced than Mormon thought, which straightforwardly asserts that God has a perfected, immortal human body. All the same, both outlooks arise from an affirmation, rather than dismissal, of everyday physical experience. To this end, each outlook allows for the possibility that sentience is an intrinsic feature of the world. Physical entities such as atoms and planets may well be more than inert objects.

Truman G. Madsen, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2002), 285–317.

A SENTIENT COSMOS

As noted, the Book of Moses describes a sentient earth, indeed one that yearns for cleansing and salvation. We read that "Enoch looked upon the earth; and he heard a voice from the bowels thereof, saying: 'Wo, wo is me, the mother of men; I am pained, I am weary, because of the wickedness of my children. When shall I rest, and be cleansed from the filthiness which is gone forth out of me? When will my Creator sanctify me, that I may rest, and righteousness for a season abide upon my face?'" (Moses 7:48). This ascription of sentience to a material body marks another similarity between Mormon theology and process thought. As a rule, process thinkers are unpersuaded by Cartesian dualism and side with those who argue that were matter and mind utter opposites, there would be no basis for their interaction. But they do interact, and so the Cartesian discontinuity is better defined as a continuum whereby such things as atoms and planets are (like human minds) prehensively or feelingly responsive to their environments, at least to some small degree.

To attribute sentience to things normally deemed inanimate is to place a wager on a wider, richer world than that described by mechanistic science and metaphysics. Given our limited knowledge of the universe, Whitehead was willing to make that wager. "I see no reason," he ventured, "to suppose that the air about us and the heavenly spaces over us may not be peopled by intelligences, or entities, or forms of life, as unintelligible to us as we are to the insects. In the scale of size, the difference between the insects and us is as nothing to that between us and the heavenly bodies; and—who knows—perhaps the nebulae are sentient entities"[17]

Many, though probably not all, Mormons would embrace this sentiment, open as they are to other beings, all at various stages of progression, occupying the cosmos but just beyond the ken of normal human experience. At certain junctures, moreover, Mormon thought unambiguously breaks with Cartesian dualism, thereby opening up process-like possibilities of thought. Joseph Smith wrote: "all spirit is [physical] matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes" (D&C 131:7). With no typological difference between spirit and matter, one may surmise that everything is informed by the kind of sensing, feeling qualities Descartes reserved to spirit (mind) alone. Brigham Young, Joseph Smith's successor, taught that "there is not a particle of element which is not filled with life . . . . There is life in all matter, throughout the vast extent of all the eternities; it is in the rock, the sand, the dust, the water, the air."[18]

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17. Whitehead, *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1954), 237.

18. Brigham Young, *JD* 3:277.

From this, one might infer that salvation is a cosmic affair. Inasmuch as the universe is sentient—that is, responsive to, among other things, God's influence and loving kindness—it, like the earth in the Book of Moses, also yearns for redemption. And to complete this train of thought, humankind is not on its own salvific trajectory, aiming to escape a cold, uncaring, and ultimately lifeless cosmos. Orson Pratt, Young's ecclesiastical associate, put it this way: "Who, in looking upon the earth as it ascends in the scale of the universe, does not desire to keep pace with it? That when it shall be classed in its turn, among the dazzling orbs of the blue vault of heaven, shining forth in all the splendor of celestial glory, he may find himself proportionally advanced?"[19]

I hasten to add that many Mormons would not automatically ascribe sentience to rocks, nor would they reflexively link their own salvation to that of the earth or the cosmos. Picking up on mainstream materialist views, they generally regard rocks as lifeless bodies and see the earth as just a planetary rock. Yet some of this is at odds with other, more historical Mormon ways of thought. For example, Mormon scripture strikes an odd note for most modern people when it asserts the following: "This earth, in its sanctified and immortal state, will be made like unto crystal . . . to the inhabitants who dwell thereon . . . and this earth will be Christ's" (D&C 130:9). For Mormons this statement implies that the sanctified earth will be the future heaven of righteous beings. The meek will inherit the earth, once they and it have been transformed by God's glory. This transformation includes physical resurrection, which in Mormon belief entails not just the reconstitution of the body but also an indissoluble bonding of body and spirit. The two entities, not qualitatively different in the first place but apart for a season following death, permanently reintegrate so as to provide resurrected beings with "a fulness of joy" (D&C 93:34).

We can follow this line of thought, this affirmation of a living universe that shares in God's salvific work, back to more rudimentary considerations. In a revelation given to Joseph Smith we read that Christ is "the light of truth" by virtue of his sacrificial, all-embracing love (D&C 88:6). Through this light, Christ is in the sun, moon, stars, and earth. He is the light and power by which these celestial bodies were made and continue in their courses, and by which our senses and understanding are enlivened. This light "proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space—The light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed" (D&C 88:12–13).

This passage suggests that God is, in some sense, expansively co-present with the cosmos, and this co-presence not only marks his love for the cos-

19. Orson Pratt, *JD* 1:333.

mos but also imbues it with life and, presumably, keeps it on track toward higher levels of existence. Commenting on this passage, one Mormon leader, B. H. Roberts, wrote that all things "vibrate with [God's] life and thought and presence."[20] This vibration or resonance is not mechanical, according to Roberts. It is a living response based upon pre-existing likeness of nature. Being cognate with God—that is, having emerged from a common organizational matrix—the world is cognizant of God and responsive to his love.

ORGANIZATION AND INTELLIGENCE

Mormons believe that God, amid chaotic matter, organized his surroundings into a cosmos, a sphere in which other beings could advance. So the universe in its brute state is not contingent upon God; it is responsive to his action but nonetheless possesses a substantiality which limits that action. Thus, God works within constraints which, being primordial with him, cannot be overridden. According to one account of Mormon theology, we have, in some form or another, existed forever, and existence entails agency and/or the exercise of intelligence. Joseph Smith taught the eternal nature of intelligence or the mind of man, and many in the tradition have interpreted this to mean that each human person has always existed.[21]

I will say more about intelligence presently. For now it suffices to note that God's co-eternality with humans sets the stage for a covenant partnership between God and humankind, God being the senior partner. Joseph Smith stated:

> God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself. . . . that they may be exalted with himself, so that they might have one glory upon another, and all that knowledge, power, glory, and intelligence, which is requisite in order to save them.[22]

The relationship described here anticipates the LDS belief that God employs covenants to lift his children to higher planes of experience. While not invoking the concept of covenant, process theists posit that God achieves a similar effect by venturing toward new horizons, the ongoing expansion of which acts to lure humans into vaster realms of possibility. In either case, God and hu-

20. B. H. Roberts, *Seventy's Course in Theology: Fourth Year* (Dallas: L.K. Taylor, 1976), 71.

21. For a good summary of Joseph's statements on human premortal existence and the eternity of intelligence, see Charles R. Harrell, *This Is My Doctrine: The Development of Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 199–226.

22. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 354.

mankind grow in understanding and depth of feeling. To use Joseph Smith's language, they increase in "knowledge, power, glory, and intelligence."[23]

This emphasis on growth or increase has caused Mormon thinkers to ask the obvious ontological question: what is reality's fundamental nature, given that God, spirits, and glory (or the potential to advance in glory) have likely been around forever? The answer, of course, cannot be that of materialistic science; it must be, to borrow Whitehead's phrase, a "philosophy of organism"[24] or, even more fittingly for Mormonism, a philosophy of *intelligence*. Here *intelligence* connotes knowledge, light, truth, growth, and an innate capacity for more of the same; it is seen as a kind of primordial, self-existing substrate with its own upward momentum. Defined in this way, intelligence is a general feature of the cosmos and, in a way, a stand-in for Whitehead's concept of rationality. Although God's ways may be hard for us to descry, there is a principle of reason or intelligence that informs every event; nothing is lost or rendered meaningless in God's economy.

Embracing the atomistic cosmology of nineteenth-century science, some early Mormon thinkers characterized atomic particles as fundamental units of intelligence that organize into larger wholes with correspondingly greater intelligence.[25] Conceivably, all particular entities larger than atoms, including humans, are composed in this fashion, built up from self-organizing particles in uniquely different ways. Whether things really evolve in this way, however, is an unresolved doctrinal question.

More important to our discussion is the emphasis on elemental intelligence, which among Mormons sometimes means something like universal lawfulness or organization and at other times, individual, uncreated essences with separate identities. In either case, what is connoted is ontological necessity, or self-existence, with a propensity for progression. The latter case (intelligence interpreted as individual identities) is depicted in the Book of Abraham in Abraham's vision of the organization (creation) of the earth. In this vision God explains to others—one of whom is Abraham—his plan for their advancement while enlisting their collaboration in the creation process. He further describes them as having "no beginning; they existed before, they shall have no end, they shall exist after, for they are . . . eternal" (Abr. 3:18). Indeed, God is not different in kind from these pre-mortal spirits; he also is intelligence, along with Abraham and all other future mortals, although, *qua* God, he is "more intelligent than they all" (Abr. 3:19). Conceivably, he has

23. Ibid.

24. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, xi.

25. See Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology*, 7th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, Printers and Publishers, 1915), 42.

achieved a higher level of organization and, thereby, a higher "principle of intelligence" (D&C 130:18).

Admittedly, it is hard to know at what point intelligence flowers into Godhood, but this difficulty itself marks an important point: divine potential is not monopolized by a single being but is freely shared with others. For Mormons, this makes plausible the claim that humans are "gods in embryo" and that life begets life—not only more but also higher, better life, *ad infinitum*. Given this optimistic assessment, one might assert, as did Orson F. Whitney, that "Intelligence is the glory of God. It is his superior intelligence that makes him God. The Gospel . . . is nothing more or less than a ladder of light, of intelligence, or principle, by which man, the child of god, may mount step by step to become eventually like his Father."[26]

As the greatest or most advanced intelligence, God compassionately blazes a path for all. This he does, opined the Mormon apostle John Widtsoe, while also fulfilling his own needs:

> The development of intelligence increases the variety within the universe, for each active individual may bring new relationships into view, and thus increase many-fold the body of acquired truth. In that sense, the man who progresses through his increase in knowledge and power, becomes a co-laborer with God, and may be said, indeed, to be a help to God. It is a comforting thought, not only that we need God but also that God needs us. True, the need God has of us is relatively small, and the help he gives us is infinitely large, yet the relation exists for the comfort and assurance of man.[27]

Widtsoe, a scientist by training who spent the last thirty years of his life as a high-ranking church officer, taught that "God, standing alone, cannot conceivably possess the power that may come to him if hosts of other advancing and increasing workers labor in harmony with him."[28] Moreover, this ongoing labor, aimed toward higher plateaus of experience, ensures a dynamic cosmos: "Quiescence in the universe cannot be conceived, for then there would be no universe."[29] Given Widtsoe's assumptions—that God derives benefit from his relationship with his creation and that the development of intelligence instills the cosmos with growing diversity—his conclusion is almost inevitable. Indeed, the thrust of Mormon theology, as articulated by Widtsoe and others, is toward the proposition that the cosmos is a divine work in progress.

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26. Orson F. Whitney, *Deseret Weekly* 38, no. 22 (May 25, 1889): 689.

27. John A. Widtsoe, *Rational Theology; as Taught by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1915), 27–28. With regard to God's need of humankind, see Carlisle U. Hunsaker, "Mormonism and a Tragic Sense of Life," *Sunstone* 8, no. 5 (1983): 30–35.

28. Widtsoe, *Rational Theology,* 27

29. Ibid., 19.

Widtsoe's older contemporary, B. H. Roberts, similarly drew inspiration from Mormon scripture to propound a theory of God and other intelligences engaged in a grand, collectively uplifting work of cosmic proportions. Among LDS scholars he best appreciated the insight that reality is, at bottom, process. Linking God's relative omniscience to the ongoing growth or expansion of reality with its steady delivery of novelty, Roberts wrote that it is "not that God is omniscient up to the point that further progress in knowledge is impossible to Him; but that all the knowledge that is, all that exists, God knows. All that shall be He will know. The universe is not so much 'a being' as a 'becoming,' an unfolding. Much more is yet to be. God will know it as it 'becomes,' or as it unfolds."[30]

If the universe is a "becoming," so is God, for in Roberts' mind, neither advances nor "becomes" without the other. Modifying Whitehead's expression, we might say that each is the other's instrument of increase. Whitehead, of course, said "instrument of novelty,"[31] which, given the upward thrust of novelty, amounts to about the same thing. Whatever the difference in emphasis, each view presupposes the passage of time and thereby triggers questions regarding the space-time regime: To what extent does that regime condition God? To what extent does it condition our own being as we, upon yielding to the divine lure—or to "the enticings of the Holy Spirit," as the Book of Mormon puts it (Mosiah 3:19)—progress toward eternal life and exaltation?

SPACE, TIME, AND OPPOSITION

Mormons are comfortable with the words *growth* and *progression*, and often portray salvation as a matter of *eternal* progression.[32] They might shy away from the word *novelty*, which suggests surprise or radical discontinuity with the past, but this disinclination, I believe, would fade if they were to become better acquainted with Whitehead. They would come to learn that novelty, like God, is on our side. Without it, life would degrade toward a state of maximum entropy and triviality.

Whitehead's God is not fully under the sway of temporal process, even though temporality is intrinsic to novelty. Whitehead's God is dipolar, having both a primordial (non-temporal) and consequent (temporal) nature. Thus, at the heart of Whitehead's cosmology resides a conceptual tension, which,

30. B. H. Roberts, *The Truth, The Way, The Life: A Elementary Treatise on Theology: The Masterwork of B. H. Roberts*, ed. Stan Larson (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1994), 478.

31. Whitehead, *Process and Reality,* 349.

32. See Lisa Ramsey Adams, "Eternal Progression," *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1992). Available online at http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Eternal_Progression.

consistent with his aim of reconciling science and everyday experience, keeps that cosmology from fossilizing as hard, fact-like dogma.

In Mormon belief, a similar tension emerges. There is, of course, the unconventional depiction of God as a denizen of the space-time cosmos—the "basic heresy of Mormonism," according to Sterling McMurrin[33]—but this is only part of the story. Leaving aside the increasing tendency among Mormons to talk about God in absolutist terms, there is evidence aplenty that this has been a doctrinally unsettled issue from the start. Simply put, Mormon scripture does not offer a consistent picture of how God relates to time and space, and when the different pictures are merged, God shows up as a dipolar being. Where Whitehead differs, it seems, is in having deliberately worked out God's dipolarity from broader considerations; in Mormon scripture, the dipolarity or tension is just there—inherent in the text.

The most striking indication of God's temporal nature occurs in the Book of Abraham. There the universe is depicted as a hierarchy of star systems, each having a "time of reckoning" that is determined by its place in the hierarchy. At the upper end of the hierarchy we find "Kolob," a planet or star whose reckoning is described as being "after the reckoning of the Lord's time" (Abr. 3:9, see also 3:1–8). The clear implication is that God experiences time. A further explanation within the same text, however, states that Kolob, while "nearest to . . . the residence of God," is "the last pertaining to the measurement of time."[34] While the measurement of time is not equivalent to the experience of time, this scripture may leave open the possibility that God does *not* exist in time: his residence, existing just beyond the last or highest body pertaining to time's measurement, is not under time's sway. Perhaps this possibility is reinforced elsewhere in LDS scripture where God states that in virtue of his "look[ing] upon the wide expanse of eternity . . . before the world was made," he "knoweth all things, for all things are present before [his] eyes" (D&C 38:1–2). Among the things present before God's eyes, some Mormons surmise, are the past and future of each individual agent.

A similar case may be made for God's relationship to space. Like many process thinkers, some Mormon scholars have understood that God is in and through the cosmos although not perfectly identical with it. This may seem wrong given the LDS doctrine of an anthropomorphic God, one having a humanlike body, and therefore, it would seem, confined to a particular space-time location; but Mormon scripture, while it implies a localized being, indi-

33. Sterling M. McMurrin, "Some Distinguishing Characteristics of Mormon Philosophy," *Sunstone* 16, no. 4 (March 1993): 41.

34. Explanation given to Figure 1, Facsimile 2 in the Book of Abraham.

cates that God is also expansively immanent throughout the universe.[35] The language in the following passage of scripture, for instance, sends the mind in opposite directions at once: God "comprehendeth all things, and all things are before him, and *all things are round about him*; and he is above all things, and in all things, and is through all things, and *is round about all things*" (D&C 88:41; emphasis added). One might wish, of course, to unequivocally decide the issue by asserting that God's influence and love radiate from a single location. This would collapse the tension implied in the dual claim that God is both "round about all things" and "all things are round about him"; but that response might simply squeeze God into the parameters of human understanding rather than let him stand as a being vastly greater than we know. Further, it raises the question of whether God can be neatly distinguished from his attributes.

All this is, admittedly, theological guesswork, and we should not make too much of it. The salient point, however, is that these passages, taken as a whole, do not decide the questions of how God relates to time or to space and neither do other Mormon scriptural texts. No single picture prevails, and so the question of God's relationship to time and space remains open and evolving.

In my judgment, the tension that accompanies God's indeterminate relationship to space and time need not be deplored; rather, it may be understood to suggest a dipolar God alive to contrary possibilities—indeed one who grows into larger life as he wrestles with such possibilities. Realizing that ontological progress cannot unfold in the absence of tension or opposition, Whitehead highlighted the necessity of opposites. He wrote:

> Thus the universe is to be conceived as attaining the active self-expression of its own variety of opposites—of its own freedom and its own necessity, of its own multiplicity and its own unity, of its own imperfection and its own perfection. All the "opposites" are elements in the nature of things, and are incorrigibly there. The concept of "God" is the way in which we understand this incredible fact—that what cannot be, yet is.[36]

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35. Drawing inspiration from David Bohm's implicate order and other responses to the conundrums of modern physics, Daniel Wotherspoon has developed a dipolar or bivalent picture of God: a being that is at once under the sway of space and time and yet transcendent thereof. Whitehead's notion of internal relations (versus the external, causal relations so prized by materialistic science) and his critique of the fallacy of simple location are helpful in this regard. Whitehead's idea of "mutual immanence" and his belief that "[i]n a certain sense, everything is everywhere at all times" help drive Wotherspoon's analysis. (See Wotherspoon, *Awakening Joseph Smith*, and Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* [New York: The Free Press, 1967], 91.)

36. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 350.

This statement is very congenial to the Mormon worldview, which similarly recognizes and prizes opposition as a foundational principle of reality. Lehi, a Book of Mormon prophet, states: "For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so . . . righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one" (2 Ne. 2:11). Lacking this aboriginal *complexio oppositorum*, the prophet continues, the wisdom, power, mercy, justice, and eternal purposes of God would be destroyed, "for there could have been no creation of things, neither to act nor to be acted upon" (2 Ne. 2:12–13). Without the push and pull of opposites, nothing would have awakened to self-awareness or to the prospect of higher, better existence.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Like process thought, Mormon cosmology assigns value to human experience and freedom by bringing humankind into partnership with God. For Mormons, this relationship, far from diminishing God, dignifies and glorifies him. This ability to fully share his own life with others is one of the hallmarks of his superabundance: drawing from God's storehouse does not deplete it. Furthermore, the multiplication miracles of the Bible suggest that God loves to multiply and magnify—not monopolize. For Mormons, this applies even and *especially* to God's own divinity. He is much more concerned with our deification than with our subjugation.

Both process thought and Mormon cosmology posit a self-existent, sentient, and intelligent cosmos informed by the tug of opposites and susceptible to greater organization, complexity, and experience. For Whitehead the process is an unresting adventure, with God at the helm as the Great Adventurer. Mormons might want to qualify this stance, but it would not shock them. There are other points they might also want to qualify, and perhaps even reject, and so it is important to note, by way of conclusion, that differences exist beneath the broad similarities outlined above. One is that—and this may be more a difference in emphasis than in thesis—while Mormons highlight the love of God, they also underscore his ability to enact justice in the face of evil. Sometimes he intervenes wrathfully and powerfully, although he *will not*—whether or not he can—infringe upon the free will of his children. This is not to attribute malice to God, only to bring him forward as Judge. To follow Joseph Smith: "Our heavenly Father is more liberal in His views and boundless in His mercies and blessings, than we are ready to believe or receive; and, at the same time, is more terrible to the workers of iniquity, more awful in

the executions of His punishments, and more ready to detect every false way, than we are apt to suppose Him to be."[37]

Another difference is the view of God as Risk Taker in aspiring to higher life. For process thinkers the risk is real. Linked as he is to other beings with free will, God is not the sole agent guiding reality's evolution. He consequently cannot warrant its ongoing or final success: the universe simply bootstraps itself up—or down—in free, undefined space, uncontrolled by anything but itself and unsecured by a divine plan promising ultimate triumph. For most Mormons this is too austere. Humans may fail individually, but the collective enterprise, spearheaded by God, will not: his involvement guarantees its success (D&C 3:1). I should add, however, that some Mormons influenced by Whitehead and William James are open to the possibility that the cosmos is "a real adventure, with real danger" that may or may not "win through."[38] They maintain, in fact, that this is implied in the foundational principles of Mormonism.

Yet another difference—one already touched on—is God's nature. Sharply departing from mainstream Christian thinking (and process theology), Mormons see God as an exalted person having familial ties with humanity. This belief is strongly related to the profound emphasis on family and physicality in Mormon thought. According to Mormons, our physical being, inclusive of our biological identity and kinship with others, is not a happenstance of earth life but a divine blessing whereby we take on God's image and likeness. Hence, as Widtsoe put it, "God's attributes are . . . those that man possesses, made great and beautiful."[39]

While yet additional differences between Mormon theology and process cosmology could be noted, so could other similarities. On balance, similarities outweigh differences at the general level; specificity, however, makes the comparison more difficult because Whitehead, in his rigor, dealt with issues that Mormon thinkers have yet to broach, at least within the context of their faith. Take, for instance, the question of causality: on the Mormon side of the ledger, corresponding to Whitehead's compelling formulation, there is no entry. Thus, reading Whitehead would be good for Mormon thinkers wanting to follow the cosmological leads of their religion. Let me support this assertion with an example.

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37. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 257.

38. William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (New York: Longman, Green, & Company, 1948), 112. Noted LDS philosopher and theologian Sterling M. McMurrin cites James favorably on this point. He adds, however, that "[p]eople simply do not like to take their problems to a God who has problems of his own" (McMurrin, "Some Distinguishing Characteristics," 44).

39. Widtsoe, *Rational Theology*, 27.

Like Whitehead, Mormons regard God as a rational being. Unlike Whitehead, however, most have not identified rational incoherencies within the materialistic metaphysics of modern science, mistakenly believing that science and its method embody reason. They may disagree with specific scientific claims, like the Big Bang, but they have yet, in any systematic way, to think their way out of foundational assumptions that, once accepted, constrain belief in an essentially lifeless, mindless universe. Consequently, Mormons often affirm and deny a sentient cosmos all in one doublethink, not sure how to square scripture and prophetic utterance with the prevailing scientific attitude of lifeless mechanism. Their generally unacknowledged perplexity stems from the belief that true religion and modern science cannot disagree since the common light of reason informs both. Among philosophers, Whitehead is refreshing in his forthright assertion that the materialistic metaphysics of modern science is in some ways irrational and therefore at odds with the broadly rational structure of human existence. Implicit in this structure is the evidence of poetry and pre-reflective experience, which for Whitehead are often correctives to the overly abstract views of science. He, of course, wants a metaphysics that respects the stubborn facts of life—facts that cannot be abstracted away—and that comports with the way life *feels* from one moment to the next. To be sure, Whitehead is at times difficult to understand, but even a modest grasp of his ideas can be liberating. I believe that many Mormon thinkers would walk away from Whitehead with a renewed appreciation of their own faith, having put the scientific worldview into clearer perspective.

But even after that, Mormons would yet balk at a religious outlook reasoned into existence solely by human brilliance: no theophanies, no miracles, no divine drama of any sort. In sum, process thought is armchair theology, not divine revelation. Even while allowing for the possibility that Whitehead was divinely inspired as he thought out his theology, the fact remains that it has no divine imprimatur, no explicit, otherworldly endorsement.

For some, of course, this is one of its virtues: its persuasiveness lies in its intrinsic intellectual merits, not in controversial and publicly unverifiable claims of divine approbation. But for others, that approbation is just the springboard to the possibility of greater approbation—that is, salvation. And this is where Latter-day Saints would most likely fault process theology. With no allowance for God to explicitly speak to believers, how can those believers develop sufficient confidence that they are headed toward salvation? Whitehead stated that his outlook was "entirely neutral on the question of [the soul's] immortality,"[40] and so while that outlook may enlarge compassion by

40. Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926), 111.

endearing us to a God who "is the great companion—the fellow sufferer who understands,"[41] it apparently lacks the resources to inspire faith in the prospect of a happier life, or any sort of life, after death.

This failure to ensure salvation on condition of obedience is part of the cost of a process God who forever struggles with elements he did not create and cannot fully control. In my mind, it is a sublime but terrifying vision, and I wonder whether Whitehead, after having pulled back the curtain, was always able to bear it up. His cosmology is a triumph of human reason. No Mormon should pass it up, but most will want divine assurance that God, along with humankind, will ultimately find safe harbor.

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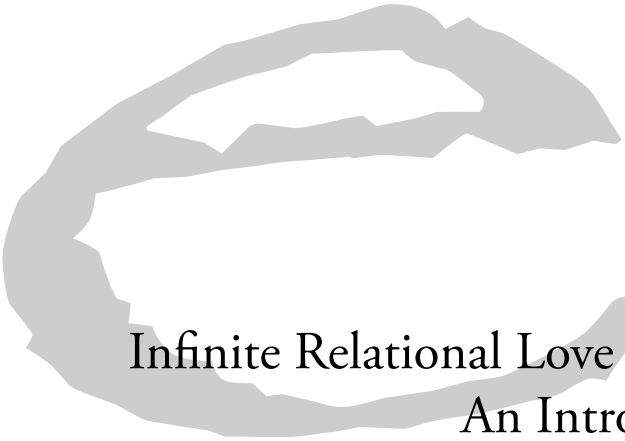
41. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 351.



Infinite Relational Love and Power: An Introduction to Process Relational Theology

by C. Robert Mesle

God is love. (1 John 4:16)

Process relational thought is a broad philosophical, theological, ecological, and ethical movement proposing a relational vision for the common good. Although it has roots as ancient as Heraclitus and the Buddha, in the modern era it principally arises from the work of Alfred North Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, and Henry Nelson Wieman, and, as a Christian theology, most especially from the work of Daniel Day Williams, John Cobb Jr., David Griffin, and Marjorie Suchocki, followed by younger generations of process thinkers. It finds expression in many religious traditions and cultures, especially in Christianity and Buddhism, with common root visions of reality as temporal—composed of relational events and compassion as a fundamental value. It is currently becoming influential in some circles in China, especially in education and efforts to envision a sustainable ecological civilization.[1]

1. Approximately twenty-two centers for process studies have opened at Chinese Universities. Nine Process Academies have been held (I have taught at four of them), offering Chinese professors and graduate students from many fields an introduction to Whitehead's thought. A large number of international conferences on education, agriculture, economic, ecological civilization, and philosophy, have been held at Claremont, California, and at various universities in China. Many of the papers from these conferences have been published in Chinese journals and books. My own book, *Process-Relational Philosophy: An Introduction to Alfred North Whitehead* (Templeton Foundation Press, 2008), was translated into Chinese by Zhou Bangxian and published by Guizhou People's Publishing House in June, 2009. Zhou Bangxian

In its Christian forms, I see process relational theology as an effort to express with spiritual power and intellectual integrity the deep Christian conviction that God is love. My father taught me that the way to evaluate any theology is to ask: "Is that what a truly loving God would be like? Is that what a truly loving God would be doing in the world?" We must also care so deeply about the truth of our theological claims that we are willing to submit them to the toughest, most honest, and penetrating questions we can, and we must revise or abandon our ideas as the evidence requires. Faith is not about blindly believing without evidence. Rather, faithfulness to the search for truth is expressed in the love, fidelity, and integrity which continually call us to be willing to look beyond our own current beliefs, values, and practices toward those which are more adequate expressions of truth and love. By these criteria, I find process relational theology to be an important voice in contemporary theology, philosophy, and spirituality.

Christian process theologians stand squarely in line with the great tradition of biblical and Christian thought. Process theology is also part of that broad Christian effort arising from the Renaissance, crossing denominations and cultures, to continually re-conceive the meaning of Christian faith in light of the rise of modern science, modern critical study of scriptures, engagement with world religions, and the human rights culture which understands the urgency of listening to the voices of the oppressed.

RETHINKING THE NATURE OF POWER: GOD EXISTS AND IS PERSONAL AND LOVING

Although process relational thought can take other forms, I will focus here on theistic Christian theology as the belief that God exists and is Someone who loves us. Process theists share the deep Abrahamic faith in a personal God who acts in history, lovingly and creatively, to work for justice and love for all persons.

Process relational thinkers believe that working out the meaning of God's loving activity in the world requires a fundamental rethinking of the nature of power. Rather than thinking of God as omnipotent, exercising absolute unilateral coercive power, process relational thinkers envision God as having

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and Dr. Yang Fubin have translated Whitehead's major works into Chinese along with books by David Griffin and John Cobb Jr. My essay, "Creative Transformation: Process Philosophy in Curriculum and Classroom," was translated to Chinese and published in the *Papers of the International Conference on Process Thinking & Curriculum Reform* (Yanti, China, July, 2007).

infinite relational power and love. Rather than being the great controller, God is the great companion, the "fellow-sufferer who understands."[2]

Normally, if we think of concrete examples of power, we might think of Bill Gates' wealth, a winning sports team, generals, armies, the President of the United States, tornadoes or hurricanes, earthquakes, or nuclear weapons. An earthquake does what it does, and no one can stop it. The common theme is the ability to control or influence others without being controlled or influenced by them. Our normal conception of power, therefore, is *unilateral*; it flows one way—down. Generals give orders to Captains who give orders to Sergeants who give orders to privates—definitely not the reverse.

There is no question that unilateral power describes an important experience in life. Of course, it is always a matter of degree. Voters do influence presidents, oppressed peasants rebel against tyrants, and Bill Gates battles the Justice Department. Still, we long to have unilateral power because we fear the threats which arise from not being in control of our own lives—especially pain, loss, and death.

Consider, however, the most extreme examples of human unilateral power—those situations in which one person or group exercises almost total unilateral power over others: rape, torture, slavery, tyranny, child abuse. Loving parents do have much power to control a child, but the more compassionately they feel the child's feelings of fear, hope, pain, and curiosity, the more they become models of something radically different from unilateral power. Actual examples of anything close to total unilateral power require the absence of compassion, and are hence deeply disturbing and destructive. Yet, traditional concepts of coercive unilateral power profoundly shape most thinking about God.

Philosophically, Plato articulated the idea of power clearly in the *Sophist.*

> My notion would be that anything which possesses any sort of power to affect another, or to be affected by another, if only for a single moment, however trifling the cause and however slight the effect, has real existence; and I hold that the definition of being is simply power.[3]

As we know, however, Plato did not weigh these two aspects of power equally. He modeled his eternal forms after mathematical ideas—absolutely changeless, timeless, and impassive. In the *Republic*, Plato argued,

> Things which are at their best are also least liable to be altered or discomposed. . . . Then everything which is good, whether made by art or nature or both, is

2. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), 351.

3. *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Random House, 1937), 2:255.

> least liable to suffer change from without. . . . But surely God and the things of God are perfect in every way? . . . Then it is impossible that God should ever be willing to change; being, as is supposed, the fairest and best that is conceivable, every God remains absolutely and for ever in his own form.[4]

In *The Republic* Plato made clear the distinction between that which stands at the top of the divided line in the realm of eternity, and that which lies below in the physical world of time.

> What is that which always is and has no becoming; and what is that which is always becoming and never is? That which is apprehended by intelligence and reason is always in the same state; but that which is conceived by opinion with the help of sensation and without reason**,** is always in a process of becoming and perishing and never really is.[5]

Western philosophers and theologians have followed Plato's lead. Despite the very contrary images of God in the Bible as passionate and engaged with the world, Christian theologians have usually insisted on the omnipotence, and hence absolute unchangeability, of God. Serious problems arise in this merger of static platonic perfection with the active power of the biblical God.

UNILATERAL POWER TENDS TO BE COERCIVE AND CONTROLLING

Because unilateral power seeks to control others while resisting their influence, it inevitably moves to coerce and control. To coerce means to close off possibilities, to narrow the range of possible actions down to those the controller desires.

Imagine divine omnipotence as absolutely perfect unilateral power, in Plato's sense, without any qualification or challenge, but as exercising active power. (If this is logically coherent.) Such an omnipotent God would necessarily control absolutely everything, and by the same token, nothing at all would influence God in any degree. Such are the logical outlines of the doctrine of omnipotence with which Christian theologians have long struggled. Pressed to its extremes, as theologians have often done, it leads to belief in total divine predestination of all events. Obviously, it has been an ongoing challenge to reconcile God's unilateral power with Christian faith in God's love and any notion of human freedom.

Yet, the idea of divine omnipotence has been central to Christian theology, and in the face of the massive suffering and cruelty in the world, is often preserved only by twisting the idea of divine love in the most horrifying ways, suggesting that it is a mysterious expression of divine love to allow rape, mur-

4. Ibid., 1:645.
5. Ibid., 2:12.

der, disease, war, poverty, child abuse, and genocide. Efforts to explain evil in terms of the free will of the creatures are difficult to make coherent in face of a fierce determination to preserve absolute divine omnipotence. But, belief in God's omnipotence remains so attractive because then we can always hope that God will miraculously step in to solve all of our problems and make all the evil go away, or at least be only apparent evil, destined to be transformed ultimately into a great good.

Despite obvious challenges for any theology rooted in a God of love who suffers on the cross out of love for us, the idea that the truly real must be unchangeable and unrelated has persisted in Western thought (and elsewhere as well). It is evident in Thomas Aquinas' embrace of Aristotle's concept of God as the Unmoved Mover. It is equally evident in the persistent Cartesian philosophy that reality is composed of substances, that "By substance, we can understand nothing else than a thing which so exists that *it needs no other thing in order to exist,*"[6] and Descartes' further explanation that a substance (including a human soul) is something which *endures unchanged* through the changes of its accidental qualities.

LOVE AND RELATIONAL POWER[7]

Yet, it is unquestionable that to love someone is to be affected by them. The more deeply we love, the more deeply we are affected. This universal human experience sets love in direct opposition to the idea of unilateral power.

Process relational thinkers propose a profoundly different view of God's power and love. What do the best students, thinkers, artists, parents, friends, poets, bosses, and lovers have in common? First, they have a great capacity to be actively open to other people and the world around them. This is not a passive weakness, an inability to resist the influence of others. To the contrary, it is an intentional active openness which reaches out and draws the world into the self. A rock may have great capacity to remain unaffected by the surrounding world, but rocks have no power to learn, grow, sympathize, or love. It is precisely the power of creative openness which increases in complexity in the evolution from primary elements to living organisms, sentient animals, and reflective human beings.

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6. René Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, in *Philosophical Works of Descartes*, ed. E. S. Haldene and G. R R. T. Ross, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955) 1:239; emphasis added.

7. For the earliest articulation of the concept of relational power in the process tradition, see Bernard Loomer, "Two Conceptions of Power," *Criterion* 15, no. 1 (Winter 1976): 7–29. Building on Loomer's work in conjunction with H. N. Wieman's discussion of the creative event (see below), I have developed my own formulation of relational power.

In my own formulation, building on the work of others, I describe relational power, contrasted with unilateral power, as having three elements: active openness, self-creativity, and the strength to sustain a mutual relationship.

1. Relational power as intentional active openness is the capacity to reach out and take in ideas, values, feelings, and experiences from the world around us.

2. Relational power as self-creativity means that what has been received is integrated with the ideas, values, and feelings you already have. You are not simply a passive blank slate on which the world writes, but are actively self-creative by integrating the old with the new.

3. Relational power as the strength to sustain a mutual relationship is the capacity to engage with the world despite challenge and suffering. If we are able to see the world through new eyes we should be better prepared to come back with greater openness, sharper questions, and deeper sensitivity. But this takes hard work, makes us vulnerable, and may open us up to shared suffering. Relational power involves the strength to continue to engage the world despite these challenges, so that the process of openness, self-creativity, and deepening of relationships can continue.

Imagine a person—a friend, spouse, parent, teacher, Bishop, or U.S. President—who strives to model their life on unilateral and coercive power, like a good Cartesian substance needing no one else in order to exist and live, untouched by the feelings of others. Contrast that person with someone modeling relational power, a friend or spouse who listens to you openly, a parent who feels and respects the sorrows, joys, and hopes of her children, a teacher who constantly works to adjust to the successes and failures of teaching strategies by being open to the voices of her students. Which do you want as a spouse, teacher, friend—or God?

GOD'S INFINITE RELATIONAL POWER, LOVE, AND SUFFERING

Process relational theists envision God as having the infinite relational power and love to enter into relationship with every creature. God shares the experience of every creature however simple or complex. God actively and openly feels the feelings of the world, with all the pain and suffering, joys and hopes. God integrates the values of the creatures of the world with God's own infinite love and wisdom, and offers to the world a range of possibilities for becoming.

Since divine embodiment is an important idea in the LDS tradition, we might imagine that the world is God's body. The pain experienced by the living cells forming your body *is your pain.* Likewise, God shares the pain and joy of all creatures in the world. Or, in another image, having children means

having your "heart go walking around outside your body."[8] Having children is a great risk. We can never fully protect our children, and God cannot fully protect the creatures of the world.

Relational power in its deepest forms opens us to the pain and suffering of the world around us. No wonder we seek escape into the callousness of unilateral power. But love draws us back to a willingness to bear the suffering of others—with them, and sometimes even because of them. Great souls like Gandhi reveal in the most compelling actions the incredible strength required to be willing to suffer hunger, imprisonment, beatings, and humiliations for the sake of others. In the Christian tradition, there is no more important symbol of relational power than Christ on the cross.

Imagine what infinite relational power and love mean for God. God intimately shares the suffering of the entire universe. God is infinitely compassionate. God also shares the joys of the world's creatures, but at a great price. The sacred Hindu text, the *Bhagavad-Gita,* captures this vision well.

> Those who burn with the bliss, and suffer the sorrow
> Of every creature within their own heart,
> Making their own, each bliss and each sorrow:
> Them I hold highest. . . .
> Their every action
> Is wed to the welfare
> Of other creatures.[9]

This is the kind of compassionate love envisioned by Whitehead when he proposed that "God is the great companion—the fellow-sufferer who understands."[10]

RELATIONAL POWER AND CREATIVE TRANSFORMATION

Relational power can be reframed in terms of what relational power achieves in our lives—Creative Transformation.[11] Henry Nelson Wieman sought to identify the deepest source of value in human life. His answer described Creative Transformation as a creative event involving four sub events which he spoke of as four *ings*: Emerging, Integrating, Expanding, and

8. I frequently see this attributed to Elizabeth Stone but have yet to find the original source.

9. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, trans., *Bhadavad-Gita: The Song of God* (New York: Signet Classic, 2002), 61, 67; modified for inclusive language.

10. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 351.

11. For a fuller discussion see Henry Nelson Wieman's *The Source of Human Good* (Carbondale, Ill.: S.I.U. Press, 1967) and *Man's Ultimate Commitment* (Carbondale, Ill.: S.I.U. Press, 1974). Wieman originated the concept and spoke of this process as the "creative event" and the "creative good."

Deepening. My own description of relational power is directly indebted to Wieman. Essentially, active openness brings about emerging awareness. The self-creativity of relational power incorporates what Wieman covered in both integrating and expanding. When I write of sustaining mutual relationships I refer to what Wieman meant by deepening. So we could think of relational power as simply another description of Creative Transformation, but I tend to see the transformation as a consequence of the exercise of power.

Imagine a deeply bigoted person reluctantly moving through a transformation away from bigotry toward friendship and respect. Creative Transformation is at work in human life as we learn, grow, mature, see new visions for life, and become more compassionate people.

RELATIONAL POWER IS PERSUASIVE RATHER THAN COERCIVE

Unilateral power is apparent when parents make their children obey pointless commands which serve only to make life easier for the parent. Hence the old familiar reason children know too well: "Because I said so!"

Relationally powerful parents "listen" to their children with ears, eyes, hands, and hearts. Parents who are actively open to the feelings, hopes, dreams, goals, and inherent value of their children will work to support their children's positive and creative choices, helping them to expand the range of possibilities open to them. Parents certainly have the responsibility to teach their children good values and set boundaries for their protection. Children cannot simply be left on their own to do whatever they wish. But we all understand the destructiveness of parents who rigidly impose their own goals and desire onto their children, living out their own lives vicariously through their children, who are reduced to toys their parents manipulate. In between lies the path of creative persuasion in which we are actively open to the feelings, thoughts, and goals of our children, sharing our own best wisdom with them, but encouraging them to create their own visions and to grow beyond us in wisdom and compassion. That is the work of relationally powerful and loving parents. Persuasion *opens up possibilities* for the welfare of the child, while coercion narrows the child's options to the choices of the parents.

A PROCESS RELATIONAL WORLD

A fuller explanation of how relational power works in God's relationship with the world requires some understanding of the process relational vision of reality. It is necessary to re-envision the nature of nature, as well as the

nature of God's power. I can only offer the briefest account here. Readers will need to look elsewhere for more extensive explanations.[12]

In contrast to the Cartesian vision of a world composed of unchanging, independent substances, or the atomic "particles" of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century physics, Whitehead accepted the evidence of quantum mechanics and the ancient wisdom of Heraclitus and the Buddha that all things flow. The world is composed of momentary events, and these events arise out of the world around them. They are relational. Each new quantum event in the life of an electron, for example, arises out of the past life of the universe and that electron. It exists momentarily, then perishes, and gives rise to a new quantum event. In Plato's language, time is perpetual perishing. The world is "always in a process of becoming and perishing."[13]

The more radical and difficult to grasp vision is that each quantum event can be conceived as, in William James' language, "a drop of experience."[14] A quantum event "prehends" or grasps the immediately past world and creates itself out of that complex web of physical relationships. And, as a century of experimental evidence has demonstrated, that event has the power to "decide" (Whitehead's term) how it will become. "The word 'decision' does not here imply conscious judgment, although in some 'decisions' consciousness will be a factor. The word is used in its root sense of a 'cutting off.'"[15] As crazy as this sounds it is simply another way to describe what physicists Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow state clearly in their book, *The Grand Design*. "In other words, nature does not dictate the outcome of any process or experiment, even in the simplest of situations. Rather, it allows a number of different eventualities, each with a certain likelihood of being realized."[16] Quantum certainty is simply the smallest, most trivial expression of the self-

12. The fundamental text is Whitehead's *Process Reality,* cited above, and other works. The works of Charles Hartshorne are also basic. For the simplest available introduction see my own books, *Process Relational Philosophy: An Introduction to Alfred North Whitehead* (West Conshohocken, Pa.: Templeton Press, 2008) and *Process Theology: A Basic Introduction* (Atlanta, Ga.: Chalice Press, 1993).

13. Plato's *Timaeus,* in *Dialogues of Plato*, 2:12. Process relational thinkers reject Plato's additional words, "and never really is." On the contrary, it is precisely the events which become and perish which are the most real things. God's life, as well, is an infinite series of events of experiencing the world and engaging with it. God is not static, but dynamic, not unaffected, but infinitely engaged.

14. Quoted in Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 68.

15. Ibid., 43.

16. Stephen W. Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010), 72.

creative freedom which characterizes all *individual* events, including the events of your own mind. (Rocks are not individuals, simply composites.)

Thus, in the process relational vision, the world is composed of relational, self-creative events, all of which have some relational power. They take in the past world, create themselves out of what they prehend by choosing from the relevant range of possibilities, and contribute to future events by their own self-creativity. The universe is a creative advance into novelty, in which freedom is inherent. It is important to distinguish between most inorganic macro structures in which quantum indeterminacy is overwhelmed by sheer numbers and reduced to determinism, from those organic, living structures in which indeterminacy grows into significant capacity for novelty. While that freedom (indeterminacy) is trivial for an electron, freedom grows in richness as more complex organic creatures emerge through the evolutionary process, achieving significant moral freedom in human beings and possibly some other animals.[17]

GOD'S POWER IS INFINITE, BUT NOT OMNIPOTENT

Remember Plato's crucial insight in the *Sophist:* "The definition of being is simply power." To exist is to have some power. In process relational thought, this can be expressed as "To exist is to be self-creative," at least as applied to the basic constituent events of nature. This leads to the crucial recognition that if every creature has some power of its own, God *cannot* have *all* the power. God *cannot* be omnipotent. So, even though God has infinite power to engage creatively, through infinite time, with every event which ever has occurred or ever will occur, God's creative relational power is always interwoven with the free self-creativity of the creatures of the world.

IS GOD OMNISCIENT?

God is omniscient in the clear sense that God knows everything there is to know. God knows the past as past, and the present as present. Also, God knows everything there is to know about the future. But in process thought, the future does not exist—it is not actual. The future will arise from the co-creativity of God and the creatures of the world—who all have their own self-creative freedom in varying degrees. God knows all of the possibilities and probabilities for the future. But while God knows what *can* happen and is *likely* to happen, God cannot know with certainty what *will* happen.

17. For an expanded argument, see my essay, "Quantum Indeterminacy and the Case for Freedom in Nature," *The Journal of Cosmology* 20 (Sept. 2012): 8667–77.

So, God has full knowledge of everything that exists just as it exists. And the future "exists" not as actuality, but as a range of possibilities.

IS GOD UNCHANGEABLE?

I would argue that the overwhelming majority of Christian people and theologians have been unclear in claiming that God is unchangeable. Unchangeability is not a biblical idea. When the prophet Malachi presents God as saying, "For I the Lord do not change" (Mal. 3:6), there is no hint here of the platonic notion of a static divinity akin to mathematical forms. In the verses that follow, God, as usual, presents the people with a choice. Return to the Lord and God will respond in one way; continue to turn away, and God will respond differently. The future, including God's own actions, is not fixed, but remains to be created jointly by God and the world.

God does not change in the abstract fundamental structures of God's nature or character. God is always loving and just. God is always working with us creatively to bring about the good. But, since creative love is always responsive, this very unchanging character of God means that the concrete content of God's activity in the world is always adaptive to the actual situation, as with any good parent, friend, spouse, or teacher.

IS GOD ETERNAL?

Here again, clarity is needed. If "eternal" means timeless, as for Platonic forms, then clearly the process God is not timeless. God is not an Aristotelian Unmoved Mover. If "eternal" means that God is everlasting, that God has always existed and will always exist, then yes, clearly God is everlasting. Likewise, while universes begin and end, there will always be some kind of world in which God is creatively at work. Creation is an everlasting process, not a one-time event.

IS GOD OMNIPRESENT?

God is clearly omnipresent because God both shares the experience of every creature and is experienced by every creature. As explained above, "creature" is shorthand for more complex distinctions. A rock is composed of quantum events forming electrons, protons, neutrons and the like which ultimately may be said to have some kind of incredibly trivial, but real, "experience." A rock is not organized to have any level of experience higher than that. But a living cell is. So the way in which God can be present in a rock is very different from the way in which God can be present in the experience of a human soul, which is the cumulative flow of a person's experience.

CAN GOD OVERRULE OUR FREEDOM?

Everything I have said so far should make it clear that process thinkers agree with Plato that "the definition of being is simply power," and that power means some degree of self-creativity which even God cannot take away.

At least in my own branch of the Latter Day Saint tradition (now Community of Christ) I was raised with the idea that "God gives us our agency (freedom)." But it was also clear that being omnipotent meant that God could overrule that freedom if God chose. In different forms, this seems to be a standard part of the "free will defense" in response to the problem of evil. I have often thought that this idea that God gives us freedom but can take it away makes us into little more than wooden Pinocchios, who may or may not be "real" boys and girls depending on how well we behave. Process relational thinkers view this very differently. Freedom is inherent in existence. God cannot take it away.

WHY DOESN'T GOD PREVENT THE EVIL AND SUFFERING IN THE WORLD?

The process-relational vision offers compelling arguments that God *cannot* overrule either natural law or human freedom to prevent evil. That does not mean that God is powerless any more than human parents are powerless simply because they are not omnipotent. God has *infinite relational power* to share the joys and sorrows of every creature, to call every creature toward the good, to work with us as co-creators. As the Bible affirms, "We love because God loves us" (1 Jn. 4:19). What power is more important than that? God is present with us, and suffering with us in times of sorrow, doing everything God can do to work for healing and welfare, as would any loving parent. God promises to be with us, but cannot control events.

IS THERE CONTINUING REVELATION?

Process-relational theology emphatically insists on continuing revelation, but with a meaning much broader than is usually conceived. Every creature in the world experiences God in every moment: encountering God's love, the range of possibilities relevant for that moment, and God's call toward the better. God's call is clearly important here. Obviously, many of the relevant possibilities are not good. They are what they are. We often make terrible decisions which leave us with terrible possibilities. But whatever the situation, God always draws us toward the better possibilities, those which lead to a better range of possibilities in the future.

Revelation in this basic sense is universal. It cannot be restricted to any particular time or place. All of creation is the scene of divine revelatory activity.

Because God is not omnipotent, God cannot unilaterally sweep aside the veil between the infinite and the finite. Every creature, every person, experiences the divine voice as one voice among many voices forming their world. We all experience God's call, but in our efforts to discern that divine voice, as William James observed, no infallible bell rings to tell us when we have gotten it right. Hence, we finite, self-centered, humans all too easily mistake our own self-interest and desires for the divine call, and end up creating our God in our own image to serve our own interests. Racist people have a racist God. Patriarchal men have a patriarchal God. And, to be honest with myself, I am drawn to an image of God with the amazing compassion and relational power of my own mother, and as encountered in my own religious experiences. For good or ill, it is difficult for us to see beyond ourselves in our search for the divine.

REVELATION, SPIRITUALITY, AND BEAUTY

Whereas most philosophers shaped by Western rationalism and the paradigm of mathematics have thought of truth and goodness as singular (2+2=4), Whitehead and others have taken beauty as a guide in some crucial issues. No one (except extreme Platonists) thinks that there is one single poem so perfect that we need no more poems. It would be absurd to imagine that there is one single song or sculpture or painting so perfect that we need no other music or art. And consider how foolish it would be to imagine that one "perfect painting" (a meaningless conjunction of words) meant that we no longer need Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Beauty just isn't like that. It is rich and infinitely varied.

Apply the model of beauty to spirituality and human values. Yes, there is falsehood, cruelty, and evil. But clearly human beings have recognized and pursued a range of overlapping good but diverse spiritual values. The Buddhist search for Enlightenment is different from, but not opposed to, the Christian search for the love of God. The New Testament emphasis on personal love is importantly different from, though not opposed to, the Hebrew focus on social justice. The Islamic pillar of prayer five times a day is surely related to, but still clearly diverse from, the monastic practice of canonical hours.

The idea that revelation is universal means that no one person or group of persons can claim to have exclusive access to God's word. But it does not exclude the idea that some persons, by situation or personal character, may be unusually open to the divine. The idea of One True Church makes little sense to me as a process thinker, but the idea of prophetic insight does. Jesus, the Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed, Gandhi, and even Joseph Smith Jr. may certainly have their own prophetic visions in their diverse contexts. The Buddha and Jesus lived and worked in very different cultures, creating different

expressions of spiritual beauty. But these forms of spiritual beauty do not have to be seen in opposition to each other.

Process thinkers like John Cobb Jr. and others, have made important contributions to interfaith dialogue because they tend to ask, "What have those people seen about reality and goodness that I have not yet seen?" Yes, some beliefs are false, and some values are bad. But while there are genuine conflicts in claims about truth, and a vast gulf between compassion and cruelty, there is no contradiction between Jesus being the Christ, Siddhartha being the Buddha, and Confucius being wise.[18]

WAS GOD INCARNATE IN CHRIST?[19]

> In the Beginning was the Word [Logos], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. (John 1:1–4, 14)

Whitehead wrote of God's eternal envisagement of all the possibilities and values for the world woven with God's constantly growing experience of the actual world. It is the unity of this primordial envisagement with God's experience of, and loving response to, the world which is offered to the world in each moment as that range of possibilities and values which makes freedom and goodness possible in the world. In Christian language we could speak of this creative call of God as the Logos, for the Logos is the divine Word, God's call and vision which simultaneously makes possible both order and creativity in the world, making creative freedom possible. Again, as First John affirms, "We love, because He first loved us" (4:19).

God's Logos is unchangingly eternal in one respect and yet continually adaptive to the actual state of the world. This Logos, experienced by each momentary creature, is what makes the existence, creativity, and goodness of the world possible. Without the divine Logos nothing in the world can come into being. In this sense, it is obvious that all creatures incarnate the Logos.

However, what made Jesus the Christ was the unique way in which he chose to incarnate the divine logos. Whereas all of us experience God's call, most of us respond to it hesitatingly and grudgingly at best. We alternately

18. For example, see John Cobb Jr., *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

19. For fuller discussions see John B. Cobb Jr., "Jesus and Christ in Process Perspective," in *Handbook of Process Theology*, ed. Donna Bowman and Jay McDaniel (Atlanta, Ga.: Chalice Press, 2006), 37–48; and John Cobb Jr. and David R. Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1976).

say no and yes, reject and embrace, sin and repent. But Jesus seems to have embraced the divine Logos so completely that, as John Cobb Jr. has suggested, the life of Jesus as the Christ was "co-constituted" by the human will of Jesus and the divine logos. Because Jesus so consistently chose to say *yes* to God's call, God's will *became* Jesus' will. In this vision, human and divine are not inherently opposed. Rather, the more fully Jesus incarnated the divine Logos, the more fully and lovingly human he became.

CHRIST AS CREATIVE TRANSFORMATION

John Cobb has proposed that the Logos of God, as God's creative work in the world, can also be spoken of in terms of creative transformation. This is easily illustrated in the ministry of Jesus, in which he broke down old barriers, and enabled people to create themselves in radically new ways with deeper and more open human relationships. Old prejudices and divisive structures were broken down so that appreciation for a wider range of people could emerge, richer self-creativity could triumph, and more loving structures of human community could be created. In so far as this continues, we can speak of Christ as Creative Transformation at work in our lives today.

HOW SHALL WE VIEW OTHER WORLD RELIGIONS?

Creative Transformation is present in all communities of love. God always works in every person and culture. There is more than one good way to live, and more than one way for God to work with people. We should look for what is of value in any religion, without sacrificing the insights and values of our own. Faith in Christ incarnate in Jesus or in our own community does not exclude truth and value in other religions.

Is there any objective norm by which religions can be measured? Yes. John Cobb Jr. argues that the Christian concept of Christ as the incarnation of the Logos, as Creative Transformation, is that norm. We can fairly ask of any religion whether it has resources within itself—in its scriptures, traditions, doctrines, rituals, hymns, etc.—which can be drawn on to support the work of Creative Transformation within that religion and in that religion's relationships with others.

Traditions like the KKK, the Aryan Nation, and many fundamentalisms, actively oppose such Creative Transformation. They despise the idea of learning from others. They believe they have unique access to, and control of, the absolute truth and right. But people in all spiritual traditions, including our own, usually turn away from the hard work of relational power which leads to Creative Transformation. It is just easier and less painful in the short run to be narrow-minded and self-centered, to believe that we have the whole truth and the monopoly on righteousness.

Surely, however, all of the great spiritual traditions we see in the world today do have rich resources for Creative Transformation. All of the great living spiritual traditions have scriptures, teachings, and modes of worship which call their people away from arrogance, narrowness, violence, and self-centeredness, and beckon them outward toward love, compassion, humility, openness, a wider range of appreciation of others, integration of other wisdoms, and hence the wonder of Creative Transformation.

Thus, we might cautiously claim that Christ is the test of truth and goodness in every religion. But in doing so we had better be prepared to laugh out loud at our own presumptuousness, until we learn how to explain deeply and clearly why the Buddha, the Torah, the Tao, or the Dharma, is also the test of every religion. Learning to do that will require great relational power, and will lead us into the wondrous grace of Creative Transformation in ways we cannot envision until we ourselves are transformed into people with greater wisdom than we have now. What a joyous hope lies before us, if we will open ourselves to it.

IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH?

Since God fully shares our experience, our lives become part of God. In this way our lives have eternal significance in the Divine Life. Process theists largely agree that this is one kind of immortality process theology supports.

Whitehead, Hartshorne, and many other process theologians have not believed that our minds survive the deaths of our bodies, while Cobb and Griffin and others think this is at least possible. David Griffin points out that we have a surprisingly narrow view of the options: either nothing, or the traditional heaven (and hell). He proposes that we examine the evidence and consider many possibilities. We must search for what is true, not just imagine what we want to be true.

WHY PRAY IF GOD IS NOT OMNIPOTENT?

Personally, I think that leading us to think more deeply about prayer is one of the most valuable contributions of process relational theology. So many people assume that there is simply no point in praying to a God who cannot magically grant their requests. In doing so, I think they reveal how shallow our common view of prayer is. Socrates, in the *Euthyphro*, ridiculed this form of religion as a mere business transaction with the Gods.

Imagine yourself with a child dying of cancer. (I apologize if this strikes too close to home.) You pray for healing, for God to save your child. Your child grows sicker. The problem is the idea of omnipotence, which forces us to say that since God *could* simply snap God's fingers and save your child, God is apparently *choosing* to allow or even caused your child to die. How sad

is that? Apparently, if God is omnipotent, the purpose of prayer is to change God's mind, to persuade God to do something which, in God's infinite love and wisdom, God has so far chosen not to do. Does that make any sense? Does God have to be cajoled, petted, flattered, bowed to, or bargained with, to cave in and perform an act which any minimally decent human being would already have done? Surely God grieves to be so maligned.

One of my tests for theology is that the God someone describes to me must be at least as loving as my mother. And I can promise you that you wouldn't have to beg or cajole or flatter my mother to get her to save a sick child if she had the power. Are we not grateful that we can now prevent or cure so many diseases? How would you feel about a doctor standing there with the curing pills in hand, refusing to hand them out?

Imagine instead that you are praying to a God who is already doing everything within God's power to save your child. You don't have to persuade God, or beg God, or flatter God, or be morally perfect or anything. God is way ahead of us, working with the healthy cells, and the doctors and nurses, doing everything God can to work for health. But God cannot simply over rule the laws of nature or the freedom of the world. What then is prayer for?

Prayer then, seems to be about opening ourselves up to know that God is suffering and grieving and working and hoping and fearing with us. God is there, in the midst of your anguish, fear, and hope, feeling all of your feelings, and your child's feelings, right along with you. God is the great companion, the fellow/sister sufferer who understands.

Prayer, in process theology, is about turning away from futile magic, and asking ourselves how to live as well as we can in the face of things as they are. What are the best possibilities open to us right now? What are the choices that will build loving community rather than lead to despair and destruction? What is God calling us to in this terrible—or wonderful—moment? Marjorie Suchocki puts this clearly and beautifully.

> *God works with the world as it is in order to bring it to where it can be.* Prayer changes the way the world is, and therefore changes what the world can be. Prayer opens the world to its own transformation.[20]

My own conviction is that process theology leads away from all the shallow business transactions of prayer into reflections on what prayer at its deepest dimensions should be. It calls us to stop bargaining with God as if God is far away and uncaring, and calls us to turn to a God who is fully with us while also infinitely larger. Then we can seriously ask: What is God already doing that I need to be open to? And the answer will *not* be that God is choosing for

20. Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *In God's Presence: Theological Reflections on Prayer* (Atlanta, Ga.: Chalice Press, 1996), 18–19.

this child to die to test our faith or teach us a lesson. Prayer will lead us to ask: Where does love lead us even in the most terrible of times—and also the best and most joyous of times? That is a serious theology of prayer.

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Searching for an Adequate Theodicy: David Griffin and Mormonism

by David Paulsen, Alan Hurst, Michael Pennock, and Martin Pulido

Reading the works of David Griffin, a prominent process theologian, one can imagine him before a grand theological judgment bar prosecuting attempted theodicies. He accuses Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin of disregarding common experience by denying genuine evil's existence.[1] He charges Leibniz, Plantinga, and Hick with taking the traditional idea of God as axiomatic.[2] Brunner and Fackenheim are indicted for denying the law of non-contradiction in their attempts to reconcile the traditional God with genuine evil.[3] At length, Griffin concludes this bill of indictment with a dour charge against all the defendants: incoherent conceptions of divine omnipotence, given the world's extant evils. However, Griffin's case is also constructive. After arguing for the inadequacy of these theodicies, Griffin presents his own theodicy, built on a radically re-thought account of God's nature and relationship to the universe.

Griffin's reconstructive approach surprisingly develops a worldview akin to that revealed to Mormon prophet Joseph Smith. Accordingly, Griffin's theodicy also shares important features with theodicies extrapolated from Mormon theology. Griffin did not try a Mormon theodicy in his courtroom, but its fundamental difference from other Christian theodicies merits his attention. Like

1. David Ray Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 222.

2. Ibid., 255. David Ray Griffin, *Evil Revisited: Responses and Reconsiderations* (State University of New York Press, 1991), 46

3. Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 223.

Griffin, and unlike the theodicies he condemns, Mormon theodicies rest on a radically different understanding of God, including preeminently the belief that God's power is constrained by more than mere logical consistency.

Despite their mutual disapproval of traditional theodicies and promotion of new theodicies informed by heterodox accounts of God, it is still debatable whether they adequately address the problem of evil themselves. To explore how these theodicies fair, we first summarize Griffin's critique of traditional theodicies and show how his process theodicy attempts to avoid these charges. We then identify parallels between Griffin's theodicy and ones based on Mormon teachings, showing that the two address the problem of evil in deeply similar ways. Finally, we note difficulties facing Mormon teachings and Griffin's process theism, exploring the advantages and shortcomings of their respective theodicies. We argue that given Griffin's general standards for an adequate theodicy, both Mormon and process theodicies do not explain (nor explain away) every instance of evil, but do contain insights which, if accepted, prevent moral and natural evil from constituting an insuperable bar to rational belief in God.

GRIFFIN'S INDICTMENT OF TRADITIONAL THEODICIES

In *God, Power, and Evil*, Griffin presents the problem of evil in eight steps:

1. God is a perfect reality. (Definition)
2. A perfect reality is an omnipotent being. (By definition)
3. An omnipotent being could unilaterally bring about an actual world without any genuine evil. (By definition)
4. A perfect reality is a morally perfect being. (By definition)
5. A morally perfect being would want to bring about an actual world without any genuine evil. (By definition)
6. If there is genuine evil in the world, then there is no God. (Logical conclusion from 1 through 5)
7. There is genuine evil in the world. (Factual statement)
8. Therefore, there is no God. (Logical conclusion from 6 and 7)[4]

Griffin distinguishes only "apparent evils"—evils that bring about more good than harm—from "genuine evils," without which, "all things considered . . . the universe would have been better."[5] Griffin believes the existence of genuine evils is obvious, a "hard-core commonsense notion," that people necessarily affirm in practice even if they deny it in theory. As such, traditional the-

4. Ibid., 9.
5. Ibid., 22.

ism makes evil an intractable problem. He argues, therefore, that one cannot solve the problem of evil by denying premise 7 but by rethinking premises 1 through 5.

In particular, Griffin asserts that the traditional view of God's power needs revision. If God embodies moral perfection and can unilaterally bring about any logically possible state of affairs, Griffin thinks there is no adequate explanation as to why genuine evil exists.

Griffin is adamant on this point: Attempts to reconcile the traditional God with evil's existence will fail, and merely "tinkering" with theism will never produce a satisfactory result. "If traditional theism is rendered untenable by the problem of evil it engenders, then a solution will be found not by a slight modification here or there in the traditional idea of God, but only, if at all, by completely re-conceiving the idea of a perfect reality."[6] To formulate a better theodicy, we need a different God.

GRIFFIN'S THEODICY

For Griffin, the first step in achieving a satisfactory concept of God is to deny that God can create any logically possible state of affairs *ex nihilo*.[7] According to his process theology, based on the thought of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, God never existed alone, but has existed as the soul of the eternal universe, encompassing and transcending everything within it and coaxing it from trivial to more valuable states.

The metaphysical principles structuring the universe have eternally existed, necessarily independent of God's agency, so that God must work within their framework.[8] One such principle is that each "actual entity" (such as a human being, or even the smallest particle) possesses its own inherent power. If so, God cannot fully change the universe by divine fiat, but through persuading (or what many process theists call "luring") actual entities to adopt his plan—God's power is persuasive only. Each actual entity determines to some degree for itself how to respond to God's influence. This is Griffin's explanation for the existence of moral evil.

Additionally, God cannot "occasionally interrupt the world's most fundamental causal processes."[9] Instead, God's power is limited to continually coaxing the universe toward higher, more complex states. Griffin calls this

6. Ibid., 95.

7. David Ray Griffin, *Two Great Truths: A New Synthesis of Scientific Naturalism and Christian Faith* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 37–58.

8. Griffin, *Two Great Truths*, 88; Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 297.

9. David Ray Griffin, *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion* (Cornell University Press, 2001), 21.

"naturalistic theism" because interruptions of the natural order, as miracles are traditionally understood, are metaphysically impossible.[10]

By denying creation *ex nihilo* and affirming self-existent metaphysical principles that limit God's power to persuasion only and deny the possibility of traditional miracles, process theism has developed a view of God's relationship to the world that radically rethinks divine omnipotence. Lacking a monopoly on power, God's influence must be compatible with that of other necessarily efficacious agents.[11] Hence, Griffin denies the third premise in his formulation of the problem of evil: Even an omnipotent being cannot prevent all genuine evils. God does not eliminate holocausts and hurricanes because he is metaphysically incapable of doing so, and one has "no reason to infer that cancer, polio, tornadoes, and earthquakes exist because God wanted our world to have them."[12]

CONVERGENCES BETWEEN MORMONISM AND GRIFFIN'S PROCESS THEISM

While Joseph Smith uncompromisingly affirmed traditional Christian doctrines like Christ's divinity, incarnation, atonement, and resurrection, some of his theological positions are unconventional. At least five have striking similarities with process theism.

(1) Creation out of chaos.

Like process theists, Joseph Smith rejected creation *ex nihilo*. He explained: "God had materials to organize the world out of chaos—chaotic

10. Griffin, *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism*, 137. David Ray Griffin, "Life After Death in the Modern and Post-Modern Worlds," in *Religion and Parapsychology*, ed. Arthur S. Berger and Henry O. Thompson (Barrytown, N.Y.: Unification Theological Seminary, 1989), 94. Griffin's naturalistic theism involves ongoing divine intervention without any suspension of natural laws. According to Whitehead, an atom's behavior is dictated not by "laws of nature" imposed by God but rather by "its inner nature, which is due to its internal relations to other things," including its relation to God. All things naturally share in God's immanent nature, although God does not supernaturally intervene in the natural course of things. Griffin thus denies that miracles occur "in the traditional sense, meaning events in which the world's ordinary cause-effect relations have been supernaturally interrupted." David Griffin, "In Response to William Hasker," in *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue Between Process and Free Will Theists*, ed. John B. Cobb Jr. and Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 253.

11. Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 268.

12. David Ray Griffin, "Creation out of Nothing, Creation Out of Chaos, and the Problem of Evil," in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 108–25.

matter . . . "element had an existence from the time he had [existence] . . . [and] can never be destroyed."[13] Mass-energy is self-existent and God's creativity consists in continually bringing cosmos out of chaos.[14]

(2) Self-existent metaphysical structures to which God is subject.

Smith's denial of creation *ex nihilo* presupposes the existence of uncreated metaphysical laws or realities; otherwise, God should be able to create or destroy matter as He wills. In support of this, the prophet spoke of "laws of eternal and self-existent principles."[15] Contemporary Mormon apostle and philosopher Orson Pratt explained how such laws affect divine agency in the world: "There are some things that cannot be performed . . . the great God Himself . . . has not the power to do that which. . . . [is] in opposition to the great, necessary, and fundamental truths of nature, which . . . cannot be otherwise than they are."[16] Regardless of precisely how such laws are understood Mormons generally share Griffin's belief that God works within an uncreated metaphysical structure.

(3) A plurality of self-existent agents.

Smith also agrees with Griffin that some agents are self-determining. Among these are "intelligences" or, as some read the following discourse, individual primal persons that include each of us. Smith taught: "We say that God is a self-existent being . . . [But] who ever told you that man did not exist . . . upon the same principles? Man does exist upon the same principles . . . mind or the intelligence which man possesses is co-equal [co-eternal] with God himself." Nonetheless, Smith does not affirm anything *inherent* in humanity that grants them advanced cognitive, emotional, or spiritual qualities, nor does Smith believe these could be acquired solely by human effort. We gradually developed these characteristics through God's grace, by imitating Him, and likely in conjunction with evolutionary processes.[17]

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13. Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 350–52.

14. Later Mormon thinkers, such as Dennis Potter, have recognized that *creation ex nihilo* is not in itself problematic, but only when combined with the assertion that God can create any logically possible state of affairs that way and annihilate any existing state of affairs.

15. Smith, *Teachings*, 181.

16. Orson Pratt, April 6, 1856, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London and Liverpool: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1854–1886), 3:300.

17. Smith, *Teachings*, 352–54. The text says co-equal—Joseph Fielding Smith suggests he meant co-eternal. The LDS church has always been officially neutral regarding the truth of organic evolution, but there are good reasons why Mormons have

Because Smith's teachings were both ambiguous and speculative on the subject, Mormons are not united on the nature of intelligence. While some understand intelligence as the individuated, uncreated ego of each person, others understand intelligence as a collective "spirit matter" from which individuated egos come, or as emanations from the uncreated divine mind. No doubt other positions also cohere with LDS scripture and tradition.[18] Yet on

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been open to it. Joseph Smith's later creation accounts describe it as not accomplished by divine fiat, but rather through a long, continuous process, involving planning, preparation, and development (Abr. 4). Many LDS thinkers think this involves evolution. General Authority and philosopher B. H. Roberts and Apostles John A. Widtsoe and James E. Talmage believed in the development of organisms over time through observing fossil succession and different humanoid species. Roberts' position was that life on earth evolved from several simple organisms that were deposited or brought to earth that had some connection with the Biblical "kinds." B. H. Roberts, *The Truth, the Way, the Life: An Elementary Treatise on Theology*, ed. John W. Welch, 2nd ed. (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1996), 237–40. Of course, Roberts did not answer the wider question of cosmic evolution, perhaps due to his investment in more static patterns in his eternalism (pp. 235–36). The concept of eternal round and unending pattern in Mormonism has made it difficult to fully embrace the extreme novelty of change advanced by evolution.

For other earlier Mormon works supportive of organic evolution, see Ralph V. Chamberlin, *The Life and Philosophy of William H. Chamberlin* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1926), 155–60; William H. Chamberlin, *The Meaning of Life* (Salt Lake City, self published, nd.); Nels Nelson, *The Scientific Aspects of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City, 1904), 61–88.

There have been a variety of LDS thinkers and leaders opposing evolution, given their reading of LDS revelations and writings. President Joseph Fielding Smith and apostles Bruce R. McConkie and Boyd K. Packer have adamantly denied evolution, some even defending creationism. Hence, Mormons have much thinking to do in regards to the relationship between organic evolution and their theology, but there are no blatant reasons to affirm their incompatibility.

18. See Brigham Young, June 15, 1856, *Journal of Discourses*, 3:356; Charles W. Penrose, November 16, 1884, *Journal of Discourses*, 26:24–28; Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960), 84; Daniel Wotherspoon, "Awakening Joseph Smith: Mormon Resources for a Postmodern Worldview" (Ph.d. Diss. Claremont Graduate University, 1996), 210–32. A good example of the uncertainty of a position on intelligences is in Orson Pratt, "Questions," in *The Essential Orson Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991). Joseph Fielding Smith, the tenth church president, wrote, "Some of our writers have endeavored to explain what an intelligence is, but to do so is futile. . . . We know, however, that there is something called intelligence which always existed." Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957–1966), 4:127. In general, mind and matter are seen as eternal, but the ambiguity is in the details. For some introductory material on Mormon ideas of intelligence, see Blake T. Ostler,

the whole, Mormons interpret Smith's revelations and teachings in a way that agrees with Griffin's idea that there are persons other than God who have some degree of creative power.

(4) Persuasion as God's principal modus operandis.

Based on Smith's teachings and revelations, we believe that while God mainly uses persuasive power, he also uses coercive power on occasion.[19] Howard W. Hunter, a Mormon apostle, wrote: "[God] acts by gentle solicitation and by sweet enticement. . . . He always acts with unfailing respect for the freedom and independence that we possess."[20] Some Mormon thinkers have posited that this consideration for human agency is not a divine self limitation, but part of the uncreated laws of the cosmos. For instance, Brigham Young believed that God cannot revoke our agency: "Th[ere] is a law which has always existed from all eternity, and will continue . . . throughout all the eternities to come[:] Every intelligent being must have the power of choice."[21] Whether honoring or constrained by this law, God's coercive activity is limited so that humans have greater self-determination. Where voluntary God is an exemplar of patience and mercy. As Paul observed, God's restraint shows his love: "despisest thou the riches of [God's] goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Rom. 2:4).

(5) Consequent redefinition of divine omnipotence.

These counter-classical doctrines entail a different understanding of divine omnipotence. Mormon leader and thinker B. H. Roberts asserted that the type of God's omnipotence Joseph Smith thought entailed power to do

"The Idea of Pre-Existence in the Development of Mormon Thought." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 59–78. Charles Harrell, *"This Is My Doctrine": The Development of Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 199–226. There are more nuances and several more positions than Ostler or Harrell cover, which deserve investigation. For instance, there is a historical position of spirit emanation, where intelligences originate from God's being itself. See Parley P. Pratt, "The Regeneration and Eternal Duration of Matter," in *The Essential Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990); and also John Taylor, *The Gospel Kingdom* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 388–89. As President of the Church, Taylor asked, "Whence came our spirits? . . . Our spirits are eternal and emanate from God. So we, as a people, have always understood and do understand today." John Taylor, Decemeber 14, 1884, *Journal of Discourses*, 26:33–34.

19. God's power, the priesthood, is to be exercised "only by persuasion, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned" (D&C 121:41).

20. Howard W. Hunter, "The Golden Thread of Choice," *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 18.

21. Brigham Young, August 19, 1866, *Journal of Discourses*, 11:272.

"all that can be done," which is "conditioned by other eternal existences."[22] This definition resembles Griffin's: "the greatest power it is conceivable (possible) for a being to have," given the existence of multiple beings with power.[23]

MORMON RESOURCES FOR THEODICY

We have now seen how Joseph's teachings and revelations can be read as mirroring Griffin's thought in several areas. The aforementioned doctrines have profound implications for theodicy. Given these convergences between Mormon and process thought, using Joseph's teachings and revelations, Mormons can dissolve Griffin's formulation of the logical problem of evil by denying premise 3: an omnipotent being cannot unilaterally prevent all genuine evil.

First, if other existences are necessarily self-determining as Joseph insists, then God cannot unilaterally prevent the evils arising from agents' decisions without removing agency. Mormon teachings can also answer why God created humans with a morally imperfect nature. The moral virtue of persons is forged by their free choices in a challenging environment, rather than by divine fiat, and cannot be acquired in any other way. As F. R. Tennant asserts: "moral goodness cannot be created . . . there is no moral goodness in a clock, *however perfectly it may keep time*."[24]

Explaining *natural* evil, however, is more complicated. While many early Mormons explained natural evils as punishments from God or as a consequence of the Fall,[25] most Mormon intellectuals gave up these explanations as accounting for all natural evils when science established that organisms died

22. B. H. Roberts, *The Seventy's Course in Theology,* Year 4 (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1911) 70.

23. Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 268.

24. David Paulsen and Blake Ostler, "Sin, Suffering, and Soul-Making," in *Revelation, Reason and Faith*, ed. Donald W. Parry, et al. (Provo: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002), 237–84; emphasis added. For more Tennant, see Paulsen, "Divine Determinateness and the Free Will Defense," *Analysis* 41, no. 3 (1981): 150–53.

25. Some early Mormons drew from their protestant backgrounds and 2 Nephi 2 for support of this notion. Unlike traditional Christians, Mormons were not committed to the belief that the relationship between moral and natural evil is sovereignly imposed by God; it could conceivably be a result of the eternal structure of the cosmos. Thus, natural evil could actually arise directly from Adam and Eve's decision even if God wished it to be otherwise. Even now that natural evils have been justified as occurring "pre-Fall" (in some sense of the word), a Mormon could still claim in a similar vein that while natural events are not a result of a specific event, the moral evils of agents (our fallenness) makes the cosmos more chaotic or prevents God from being able to protect creatures from inherently chaotic forces in the cosmos.

and suffered before the Fall. Today, Mormons hardly have a united stance on how to address the problem of natural evil, but there are substantial resources to support various positions. We will explore some of these below.

(1) Extended free will defenses.

The first set of positions extend free will defenses (used to explain moral evils) to account for natural evils as well. For instance, a few Mormons have explained some natural evils as being caused by demonic forces, perhaps not prevented by God due to his honoring the free will of these agents, as Christian philosophers like Alvin Plantinga argue.[26] Plantinga does not see such forces as occasionally interrupting the flow of a good cosmos, but as having altered the laws of nature, producing a universe with the natural evils we now experience.[27] Perhaps a Mormon could adopt a similar position regarding uncreated malignant forces.

Second, a Mormon might account for natural evils as resulting from the imperfect creative endeavors of "the noble and great ones" who helped form the cosmos (Abr. 3:22–24).[28] Maybe the lesser beings' creative endeavors were permitted by God to honor their free will (on top of soul-building opportunities), so that natural evil is not the consequence of some beings' ill will as in the prior position, but a result of the imperfect, finite abilities of good-intentioned beings.

Third, instead of focusing on the potential natural evils arising from the free agency of advanced beings, a Mormon might adopt Brigham Young and Orson Pratt's panpsychism, and consider the natural evil that could come from the agency of chaotic matter. Just as some humans murder, so the elements could conceivably exercise real, though narrow, freedom to stray from God's

26. In early Mormonism, possessions and mental illnesses were accredited to the agency of evil spirits, and some Mormon thinkers broadened their destructive capacities. Tyler R. Moulton advocates that devils are "directly responsible for many of the events that occur in this fallen world *and that God would have it otherwise*." Tyler R. Moulton, "Divine Benevolence, Embodiment, and Salvation in the Teachings of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon" (Ph.D. diss., University of Nottingham, 1997), 39, 48. For Plantinga's discussion of the relationship between demonic agency and natural evils, see Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1974), 57–59.

27. Alvin, Plantinga, "Supralapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa,'" in *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil*, ed. Peter van Inwagen (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 16 fn. 26.

28. See also Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–1956), 1:74–75; Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–1972), 3:194.

will, resulting in hurricanes, plagues, and other disasters.[29] God then is exercising his coercive and persuasive power to rid these evils from the cosmos. This position bears obvious resemblance to Griffin's own panexperientialism.

Finally, a Mormon who rejects panpsychism could nonetheless argue that God values the free expression of the cosmos, and so will not completely coerce nature. Natural evils may have come about as a result. While these extended free will defenses are logically possible, few Mormon thinkers grant these explanations due to both lack of empirical support and that Joseph's revelations and doctrines give little guidance in this area.

(2) Soul-building and divine tests.

A far more common argument is that all seemingly surd disasters contribute to soul-building by providing an environment with sufficient epistemic distance from God to encourage creaturely response and effort. Joseph Smith taught that one purpose of embodiment in this "fallen" environment is "to create sympathy for [our] fellowman."[30] John Hick adds, "The fact of an objective world within which one has to learn to live, on penalty of pain or death, is also basic to the development of our moral nature."[31]

Despite these advantages, a soul-building theodicy for natural evil has both evidential and conceptual challenges. It does not seem that all organisms that suffer from natural evils are able to develop virtues as a result of their suffering. Furthermore, it isn't clear how predation (that many organisms must eat one another to live) or the evolutionary process via natural selection are necessary for soul-building or epistemic distance from the divine. Moreover, even if they were necessary for such purposes, whether soul-building outweighs the cost of these evils' existence is unclear. Finally, soul-building is simply assumed to be a good without any justification. Mormons would benefit from doing more work to explain why it is so.

A similar, but distinct common Mormon teaching is that "life is a test." While at face value this appears to refer to soul-building, the test does not

29. While few Mormons consider or accept panpsychism, scripture and some church figures lend some support to the view. Hugh Nibley intimates that a Mormon creation account can be read this way in his April 1, 1980, address, "Before Adam," available online at http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=997. Brigham Young suggests something akin to panpsychism in Brigham Young, March 23, 1856, *Journal of Discourses*, 3:277. Orson Pratt's views are espoused in "The Great First Cause" in *The Essential Orson Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1991), 8–13.

30. Andrew F. Ehat and Lindon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, 1980), 68.

31. John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), xxvi.

have to be about growth, but rather "passing" whatever obstacles are included in the opt-in test laid out by God. For Mormons, earth life prepares humanity to receive God's glory (Abr. 3:25–26), and some natural evils may, like Richard Swinburne suggests, provide creatures (including non-humans) with a choice to endure with patience or frustrated exasperation.[32] Even the hermit, who avoids all encounters with others to avoid moral evil, can find opportunity to prove himself and his goodness to God by how he responds to natural evil. But what could be the purpose of such a test that could make natural evils in it justifiable? It seems that the test would have to provide some kind of "sorting mechanism" that shows God who is worthy of receiving greater influence. Even if God wanted to pass on all of his glory onto others, his resources might be limited, so that he needs the test to create a sequential order. While a test theodicy might be employed in such ways, there is little scriptural evidence that a test was needed to accomplish such goals.

(3) Swinburne's epistemic argument.

Richard Swinburne has argued that only by natural evil can humans inductively learn why certain acts are immoral (they produce unfavorable, painful outcomes), and thus how to commit them.[33] A popular Mormon belief is that by coming to earth humans get to learn by their own experience the good from the evil, echoing Swinburne's position to an extent. While initially plausible, this epistemic justification cannot account for the qualitative and quantitative amounts of extant natural evils. One can learn to harm another person through simple incidents like squeezing too hard during a hug; it is not necessary for a rock to fall and strike the head of one's comrade during an earthquake to learn how to murder. While admittedly the squeezing incident includes natural evils, it does not seem like evils such as predation or evolution via natural selection are requisite to gain the moral knowledge. So at most Swinburne's argument shows that some natural evils are needed, and it may not even prove this. It might be possible to receive this knowledge without induction (through instinct, intuition, or divine revelation), so that this line of argumentation fails altogether.

(4) Natural evil as a double effect of creating mortal sentient life.

A plausible, but relatively unexplored possibility, is that natural evils are part of the earth's processes and are necessary to provide a habitat for advanced

32. Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 162.

33. Richard Swinburne, "Natural Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (1978): 295–301.

sentient life. This thesis is explored in works on the "anthropic principle."[34] Since Joseph Smith taught God operates within a set of eternal laws, maybe God cannot create human life without natural evils arising as a double effect.

Nonetheless, since Smith taught that human spirits existed before mortality and will exist afterwards in environments free from the natural evils of this world, maybe this cosmological explanation fails. Still, a Mormon could respond that (1) maybe natural evil exists in all these realms;[35] (2) the current natural order is a necessary step for the creation of the next; or (3) while God could create a natural order even now without horrendous natural evils in it, he could not create a world that possessed the elements necessary for the soul-building of creatures that did not also entail the existence of some natural evils that challenge that very purpose as a double effect. While (1) would likely be rejected, (2) and (3) provide possible avenues of thought, which even if they lack empirical support, may be more appealing than the alternatives. For if there were other options in organizing the world, Mormons would still, as pointed out by Nick Trakakis, need to explain why God chose to create the world with predation or through a cruel evolutionary process.[36] A sufficient reason would need to be offered for why excluding these evils would compromise God's plan or preclude some greater good.

The above considerations show how Mormons can provide a variety of explanations for natural evil, which will vary in explanatory power and persuasiveness depending on the audience. On the whole, they show that Smith's revelations and teachings do not deny "hardcore, commonsense notions" of moral or natural evil, and that Griffin's charges against traditional theodicies cannot be levied against Smith's theism, owing largely to similarities between their views.[37]

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34. See Peter D. Ward and Donald Brownlee, *Rare Earth: Why Complex Life is Uncommon in the Universe* (New York: Copernicus, 2003).

35. To make this position more appealing, it could be admitted that the sorts of entities human spirits were in the pre-existence were those that could not be negatively influenced or affected by the same processes producing natural evils in the world here. So while existent, they were superfluous. The process of getting a mortal body "exposes" one to them, while the eschaton brings one to another state not being affected by them, even though they remain existent.

36. See Nick Trakakis, "Is Theism Capable of Accounting for any Natural Evil at All?" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 57, no. 1 (2005): 38–39. For a Mormon treatment of the question of natural evil and evolution, see Stephen L. Peck, "Crawling Out of the Primordial Soup: A Step toward the Emergence of an LDS Theology Compatible with Organic Evolution," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 43, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 22–26.

37. Some Mormon thinkers further absolve God from complicity in the world's evils by denying exhaustive, specific divine foreknowledge. B. H. Roberts took the

DIFFICULTIES FOR MORMONISM AND GRIFFIN'S PROCESS THEISM

Both Griffin's process theodicy and Mormon theodicies provide novel and compelling answers to the problem of evil. Nonetheless, their accounts still have their own challenges, some of which we will explore below.

(1) Relevance and worship-worthiness.

Finitist theodicies have the challenge of steering themselves safely between two obstacles. In their effort to make God innocent of the universe's evils, they sacrifice his power, and thus run the risk of making the divine irrelevant for man to consult in prayer or consider for day-to-day needs. Such a move can trivialize God, making him vanish to a mere ideal, so that he wishes well for the world, but can do little for it. To avoid this problem, the finitist can ascribe more power to God, but then he may fall victim to the same critiques he makes of traditional theodicies.

Griffin's process theism has definitely been charged with succumbing to the first problem. Despite its obvious explanatory strengths, mainstream Christian theologians have resisted Griffin's position, arguing that it imposes unacceptable constraints on divine power. John Hick calls Griffin's idea of God "metaphysically unsatisfying". John Roth is more severe, calling "a God of such weakness . . . pathetic". Stephen Davis wonders whether a sick person could "rationally pray to such a being for healing". These and others express doubts about the process God's ability to aid in everyday problems, redeem the world, or ultimately overcome evil. Davis summarizes the general discontent: "Griffin's God is nowhere near powerful enough to merit worship." [38]

Indeed, according to Griffin, God could not have prevented the Holocaust, cannot guarantee against a future one, and cannot single-handedly stop a theft at the local grocery store. However, Griffin feels his position has at least a practical advantage: knowing that we "cannot count on a supernatural divine intervention to save us from our foolish ways" *might* convince us to act more responsibly.[39]

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position that God's omniscience entails his knowing all that can be known, although some things have yet to be determined. Roberts, *Seventy's Course in Theology*, 70. Griffin's position is very similar to this in his distinction between God's concrete knowledge and his "abstract attribute of omniscience." Griffin, *Reenchantment*, 157–58. While God certainly foresees the possibility of man's immoral choices, he cannot know of their actuality until they are realized.

38. Stephen T. Davis, ed., *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 119, 122, 125, 127.

39. David Ray Griffin, *Evil Revisited: Responses and Reconsiderations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 4.

Besides the above complaints raised by Griffin's critics, it seems likely that humans possessing coercive power would struggle relating to and appreciating a being that lacks that kind of power. Why not turn to historical and contemporary human role models that have exercised coercive power responsibly as more applicable objects of worship than God?

While most critiques of Griffin's work focus around the first problem, he may not have avoided the second problem either. Griffin argues that if God had coercive power he should be exercising it to stop genuine evils wherever possible. However, it is questionable whether persuasive power can be strongly distinguished from coercive power, when it appears that persuasion presupposes coercion to an extent. To persuade another, one must have the ability to convey some level of information (in Griffin's process theism, the "divine aims") to another. The process God's persuasive power is far more extensive than a humans': he transmits his divine aims at every moment to every actual entity. To have convinced the universe's occasions to adopt ever more complicated patterns and adopt natural laws, God must be pretty persuasive. So even though actual entities can reject the divine aims, it isn't clear why God can't send persuasive warnings—even a consistent, and therefore reliable sense of "ominous doom"—for innocent people to avoid rapists or encroaching natural disasters. If the divine aims are too weak to do so, then Griffin's process theism becomes further guilty of the first problem of irrelevance, as well as seeming inconsistent in having God be so persuasive in his creative aims, but not in his ability to pass on even vague warnings. Additionally, it becomes difficult to credit God with significant moral worth he can accomplish so little; good and even creative outcomes seem more attributable to the actual entities themselves than God. More problems with Griffin's purely persuasive power will be explored in what follows.

Mormons have not, to our knowledge, been accused of presenting a God that is too weak or irrelevant. While this still may be a concern, they are far less guilty of such a charge as Griffin. However, they need to be more concerned about aligning too much with traditional theists: in ascribing such power to divine agency that God appears guilty for the existence of many of the world's evils. Indeed, a Mormon theodicy may be "more reasonable" than that of the traditional theists, and yet not be reasonable *enough*.

While Mormon teachings agree God is not omnipotent in the traditional sense, they still attribute to God some coercive power. Mormon teachings never deny that God has power to prevent many genuine evils. We believe God cannot prevent *all* genuine evil, as opposed to Griffin's doctrine that God cannot prevent *any*. Since Joseph Smith did not derive his notion of God's power from propositions or from a struggle to resolve the problem of evil, but from reflecting upon divine revelations and personal encounters with

God, the extent to which God's power is coercive remains open to question. Mormons generally understand God as portrayed in scripture and in their religious experience, as a being actively involved in accomplishing His purposes and theirs. God has proven capable of marvelously transforming the elements of the earth, affecting the human body and mind, and revealing His will to humanity. Mormons may hedge and reinterpret their doctrines to some extent, but they will not deny their collective religious experience—of revelations, miraculous healings, and divine deliverance—to square reality with formulated definitions of God's power. As such, Mormons must confront the question of why God allows many genuine evils to exist.

(2) God as an accessory to evil through creation.

The evils arising from this world's creation may make God an accessory to evil in both Griffin's and Mormon theodicies. Here is an area where Griffin acknowledges God does hold primary responsibility. God's creative acts, including the institution of natural laws at the beginning of each cosmic epoch, are done with almost full coercive power. Since God coaxes the world towards greater consciousness and complexity, God bears responsibility for the evils that result. Had God not created the present universe through this coaxing, no one would be capable of committing evil. At the very least God could have refrained from evolving human beings—"the causes and the victims of the most horrible forms of evil experienced on our planet."[40] To exonerate Griffin's theodicy from these charges, he must show that creation was worth the risk.

Griffin finds his exoneration in process theism's aesthetic theory of the good, in which good is understood as intense, complex harmonious experience. Moral wrongs and suffering are evil because they are discordant, leading to intense, unharmonious experiences, and God could have prevented such discord by choosing not to create. However, this would have caused another kind of evil, that of "unnecessary triviality," in which entities' experiences are less intensely harmonious than they could have been. God thus faced a choice between risking discord and causing triviality; in other words, God could create and risk bringing about Hitler or refrain from creation and guarantee there would never be a Jesus. Condemning God's decision to coax the universe toward complexity thus entails the claim that the intense harmonies resulting from complexity are not worth the possibility of discord. Given this trade-off, Griffin believes that his readers will largely agree that creation was worth the risk.[41]

40. Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 308.
41. Ibid., 309.

While this argument is persuasive, it may suffer from some shortcomings. First, as Thomas Graves has observed, the idolization of a Western aesthetic of creative complexity as God's standard of goodness is questionable in light of communities like the Shona people of Zimbabwe that do not value "creativity, individuality, or unique expression, but rather [value] . . . sameness and continuity."[42] The objectivity of creative complexity as a determinant of goodness must be firmly established.[43] Second, the concept of "unnecessary triviality" may suggest a point at which creative complexity is optimal, where further risk is unwarranted. Might such a point exist? If so, how do we know that God's coaxing has not already taken us past it?[44] Nonetheless, unnecessary triviality is a fair starting point in answering whether God should have created, and we commend Griffin's efforts.

Due to similarities between Griffin's and Mormon views, a Mormon could likewise argue for a variant of "unnecessary triviality": It is good for the universe to actualize its potential and experience "a fullness of joy." God through his creative endeavors can help the universe's intelligences to actualize that potential. If he does not create, he cannot further the development of the intelligences and they will forever remain less than they could be. LDS scripture lends some support to this view. Happiness arises from the development of moral righteousness in autonomous beings. Lehi, in the Book of Mormon based this moral autonomy on having alternative (or opposite) options (2 Ne. 2:11–13).

Since humanity (and all rational beings) exist "that [they] might have joy" (see 2 Ne. 2:25), Lehi apparently suggests: (1) There can be no joy without moral righteousness; (2) there can be no moral righteousness without significant moral freedom; (3) there can be no moral freedom without a choice

42. Thomas H. Graves, "A Critique of Process Theodicy from and African Perspective," *Process Studies* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1988): 106.

43. Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 282.

44. Furthermore, how "unnecessary triviality" provides a full solution to the problem of creation is unclear. While it may explain why one would create from chaos, it does not explain why one would develop *this kind of world*, or institute the sorts of natural laws that God does in any given cosmic epoch. Griffin still must explain why God has and continues to lure the universe in *this* direction, and not in another that would avoid both "unnecessary triviality" and surd evils. Why must intelligent creatures suffer pain as intensely as some do now if only for the possibility of creative intensity? If this is logically (or metaphysically) necessary for creative flourishing, Griffin must show us how this is so in all possible worlds God can lure into existence. Until then, we are left with questions regarding the aims and uses of God's persuasive power. If, in reply, one argues that we cannot know God's aim or uses of power because many occasions reject them, the epistemic hurdle should not lead us to conclude that God is good, but rather that God might be good.

between alternative consequences. So if God did not allow the possibility of genuine evil, God would also preclude the actuality of genuine good, thus eliminating the possibility for creaturely joy (2 Ne. 2:25). Since human happiness depends on significant autonomy, this casts doubt on the claim that God should have created us with less complex bodies. Despite the merits of this Mormon variant of "unnecessary triviality" informed by revelation, it faces many of the same problems that Griffin's version does, in addition to its difficulty in justifying its revelatory claims.

However, Mormon "eternalism" starts with a far different set of beginning assumptions so that, unlike in Griffin's process theism, moral and natural evils would exist even if God had not created. Since many grant, based on Smith's teachings, that many intelligent agents have always existed, "evil did not begin with its appearance on our earth."[45] Good and evil are eternal possibilities that can be and are actualized in an eternally social universe. Since many beings affect the universe's environment, "in the beginning" the option for God was not "*a* cosmos versus *none*," but rather "*this* cosmos versus *that* one."

Nonetheless, one might argue that God could have avoided much of this world's evils had he not enabled humans to accomplish their evil designs so effectively. If God had fashioned human bodies with less-developed brains, for example, we would be cognitively incapable of the most evil crimes we commit. Mormons must therefore find justification for God's choice of endowing human beings with sophisticated abilities, especially when he must have known that we would frequently abuse them.

In response, it may depend on what situation was in place before this world's creation, and what better situations could likely result as a result of its creation. A lesser known and admittedly esoteric teaching of Smith was that this world was partly created to remove the plight of inferior intelligences who were suffering at the hands of malignant forces.[46] These intelligences wanted greater spheres of freedom and influence, so God proposed a plan by which they could progress in character, knowledge, and power, largely through gaining complex mortal bodies.[47] God explained the risks of this plan with its suffering, and the potential consequences of agency, yet this plan was accepted as good by all who come to earth. God prepared a Savior to insure that our efforts for improvement did not go to waste—in a minimal sense, things were guaranteed to be better than they had before. If Smith's teachings are taken seriously, God's creative act was not evil's genesis, but an attempt to remove evil already extant, including its existence in the immature

45. Roberts, *Truth, The Way, The Life*, 334.
46. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 67–68.
47. Ibid. Smith, *Teachings*, 354.

character of these pre-existent intelligences. Creating us with these complex bodies was part of that very effort.

(3) Inconsistent divine intervention.

Process and Mormon deities interact with the world in very different ways. In Griffin's process theism, God does not "intervene" in the world, but is part and parcel of the universe's fundamental processes. Furthermore, God is always doing as much as he can, persuading each actual entity with maximal effort to adopt the divine aims, so that both it and the divine mind can be enriched by the most intense, harmonious experiences. If God possessed more persuasive or coercive power, Griffin affirms that God should readily use it. Griffin's process theism does pose some problems for the notion of persuasive power, as noted above.[48]

However, Griffin's recently developed eschatology makes the issue of divine intervention problematic. While he downplays the importance of eschatology in *God, Power, and Evil*, consigning the entire issue to a three-page appendix, he later acknowledges that "a fully adequate theodicy requires an eschatology."[49] Like other process theists, he was aware that Whitehead and Hartshorne's process philosophy made life-after-bodily-death possible by rejecting mind-brain identism, but Griffin held out for empirical evidence to justify acceptance of it.[50] Drawing on psychosomatic and para-psychological research, Griffin suggests that, after death, human souls may "continue to exist indefinitely in new modes of existence, growing in wisdom, compassion, and sanctity, thereby overcoming the problems of injustice in the present life and enriching creaturely and divine life immensely."[51] Griffin even claims

48. There is an asymetrical relationship between God and other occasional entities that gives us pause. A dominant member or self emerges from complex occasional societies, and sentience has only arisen out of immensely complex biological organisms in process philosophy. With this dominant member in place, a sentient self can persuade its body to act coercively in the universe. Some questions arise in regards to the divine mind and its body, the universe, then: (1) How is it that the divine mind's own cognitive abilities are not affected/determined by the order of the universe like occasional entities? (2) How is it that the divine mind cannot persuade its members to obey its commands , as occasional entities do? Even if it could not act externally (as there is nothing external to the universe), bodies work on themselves internally as well. Simply put, it isn't clear why the divine isn't more persuasive or coercive given process metaphysics.

49. Griffin, *Evil Revisited*, 2. See also, Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 311–13.

50. David Ray Griffin, "Reconstructive Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 106.

51. Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism*, 246.

that life after death, conceived as a continuing journey, is critical for spiritual, religious communities.[52]

Recognizing that resurrecting bodies of flesh and bone might require supernatural intervention, Griffin insists on only the immediate resurrection of the soul at death. And he believes he can explain it naturalistically, as the result of evolutionary processes.[53] But despite this naturalistic explanation, Griffin maintains that God is a necessary partner in the soul's continued journey after death.

In developing his eschatology, Griffin discards the traditional notions of heaven and hell, and emphasizes that the life hereafter should not overshadow the importance of our life now.[54] He thus allows for the possibility of eventual universal salvation, without "divine violence . . . casting sinners into hell. God would, instead, love the hell out of us."[55] What awaits is "a continued journey, in relation to the Holy Reality of the universe, with fellow travelers."[56]

Despite his affirmation of the life hereafter, Griffin's eschatology remains problematic as it does not specify the duration of the afterlife. Given Griffin's belief in the continual waxing and waning of cosmic epochs wherein entities reduce to the simplest occasions, it is hard to imagine how souls—as complex occasional societies—could survive the end of a cosmic epoch. In this framework, can the next life be unending? If not, what guarantees that redemption from evil can be achieved before the end? Griffin's eschatology also complicates God's use of power. Should not the rapidly accumulating supply of post-mortal souls like Jesus Christ's be constantly persuaded by God to use their coercive agency to stop as many of the world's genuine evils as possible? Why then are not more prevented? Griffin's eschatology appears to have tried to solve one issue only to have created another.

In Mormon theology, God is more clearly an agent *within* the universe. Divine interventions often appear sporadic, as humans perceive God aiding in one situation and judge that he does not in others. While we do not believe there is an all-inclusive answer to this problem, in what follows we hope to sketch some general suggestions that, while individually insufficient, cumulatively provide a helpful response.

Metaphysical Limitations: Temporal and Eternal. If, as some Mormon leaders have taught and some process theists have thought, God increases in creativ-

52. Griffin, *Evil Revisited*, 36–39.

53. Griffin, *Two Great Truths*, 113.

54. David Ray Griffin, *God and Religion in the Postmodern World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 240.

55. Griffin, *Two Great Truths*, 113.

56. Griffin, *God and Religion*, 240.

ity, power, and knowledge, then there are actual limits to God's power, even if these limits are continually self-surpassed.[57] One consequence is that there might be evils that God cannot prevent. But even if God's power is limited, why are our human struggles beyond his control? God should at least be able to do what science and technology will achieve in the next several thousand years. If not, his status as worship-worthy is questionable.

Besides these temporal limitations on God's power, there may also be eternal metaphysical limits that explain some of God's varied involvement in the world. If, for instance, God must use natural means to intervene in the world, miracles may require meeting natural, spiritual, and moral conditions before God intervenes to stop or minimize evil. Since these conditions are sometimes not met, genuine evils occur.

Epistemic Limitations. If God is growing eternally in knowledge, some situations might be ambiguous. Therefore, God cannot know whether his intervention would frustrate his purposes, the moral law, or hinder actualizing a greater good. God's judgments in these scenarios could explain his erratic intervention.

Self Limitations. Earth life involves extensive epistemic and personal distance from God. Human beings are "cut off both temporally and spiritually from the presence of the Lord . . . [to] bec[o]me subjects to follow after their own will" in bringing about both genuine good and evil (Alma 42:7). We live without any guarantee of God's involvement in the world, free to discover and become who and what we want (Alma 29:5, Hel. 14:30). Thus we are also in a situation, as John Hick has noted, where God's presence is not overwhelmingly present, and where we can freely choose to enter into a loving relationship with God. As God only intervenes occasionally, one could interpret such events as either coincidences or religious experiences. If God intervened to stop all evils this epistemic distance would be destroyed, frustrating

57. Divine power might not also be constant. His intervention in one instance might preclude him from using his power in another as his power is restored. Given this, perhaps Dennis Potter's and John Jacques' suggestion that God could be overburdened with answering intelligences' needs and fulfilling his purposes may not be absolutely farfetched. Dennis Potter, "Finitism and the Problem of Evil," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 33 no. 4 (Winter 2000): 92. If this is the case, one might ask why did God expand his creation to the point where he cannot manage it? If resulting from his will, perhaps God expended his power enough for the creation of more life (and the potential for greater joy), but did so only to the point where he could guarantee there would be more good than evil in the world. Or perhaps one could argue that he is burdened by uncreated entities and realities (regardless of how complex), and so it was not his decision. Nonetheless, this line of reasoning is problematic since it may make God *too finite*.

the divine purpose for human agency. Full awareness of God's presence in the world would strongly incline many humans to do good, but for the wrong reasons. As Kant noted,

> Transgression of the law would no doubt be avoided, what is commanded would be done; but . . . most of the actions that conformed to the law would be done from fear, a few only from hope, and none at all from duty, and the moral worth of actions, on which alone in the eyes of supreme wisdom the worth of the person and even that of the world depends, would cease to exist.[58]

God's epistemic distance increases our capacity to follow our own wills, and thus choose who we will become.

Moral Limitations. Mormons believe moral reasons also explain God's varied involvement throughout history. God must participate less in worldly affairs to integrate patience, mercy, justice, persuasion, and love. This may lead Mormons to differ with Griffin in moral theory. While Griffin's description of how God should utilize his power appears to follow consequentialist reasoning, Mormons think God must not only act according to mercy and utility, but also according to justice and duty that are far more deontological concepts. And although some moral theories (specifically utilitarianism) view moral acts as always leading to desirable outcomes, this is at least controversial. Some immoral acts, or the persistence of such acts, may simply require punishing the perpetrator, such ideas called "retributivism" is "the prime philosophical underpinning of punishment in the Western World."[59]

Though Mormonism lacks a theory of justice, something akin to deontological retributivism may play a role.[60] In some cases, God might be morally obligated to permit or even inflict suffering in response to sin. He might face moral duties, like honoring human freedom, that prevent him from improving the world. Also, God might not be obligated to stop an evil because he has the power to, an important assumption for the soundness of the problem of evil. Virtue ethicists have explored how living the good life often includes investing in self-improvement instead of stopping evils extant in the world.[61] Second, evil might be a social responsibility. That is, no one being is or ought to be fully responsible for eliminating evil, but each individual is obligated

58. Cited by Eric Watkins, "Kant on the Hiddenness of God," in *Kant's Moral Metaphysics: God, Freedom, and Immortality*, ed. Benjamin Bruxvoort Lipscomb and James Krueger (New York: Gruyter, 2010), 258.

59. Mirko Bagaric and Kumar Amarasekara, "The Errors of Retributivism," *Melbourne University Law Review* 24, no 1 (2000): 44.

60. See Mosiah 3:26; Mosiah 15:27; Alma 42; D&C 82:4.

61. See Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," *The Journal of Philosophy* 79, no. 8 (Aug. 1982): 417–39.

to eliminate only some evil. Having fulfilled his obligation, God calls upon each of us to do to our part to bring about the ideal world. As such, his lack of intervention may summon the recognition that the ideal world is our duty too. This model also permits humans to see divine interventions not as actions universally required by a good being, but as supererogatory actions of divine grace.

Although we will not fully defend or articulate our above assertions here, we will note that Griffin's criticism of divine retribution theory fails against a Mormon theodicy (although we recognize it was not intended to criticize Mormons either).[62] Since Mormons deny creation *ex nihilo* and affirm necessary human freedom, humans, not God, are morally responsible for the sins of the world. Since God cannot override human freedom, his only other option, where persuasion does not work, is punishment. However, since immediate punishment would destroy an epistemic distance, God reserves punishment for after this earth life. Elder Dallin H. Oaks, a Mormon apostle, recently explained:

> Agency—our power to choose—is fundamental to the gospel plan that brings us to earth. God does not intervene to forestall the consequences of some persons' choices in order to protect the well-being of other persons—even when they kill, injure, or oppress one another—for this would destroy His plan for our eternal progress.[63]

Life is "a space for repentance," "a probationary state; a time [for humans] to prepare to meet God" and "prepare for eternity" (Alma 42:5, 12:24, 34:33). Not only is eliminating individual sinners not the general policy of the loving Christian God, doing so would neglect their personal development in their concrete historical and social situation. Removing individual persons does not solve the social problems that they—to some extent—instantiate, and it also precludes the good deeds these individuals might perform later in life. Moreover, only by means of free choices, including our free acceptance of Christ's atonement, do individuals change into powerful forces for good. Nonetheless, if we refuse to "improve our time while in this life," punishment will follow hereafter (Alma 34:35). Mormons believe a satisfactory retribution for evil will occur through human and divine efforts in the eschaton.

While Mormons would value Griffin's empirical analysis of life after death, they base their eschatology on revelation. Mormons recognize this life as a brief, but deeply significant interval in eternity. God lets us actualize our desires now, but God will also hold us accountable for them. After this life, God will judge our thoughts, deeds, and intents, and will then place us in en-

62. Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 63–65, 112.

63. Dallin H. Oaks, "Love and Law," *Ensign,* November 2009, 27.

vironments best suited to help us repent and progress in our individual paths toward self-actualization and creative perfection.[64] He hopes that through the eternities we will find joy and develop into the divine likeness, and united with our families, we will engage in divine work.[65]

LDS eschatology provides comfort to those who experience genuine evils. Mormons understand that "inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward" (D&C 58:28). This sentiment is expressed in another revelation Smith received while unjustly incarcerated: "My son," he was told, "peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; and then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high" (D&C 121:7, 8). Smith taught, "All your losses will be made up to you in the resurrection."[66] Such an optimistic prospect hinges on the atonement of Jesus Christ.

For Mormons, the end result encourages us to endure in our hardships. Christ has literally "overcome the world" and stands victorious over sin, death, and infirmity (John 16:33). His personal victory over evil and suffering serves as a powerful example to anyone striving to achieve the same. Orson F. Whitney wrote that our Heavenly Parents progressed from a moral to a divine state and their offspring are capable of the same development: "by expansion and development, . . . our eternal Parents [advanced] from manhood and womanhood to Godhood, and are capable in similar manner upon the same conditions, of raising their offspring to a like lofty level" and so Mormons gain strength and meaning in adversity, knowing that through it they can become like God.[67]

This eschatology helps explain why God does not always intervene to prevent genuine *moral* evils. The experience of this life, with all of its attendant suffering and tribulation, is an indispensable step toward humanity's highest possibility—deification. The Lord revealed to Brigham Young that humans "must be tried in all things, that they may be prepared to receive the glory that [God has] for them" (D&C 136:31). While we deny that each

64. According to Mormon theology, nearly all souls through Christ's atonement will inherit a kingdom of glory corresponding to their level of progression. The opportunity for repentance and progression extends into the hereafter.

65. Mormons place great emphasis on the eternal nature of the marriage covenant and anticipate the opportunity to live eternally with family members (D&C 130:2).

66. Smith, *Teachings*, 296. That God will make up our losses need not mean that our evils will become goods, but rather He will notice our suffering and try to bolster us with compensatory enriching experiences.

67. Orson F. Whitney, "What is Education?" *The Contributor* 6, no. 9 (June 19, 1885). According to Mormon theology, nearly all souls through Christ's atonement will inherit a kingdom of glory corresponding to their level of progression. The opportunity for repentance and progression extends into the hereafter.

particular genuine evil directly brings about a greater good, genuine evil is necessary for soul-making. While only some evils can bring about a greater good, all evils can accomplish some good. In a revelation given at a time of intense religious persecution, the Lord told Joseph Smith that "all these [adversities] shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good" (D&C 122:7). The Lord does not specify whether this good would be seen during mortality or in post-mortal progression, but where the former is not realized we deduce the latter is. This helps explain why God does not intervene to prevent all evils that appear genuine, and suggests that in eternity genuine evils may be rarer in a Mormon view than in Griffin's.

With these metaphysical, epistemic, self, and moral limitations in mind, in conjunction with God's divine purposes and preparations for us in eternity, Mormons can reasonably believe that God is a righteous, caring Parent who yet does not stop many instances of genuine evil. While God's power is limited by these considerations, this does not devalue petitionary prayers. Such acts remain meaningful in communicating our sorrows to God and freely soliciting His intervention in our lives. Instead of seeing divine intercession as a necessity for God's goodness, Mormons see many divine acts as gracious, supererogatory tokens of God's love for us. However, God has stipulated that our prayers are vain "if ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart [not] of your substance" (Alma 34:28). We hope that these considerations differentiate the Mormon conception of divine power from Griffin's, while providing a sufficient answer to God's application of his power for the problem of evil.

CONCLUSION

Griffin offers striking indictments of theodicies, and presents a new vision of God that enables him to develop a theodicy that avoids many of the downfalls of traditional theism. Mormon theodicies based on Joseph Smith's teachings and revelations also appear innocent of these charges. By affirming that matter, metaphysical principles, moral laws, and a plurality of agents are uncreated facts of the universe, Mormonism denies the traditional definition of divine omnipotence, allowing Mormons to consistently absolve God of complicity in the existence of genuine evil. While natural evil requires a more sophisticated response, there are resources available to articulate a persuasive position. Differences set aside, both Griffin's process theism and the untraditional theological frameworks laid by Smith persuasively remove much tension between the co-existence of God and genuine evil.

Despite the appeals of process and Mormon theodicies, they are not free of challenges. Besides the possibility that the finite deities they present may not be relevant and worship-worthy, both struggle to varying extents to ex-

plain God's responsibility for evil as a by-product of creative activity and the lack of divine intervention in the world. While some groundwork for a response has been laid here in exploring several potential limitations on divine activity, at least from a Mormon perspective, there is more work to do to adequately absolve God from blame for all genuine evils.

Going forward, both Mormon and process thinkers could benefit from a better understanding of God's relationship to natural laws, a clearer distinction between persuasive and coercive power, as well as engaging in meta-ethics to ground their theories of evil and morality. Indeed, we cannot adequately justify or condemn God if we cannot explain just how he is immoral; to properly address the problem of evil we must comprehend the nature of evil if even in a negative sense. And even more importantly, Mormons and process thinkers should make sure that the problem of evil does not become solely an intellectual puzzle. Primarily, they should strive with God and one another to eliminate genuine evils from the world with whatever powers they possess.

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Mormonism and the Challenge of an Adequate Theodicy: A Response to David Paulsen, et al.

by Brian D. Birch

INTRODUCTION

In his classic movie Love and Death, Woody Allen ends the film with the musings of his main character Boris, who declares that "[i]f it turns out that there is a God, I don't think he's evil—I think the worst you can say of him is that basically he's an underachiever." The accusation of an underachieving God has frequently been made of both process and Latter-day Saint responses to the problem of evil.[1] As influential voices from their respective traditions, Griffin and Paulsen both affirm the limited power of God in the face of the horrendous evils that attend human experience. David Hume expresses the uneasiness of this idea in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion,* where he states (through the character of Philo) that, given our experience, we could be led to the theologically absurd idea that this world "was only the first rude essay of some infant deity, who afterwards abandoned it, ashamed of his lame performance."[2]

The proposition of a limited God, however, is strengthened by the unceasing struggle of classical theism to reconcile a robust account of divine providence with the existence of torture, rape, murder, and other injustices

1. Paulsen references the discussion in *Encountering Evil*, wherein John Roth states of Griffin's theodicy that "a God of such weakness, no matter how much such a God tries to persuade, is rather pathetic." *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, ed. Stephen T. Davis (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press), 128.

2. David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1947), 169.

that human beings have heaped on one another since the beginning of the human drama. For both Griffin and Paulsen, it is theologically and morally preferable to understand God as limited rather than indicted in relation to the world's evils. As Susan Neiman puts it in *Evil in Modern Thought*, if God is "a large and long-living parent, well-meaning but bounded, it does less violence to our intuitions than do other options. It may be hard to acknowledge God's limits, but it's less frightening than denying his goodwill."[3]

In comparing the literature of process theology with that of the Latter-day Saints, one finds other substantial points of agreement in their criticisms of the classical theological picture. Notable among these is their shared rejection of creation *ex nihilo,* divine impassibility, immutability, and the traditional understanding of divine omnipotence. Both reject the idea that human beings are ontologically distinct from God, and thus offer the theological world alternative understandings of divine transcendence, human creatureliness, and free will that challenges the classical understanding of God.

ANALYSIS

So how does process theology ultimately square with LDS thought? In some ways, of course, it appears to be very much like the God described in Mormon discourse, a being who lures human beings toward him through persuasion and patience without interfering in their genuine freedom to choose their courses of action. Hence, moral evil in LDS and process thought is often described as the necessary consequence of genuine freedom and self-determination. However, important features of Paulsen's account appear closer to other well-known theodicies, including the interactive approach to divine relationality found in open theism and the virtue-building emphasis of soul-making theodicies. Taking into account the other writings of Paulsen on the problem of evil, the best way to characterize his overall position would be to call it a hybrid theodicy in its attempt to integrate components from prevalent positions into a cohesive account that is consistent with LDS scripture and teaching.[4]

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3. Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 20. This quote is given in Neiman's description of Pierre Bayle's remark that Manichaeism appears reasonable given the "mixture of happiness and suffering, wickedness and virtue."

4. Paulsen deals with these theodicies at greater length in "Sin, Suffering, and Soul-Making: Joseph Smith and the Problem of Evil," with Blake T. Ostler, in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of Truman G. Madsen*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002), 237–84; and in "Joseph Smith and the Problem of Evil" *BYU Studies* 39:1 (2000), 53–65.

As a leading voice in contemporary LDS thought, David Paulsen is perhaps the best suited to articulate his tradition's perspective on key theological questions. In characteristic fashion, "Searching for an Adequate Theodicy" is skillfully argued and thus helpful in illuminating points of contact and divergence between Latter-day Saint and process cosmology. His description, for example, of Mormonism's "expansive eschatology" in relation to Griffin's position is especially effective in showing the strength Latter-day Saint theology on this point.

In this brief response, however, I will focus my remarks on two related issues that go to the differences between Mormon and process theodicies, namely divine power and scriptural hermeneutics. For reasons that will become clear below, I believe Paulsen's article could have benefited from a wider accounting of the Latter-day Saint tradition in his comparative analysis. The features he omits or glosses over are vital points of divergence between process and Mormon thought and thus doubt can be cast on seemingly close affinities between these two approaches.

A well-known aspect of process theology is the distinction between coercive and persuasive power. As a form of "naturalistic theism," process theologians reject the idea of God as a metaphysically sovereign being who may intervene at will in the natural order or in human affairs. Rather, they understand God as possessing only *persuasive* power over the creation in the attempt to lure human beings and other creatures toward goodness and truth. Well-known rival theodicies, in the attempt to preserve both traditional omnipotence *and* moral perfection, have maintained that, though God possesses the power to coercively intervene, he refrains due to *self-limitation*. In these accounts, God's restraint is primarily to preserve human freedom, a necessary condition for the cultivation of "reciprocal fellowship with God." Self-limitation is the free choice of an otherwise able god in the interest of maintaining a relationship of responsive love, which is said to be the *raison d'etre* of creation. Hence, on this view, "God cannot prevent all the evil in the world and still maintain the conditions of fellowship intended by his overarching purpose in creation."[5]

5. John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downer's Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 259. Divine self-limitation has taken a variety of theological forms, notable of which is the soul-making theodicy of John Hick and the theological family known as open theism. See John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, revised edition, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977); "An Irenaean Theodicy," in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, Stephen T. Davis, ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 38–72. Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Baker Academic, 2001). Open theism distinguishes itself from well-known free will defenses by arguing that libertarian free will is *instrumental* to the kind of relationship God intends rather than being *intrinsically* necessary in any possible world in which there is freedom (See *The God Who Risks*, 258).

Griffin argues in response that "God does not refrain from controlling the creatures simply because it is better for God to use persuasion, but because it is necessarily the case that God cannot completely control the creatures."[6] This is due to the inherent creative freedom humans possess by virtue of the beings they are. It is not a contingent fact that human beings possess freedom, self-determination, and the capacity for evil, but a metaphysical reality. For Griffin, a god who *could* intervene coercively to avoid horrific evils and *does not* is morally deficient and hence not worthy of worship. John Cobb concurs: "If God could have stopped the Holocaust and failed to do so in order to honor the freedom of the Nazis, we find God's judgment highly questionable."[7] As the debate between open theism and process theology shows, the distinction between these two conceptions of divine power is crucial to understanding the theodicies that follow from them. Choosing between them has profound theological and ethical implications for how we understand both God and evil. It is certainly crucial for Griffin in articulating his theodicy.

Now an important question for Paulsen is this: which form of divine persuasion is ultimately *determinative* in his account of evil in the world? It is not clear from his presentation how metaphysical limitation and divine self-limitation play themselves out in his theodicy. Paulsen certainly wants to emphasize the metaphysical limitations on divine power stating that LDS scripture and teachings "may well imply agreement with Griffin that God must work with the universe in ways consistent with the uncreated metaphysical principles that govern it." This is said to apply to both the natural world and human agency. However, there is at least one feature of his account that demonstrates ambiguity on this point, namely his discussion of miracles. While he acknowledges that metaphysical constraint "may seem difficult to square with the firm belief of Mormons in miracles," his response to this issue is puzzling. In his appeal to miracles as "naturalistic events," he maintains that the problem is "resolved" because "God performs miracles *through*, rather than *in spite of*, natural law. His mastery over natural law is such that he can use it to do things that defy human understanding" (emphasis added). On the basis of this point, he makes a further statement: "Recall that Griffin's 'naturalistic theism' entailed a similar position, that God cannot intervene in the natural causal processes of the universe. Given their own naturalism, Mormons would be less astonished than most Christians by Griffin's claims; indeed, many would heartily agree with him."

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6. David Griffin, *God, Power, Evil: A Process Theodicy* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 276.

7. "Ask Dr. Cobb," Process and Faith, February, 2001, *www.processandfaith.org/askcobb*

But one may raise the objection that, rather than resolving anything, the appeal to naturalistic miracles actually makes the gulf between Griffin's and Paulsen's account all the more acute and sidesteps the primary questions related to the realities of moral and natural evil. The fundamental issue for theodicy is not whether God uses natural or supernatural means to part the Red Sea or to harden the Pharoah's heart, but rather with the ability, frequency, and relative application of said interventions.[8] The fact that God *can* intervene via miracles (naturalistic or otherwise) takes us back to the original questions as to when and why he intervenes in some cases and not others. This question does not apply to Griffin's theodicy because, as we have seen, God *cannot* miraculously intervene in the way Latter-day Saints believe. Almost all Mormons of whom I am aware would indeed be astonished by Griffin's assertion that "[t]here can be no 'miracles' as traditionally defined, namely, events that are produced by God's interruption of the normal causal relations among finite entities."[9] If there have been, and continue to be, such miracles, their distribution remains a live question in Mormon theodicy in a way that it is not for process theology, and this difference is momentous.

Furthermore, process theologians, in the effort to argue consistently for a persuasive understanding of divine power, either reject or demythologize the biblical narratives that involve seemingly coercive intervention. Mormonism, on the other hand, continues to retain a robust sense of scriptural literalism that precludes this kind of hermeneutic. A notable example is the volume published by Brigham Young University entitled *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures*, which was undertaken largely as a response to recent work in Mormon studies that calls into question the literal historicity of scriptural narrative. This perspective is captured in Daniel Petersen's description of the Book of Mormon "as an authentic record of a real God's genuine interventions and self-disclosures in literal history."[10] If this is the prevailing LDS approach, then from the Mormon perspective God possesses the kind of power that process theologians reject on the basis of rational inconsistency and moral intuition. Furthermore, the price of reinterpreting LDS scripture and history to align with a *merely* persuasive God cannot be consistently maintained without shaking the foundations of the Mormon worldview. The interven-

8. See Exodus 14:4, 21.

9. David Ray Griffin, *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 137. See also James A. Keller, "The Power of God and Miracles in Process Theism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63, no. 1 (Spring, 1995), 118.

10. Daniel C. Peterson, "Notes on Historicity and Inerrancy" in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001), 211.

tionism of God is in fact one of the distinctive features of Mormonism. That God has acted coercively in history and nature, and with relative frequency, is part and parcel with the LDS concept of divine/human relations.

A related point has to do with the interactive nature of God in petitionary prayer. Like many other Christians, Latter-day Saints interpret their experiences in terms of responsive interventions of God in the course of their individual lives. In fact, narratives of divine intervention are pervasive in LDS literature and testimonials, many of which are viewed as God directly acting to prevent harm or enact some positive end.[11] So in response to Stephen Davis' question as to whether a person can rationally pray for healing, the answer as manifested in Latter-day Saint devotional practice is enthusiastically affirmative. Hence, if one accepts both the past narratives and lived experiences of the LDS faithful, God indeed possesses the power to directly alter the forces of nature, to prompt his children avoid impending harm, and to affect the course of human societies. In his essay, "Joseph Smith and the Problem of Evil," Paulsen references the tragedy of five Utah children who, while playing hide-and-seek, suffocated in the trunk of an automobile while neighbors circled around the car in a frantic search.[12] He raises this example and others to demonstrate the depth of the challenge that human suffering presents for believers. However, if one accepts the idea of a merely persuasive God, one has to accept the implications of this position, namely that God does not have the power to forcefully direct the children's parents or neighbors to look in the trunk of the car. Paulsen's position seems to imply that God is powerless in these cases to impose himself on the contingencies of human life. But one can question whether Latter-day Saints are prepared to say that God is constrained such that he *cannot* intervene in cases such as this.

In fairness, there are narratives in LDS scripture that do indeed suggest that God is powerless in the face of free choices of a sinful people. Among the most well-known is the story referenced by Paulsen of the weeping God, who observes the wickedness of his children and does not intervene because "in the day I created them; and in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency"

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11. Some of these narratives imply indirect causation, while others clearly involve God as the proximate or material cause of events in an otherwise natural order. For more on petitionary prayer in LDS thought, see Dennis Potter, "What Does God Write in His Franklin Planner: The Paradoxes of Providence, Prophecy, and Petitionary Prayer," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 37:2 (Summer, 2004): and Blake Ostler in his chapter entitled "Providence and Prayer" in *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Problems of Theism and the Love of God* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2006), 25–75.

12. David Paulsen, "Joseph Smith and the Problem of Evil," Brigham Young University Studies 39:1 (2000), 53–65.

(Moses 7:32). Other passages suggest, however, more meticulous providence and intervention. Though space does not permit a detailed analysis of these passages, I think it fair to say that LDS scripture is much like the Bible in its ability to support varying theologies of providence. Furthermore, Paulsen never goes so far as to say that God is metaphysically unable, *in all cases*, to intervene in the created order. He appears to hedge in this regard. But ambiguity on this point evades the crucial issue that distinguishes Griffin's process theodicy from rival conceptions, including the family of "hybrid free-will" approaches.

CONCLUSION

Although dialogue between process thought and Mormonism has proven valuable and instructive in the attempt to provide a theoretically coherent and adequate account of the relationship among God, humanity, and the cosmos, there is a substantial difference between the two in at least one very important respect. On a reasonable reading of LDS scripture, history, and personal narrative, the God of Mormonism can coercively intervene in human affairs to avoid evil and has done so with relative frequency. Why he has not in other cases leaves the problem of evil on the table as a profound mystery. In short, while Paulsen's theodicy may well avoid the brunt of Griffin's charges, I would argue that it does not resolve the problem of evil; it merely displaces some questions while bringing others into relief.

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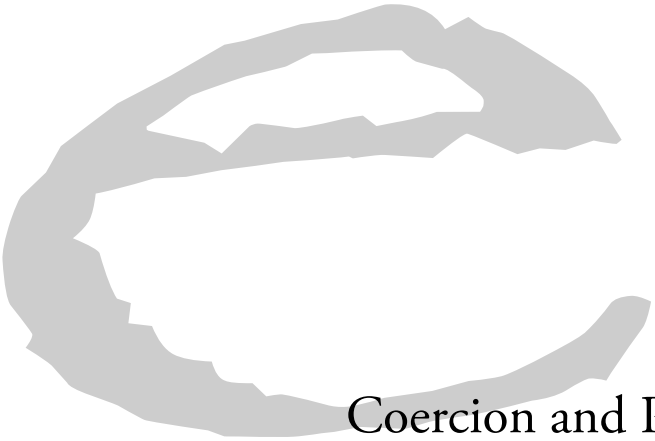

Coercion and Persuasion in Mormon and Process Theologies

by James M. McLachlan

Religion, as practiced and believed, is a messy and often even contradictory operation. Jean-Paul Sartre famously argued "man is a useless passion." Human beings want contradictory things. They want God and freedom. They even desire to be god. Sartre described God as the theologians had described him. God is pure Being, eternal, changeless, self-sufficient, perfect, as well as conscious and caring.[1] But a caring and conscious person is a relational and changing being—a being limited by other beings. The problem is we want both absolute changeless perfection and freedom relating to real others. This relates to the way we think about power. Theists, for Sartre, want to think of a God with the absolute coercive power of Divine omnipotence but even coercive power is interactive, God zaps the armies of Pharaoh in the Red Sea because they followed the children of Israel. If we want to say that the beings God coerces are really free we have set limitations to God's omnipotence otherwise God is simply the author of a script playing out on God's stage. There are no independent others. Process thinkers like Charles Hartshorne and Nicolas Berdyaev both realized that Sartre's problem with God existed in part because he only could think of God in traditionally theistic terms.[2] It is an indication of the concrete character of Whitehead's metaphysics that he recognized this situation.

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1. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, l956), 754.

2. Nicolas Berdyaev, "Sartre and the Future of Existentialism," in *Toward a New Epoch* (London: Geofrey Bles, 1949), 95–105; Charles Hartshorne, *Insights and*

In *Process and Reality* there are some dichotomies that remain in tension. Whitehead writes, "one side makes process ultimate; the other side makes facts ultimate."[3] The tension here is that reality lies between determination and fact on one side and process, flux, and creativity on the other. Toward the end of *Process and Reality* he concludes, "In our cosmological construction we are, therefore, left with the final opposites, joy and sorrow, good and evil, disjunction and conjunction—that is to say, the many in one—flux and permanence, greatness and triviality, freedom and necessity, God and the world."[4] Similarly, religious people—and Mormons are no exception—are left with such tensions. We want real freedom and an open future; we also want a world where everything happens for a reason and where God guarantees that everything—really everything—is taken care of and will end with evil defeated in a proper, "happily ever after" way. Freedom, creativity, and an open future are the attractions of Process Theology with its doctrine of God's non-coercive persuasive power. On the other hand, the God of miracles and power tends to be coercive at least to the natural world if not the human heart. Thus, the completely non-coercive pole of process thought makes Mormons leery.

The problem in scriptural traditions of the West, whether Jewish, traditional Christian, Moslem, or LDS, is that God is presented sometimes as coercive and sometimes as non-coercive. In the biblical tradition, for example, depending on the writer and sometimes the moment, God is presented as either knowing the future completely or not knowing what will be done. Similarly, he can invite repentance and know if we will repent, demand that Pharaoh let the people go and then hardening his heart so that he will not (Ex. 10:1, 20), or call for Israel to repent but make their ears heavy and their hearts fat (Isa. 6:9–10).

In the introduction to his classic text on process theodicy, *God, Power, and Evil,* David Ray Griffin noted the difficulty of arguing about divine foreknowledge and power using the scriptural tradition.[5] It should be no surprise that these tensions also exist in the LDS tradition. Although Joseph Smith altered the story of God hardening Pharaoh's heart in his "Inspired Translation" of the King James Bible to Pharaoh instead hardening his own heart, there are

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Oversights of the Great Thinkers: An Evaluation of Western Philosophy (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983).

3. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald Sherbourne (Detroit: Free Press, 1999), 139.

4. *Ibid.,* 341.

5. Of the scriptural tradition, Griffin says, "It can be cited by defenders of absolute divine determinism as well as advocates of creaturely freedom vis-à-vis God. The passages that are relevant to the topic are legion." David Ray Griffin. *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 31.

still many instances where God's coercive power is manifested.[6] In the Book of Mormon, for example, there are stories of an angel appearing to two wicked brothers, Laman and Lemuel, to bring them to obeying their righteous brother, Nephi (1 Ne. 3:28–30). Later in the story, in response to his prayer, the bands with which his brother's had bound him are miraculously loosened (6:18). Elsewhere there are miracles, healing, prison walls falling down, and, perhaps most dramatically, the destruction of the wicked Nephite and Lamanite populations at the time of Jesus's crucifixion. However, it is significant, going back to Smith's correction of Exodus, that whatever coercive power God does possess in Mormon scripture, it is never coercive over the human heart. In fact it is claimed that were God to exercise such power "God would cease to be God" (Alma 42:13). In the descriptions of the conflict in heaven where all humanity had to choose whether to follow persuasion and God or coercion and Satan, it is shown that coercion is the ultimate form of evil (Moses 3:1–4).

The experiences of the raw external power of God in the Book of Mormon and Smith's version of the Bible might frighten Pharaoh, Laman, Lemuel, and others, but their hearts remain hardened. Whether or not their hearts are to remain hardened is a choice left up to them. For example, in one Book of Mormon account, the anti-Christ Korihor is struck dumb by the power of God but his heart remains unchanged; in another account, Alma the Younger, an enemy of God, is visited by an angel but seizes upon the experience to change his own heart after much mental and spiritual anguish. Thus it seems God cannot exercise the same coercive power over the inner character of persons that God seems to have over aggregate entities like rocks and rivers. However, these manifestations of power seem arbitrarily placed. A significant point in discussions of theodicy is not simply whether God can coerce the human heart, rather it is why God doesn't intervene to prevent horrendous evils from occurring?

In his afterword to Zvi Kolitz's *Yosl Rakover Talks to God*, Emmanuel Levinas says that the Holocaust exposed the refusal of God to intervene in history. This refusal denounces the magician God of idolatry, the God of

6. Joseph Smith endeavored a rereading or "translation" of the King James Version of the Bible on which he worked for years and never completed. Smith softened passages like Isaiah 6:9 to read; "And he said, Go, and tell this people. Hear ye indeed but *they* understand not, and see ye indeed, but *they* perceive*d* not." Notice that the addition of the "they" and the change for "perceive" to the past tense places the responsibility for action on the human subjects. They refuse to hear or perceive because the hardness of their hearts. *Joseph Smith's "New Translation" of the Bible* (Independence, Mo.: Herald House Publishing, 1970), 123, 198.

imperial power.[7] Rabbi Irving Greenburg puts it even more starkly: "No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of burning children."[8] Griffin cites Richard Rubenstein's declaration in *After Auschwitz* that "no Jew, and by implication no morally sensitive person, should believe in the God who determines the course of history."[9]

Whitehead renounces the God of imperial power in favor of the God of persuasion. For him, the history of Christianity constitutes a tragic failure precisely because Christian theology apostatized from its Galilean origins. This came from worshiping God's power more than God's goodness, preferring God as emperor rather than Christ. Christian theology, as valuable as it is and has been for the growth of Western civilization, has conceived God as a coercive power, the Monarch of the Universe. In *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead calls for a return to the original intuitions of Christianity were much nearer to persuasion.[10]

Christian writers often critique the non-coercive nature of the process god. Process theodicy may clear God of complicity in the suffering of sentient creatures culminating in obscenities like the Holocaust, but traditional theists like Stephen Davis and John Roth argue that a God with only persuasive power is too weak to triumph over suffering and evil. The process God "may not be worthy of worship." They believe that a more robust power is demanded: one that can intervene powerfully in human history.[11]

David Paulsen claims that the eschatological hope of life after death is the key difference between Mormon and process theodicies. Paulsen cites a passage from the Pearl of Great Price to indicate that God's purpose is "to bring to pass [human] immortality and eternal life" (Moses 1:39). In contrast to almost all process thinkers Mormonism is inescapably anthropomorphic and

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7. Emmanuel Levinas, "Loving the Torah More Than God," in Zvi Kolitz, *Yosl Rakover Talks to God* (New York: Pantheon, 1999), 81.

8. Irving Greenburg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity After the Holocaust," in *Holocaust: Religious and Philosophical Implications*, ed. John K. Roth and Michael Berenbaum (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1989), 315.

9. David Ray Griffin, "Creation Out of Nothing, Creation Out of Chaos, and the Problem of Evil," in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, ed. Stephen Davis (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001), 109.

10. In *Adventures of Ideas* Whitehead writes, "The nature of God was exempted from all the metaphysical categories which apply to the individual things in this temporal world. . . . He stood in the same relation to the whole World as early Egyptian or Mesopotamian kings stood to their subject populations." Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (Detroit: The Free Press, 1967), 169.

11. Stephen T. Davis, ed., *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 119, 122,125, 127.

anthropocentric. In fact Mormonism is far more anthropocentric than any process theologian would care to entertain.[12]

On the whole, process theologians have taken the position that in a universe as old and filled with such a variety of beings as ours, humans cannot claim center stage. Process thinkers have good reasons for moving away from an anthropocentrism that has been used to excuse the rape of the environment. In their view it is strange to think that the immortality and eternal life of human beings is the purpose of everything when the universe has existed eons without us. For Mormons, humans have always existed and participated in the creation of the world. The even more radical Mormon claim is that God is a glorified human being. On this point Mormons can learn from the process perspective. Mormons have the resources in their tradition to do so for LDS scriptures proclaim that the earth has a spirit and suffers (Moses 7:48–49), and that all beings will be resurrected: "all things shall become new, even the heaven and the earth, and all fullness thereof, both men and beasts, the fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea" (D&C 19:24–25).

Paulsen claims a more robust character of Mormon theology on the basis that LDS scriptures support an instrumentalist view of evil that sees the world as a vale of soul making.[13] The problem with this claim is that the Mormon conception of salvation only covers a tiny portion of the sentient beings that have inhabited this world, suffered and died, since the beginning. It says nothing about the suffering of beings who seem to gain little from their brief experience here, or for the billions of human lives that have endured a nasty, brutish, and short existence. Paulsen could respond to my objection by saying that in Mormon doctrine all beings must obtain a body to move on to the next step in existence. It may be that beings have done what they must in obtaining that body. This, however, does not explain why some suffer so intensely while others do not or why the distribution of suffering is so grossly inequitable. No vale of soul making argument can explain the useless suffering of the billions and billions of non-human creatures who have inhabited this world. Surely it cannot be that the suffering of these beings has an instrumental justification. It doesn't seem to render them more compassionate. And

12. Frederick Ferre's personalist process perspective in his trilogy, *Being and Value, Knowldege and Value*, and *Living and Value* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996, 1998, 2001), may come as close to the Mormon anthropocentric position as anything written by process thinkers. Ferre gives highest value to persons. John Cobb says that God is a person but *not* "very much like" a human being and does not have a body that resembles a human body, *The Process Perspective: Frequently Asked Questions About Process Theology*, ed. Jeanyne Slettom (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003), 12.

13. David L. Paulsen, "Joseph Smith and the Problem of Evil," *BYU Studies* 39, no. 1 (2000).

it seems wrong to say that they suffer so that humans can develop compassion, just as it is wrong to say that children starve in some far away land so that the well-fed can develop compassion.

Mormons do have alternatives to such instrumentalist views. One is that Mormons have never regarded scripture as infallible. Scripture, however inspired, is always the position of some human being writing at some point in time, in some concrete situation (Morm. 8:12). A second alternative is related to the discussion of opposition in Second Nephi 2 in the Book of Mormon where it is portrayed as a condition of the world and not one that God purposefully created; opposition is a characteristic of existence. This idea brings Mormonism close to Whitehead's position in *Process and Reality* that the metaphysical ultimate is not God but is instead creativity. God is subject to some of the same conditions that make a world possible.

The object of worship for both Mormons and process theologians, however, is not creativity but a personal God. For process theologians this "not less than personal being" conforms to the ideal structure of existence in such a way that God's power in non-coercive. God proposes ideals for creatures that slowly lure the opposition of all things to a greater harmony. This returns us to the problem of God possessing coercive power in LDS scripture. Interestingly, it is in Mormonism's anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism where a possible solution to the tension about God's persuasive and coercive power lies. God as the absolute, impersonal, and infinite being possesses only persuasive power. Such an Absolute is the structure of Being (rather like Paul Tillich's "God beyond God," the impersonal absolute of the German Romantic Friedrich Schelling, "the law" for Orson Pratt, Nirguna Brahman of Hindu tradition, creativity in Whitehead, or Nirvana in Buddhism). But God as an embodied human person (like Saguna Brahman in Hinduism, the Personal God in Schelling, or "the gods" in Orson Pratt) possesses some coercive power. But this power is limited by the existence of other beings, all of whom possess a certain degree of independence. God must learn to control coercive power properly and must submit it to persuasive power.[14] This is an ethical

14. This is similar to David Griffin's characterization of a personal and impersonal ultimate in *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism*. I don't have time to develop this here, but the early Mormon Apostle Charles W. Penrose describes an experience of the ultimate in a personal as well as impersonal form. For God as a person there was a time before God's being was organized. But, "this spirit which pervades all things, which is the light and life of all things, by which our heavenly Father operates, by which He is omnipotent, never had a beginning and never will have an end." This is an ultimate that advances from an impersonal to a personal form. Charles W. Penrose, Nov. 16, 1884, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London and Liverpool: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1854–1886), 26:25-–6; David Ray Griffin, *Reenchantment*

submission on the part of God. The relation can be understood in terms of Mormon eschatology. The Mormon "plan of salvation" moves from an impersonal unity of intelligence, through the alienation of finite individuality, to the unity in diversity in sociality with God(s) in the kingdom of God. God, as a person, as finite, is capable of coercive power in the same sense that *any* embodied being is capable of coercive power. This power is external. God may be able to throw rocks, part the Red Sea, and speak softly to the hearts and minds of persons, but God could not exercise internal coercive power. God could not "harden Pharaoh's heart." Pharaoh has to do that himself. This may answer the dilemma Mormons face relating to the problem of evil. God cannot stop holocausts, God has not that much or perhaps not that kind of coercive power, but God possesses some coercive power and enough to intervene in some situations. Still God cannot, just as any other finite being cannot, ethically coerce the inner choices of any subject or person. Finally, it would be impossible in any given situation to know if God could have intervened to change its outcome.

As Paulsen has noted, Mormons argue over the meaning of the eternal character of human beings.[15] While Mormon explicitly teaches a pre-mortal existence, whether this is as individual persons or whether these persons are "organized" from pre-existent chaos has been a subject of disagreement. Mormons might find resources for thinking about this in process thinkers. David Griffin, Joseph Bracken, and Philip Clayton have adopted Whitehead's distinction between the impersonal ultimate as creativity and God as creativity's primordial non-temporal accident. In various ways they use this distinction between the non-actualized ultimate "creativity" and an actual ultimate God to point to an eschatological development toward richer experience and toward love.[16]

Without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001), 247–84.

15. This is one difficulty in writing such a paper that compares Mormon theodicy with David Griffin's theodicy. By analogy it is like writing a comparison of Griffin's theodicy with Catholic theodicy. Mormons disagree about some of these issues. Paulsen, Hurst, Pennock and Pulido recognize this problem but should point out that appropriating process thought for the purpose of explicating LDS theology is as live an option as appropriating pragmatism, Platonism, existentialism, or postmodernism.

16. Whitehead explained that "in the philosophy of organism this ultimate is termed "creativity" and God is its primordial non-temporal accident." *Process and Reality*, 7 But I am thinking particularly here of Philip Clayton's and Joseph Bracken's discussion of the later philosophy of the German romantic philosopher F. W. J. Schelling and its relation to eschatology. Schelling argues for an emergent notion of divinity in relation to others in community. As part of this emergence all personal beings pass through a moment of assertion of ego. The ethical choice is to choose against raw egoism and choose for love of others and community. F. W. J. Schelling,

Mormon eschatology is the culmination of a story beginning in an impersonal, non-actual One(s), conceived as intelligence(s), or agency, and developing toward personal and community forms that are superior to their merely potential beginnings just as real love is better, by the fact of its actuality, than any dream of love.[17] In this way Mormons may be able to appropriate process theology's ideal of God as persuasive, as the goal of eschatology, and retain a notion of God possessing a degree of coercive power as a finite, personal being. God becomes God when S/He learns to control such finite power.

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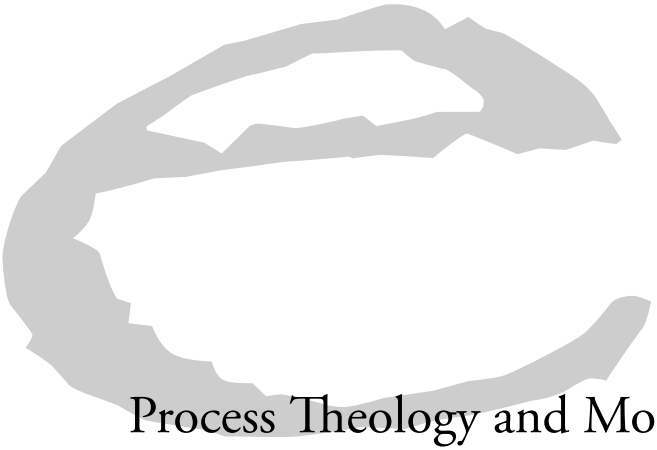
Philosophical Investigations into the Nature of Human Freedom and Related Issues (Chicago: Open Court, 1936); Philip Clayton, "Pluralism, Idealism, Romanticism: Untapped Resources for a Trinity in Process" in *Trinity in Process*, ed. Joseph Bracken and Marjorie Suchocki (New York: Continuum, 1997), 118–39; Joseph Bracken, *Society and Spirit: A Trinitarian Cosmology* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1991), 95–103.

17. There are indications of these kinds of possibilities in the Book of Mormon in Second Nephi 2 and Alma 42 and in Doctrine and Covenants section 88. The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Mormon theologian B.H. Roberts suggests an idea of two ultimates when he speaks of a generic idea of God that is embodied in a community of persons. Roberts' idea was that the word "God" has two meanings, one is an ideal, the other an actuality. The ideal is the power of creativity and love, where the actuality is the incarnation of such ideals in an individual person or community of persons. B. H. Roberts, *The Mormon Doctrine of Deity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1903), 163.



Process Theology and Mormonism: Connections and Challenges

by Dan Wotherspoon

We Latter-day Saint philosophers and theologians who are choosing to bring Mormon ideas into the public arena are recognizing that we have a great deal of work left to do. We have a sense that our theological commitments are based on rock-solid intuitions and have wonderful explanatory and convicting power, but we are only really beginning to explore at the level needed for the academic theological arena.

As I see it right now, whatever uniqueness we claim for Mormon theology still mostly rests at the level of "sensibilities." From scripture and revelation, we have gained a sense about God's character and purposes that we believe is both correct and ennobling, and we have developed a feel for how we, along with the rest of creation, fit into an overall scheme and relate to God and each other. We have done quite a bit to locate where these sensibilities touch upon those of other faiths and traditions: where they are similar, where they are at odds. We are also quite advanced in attempting to locate our tradition within the unfolding drama of human history. And as we dialogue even more intensely with other theological traditions, we will more fully develop and articulate in a way others can comprehend the nuances of our inchoate understandings.

We as Mormons make plenty of claims about God's love, knowledge, power, imminence and transcendence, as well as forceful statements about divine and human nature and our role in creating ideal conditions for the fullest kinds of flourishing. We share a great deal of terminology with other religions (especially other Christian traditions) though we claim some uniqueness in how we understand them. And, in a few cases, we've created our own theo-

logical terms or so imbued shared terms with our own sensibilities that they have become unique to us, terms such as plan of salvation, exaltation, eternal progression, intelligences, and Light of Christ. But because we've done this work, I believe we've sometimes lulled ourselves into thinking we have thought through the theological nuances with a greater degree of precision than we have—and this is especially true with regard to examining our specific claims about the most basic structures of the universe, the foundational stuff—in short, metaphysics. It is here that I feel a careful and rigorous engagement with process theology can really benefit us.

Process theology certainly has roots in philosophies that emphasize process over static being or substance, but it is based most explicitly upon the philosophical and theological speculations of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne.[1] It is not a religious tradition born in God's revelation but rather from a serious inquiry into the nature of things that utilizes Whitehead's ponderings about what the universe must be like if one is to take the insights of relativity and quantum mechanics seriously. And for this reason process theology has no real "church" of its own, no pastoral concerns about serving followers who look to it for comfort and daily guidance. Process theology works in a different direction than typical Christian theologies and is less encumbered by tradition and dogma. It was born in a different arena than Mormonism, one that has forced it to carefully explain and make arguments for its positions right from the start, to open up its recipe book where all inquirers can see the ingredients in its stew. And because it has journeyed so long in the refiner's fire of vigorous exchange where conversation partners aren't as polite as they are when engaging with a group that is sharing its confessions, it has learned to do some of the things that we as Mormons are just beginning to tackle. In what follows I briefly outline some of the areas where I believe Mormon theology is quite incomplete and could greatly benefit from an in-depth study of and dialogue with process thought.

1. Alfred North Whitehead's major contributions to process thought are *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Macmillan, 1929); *Science and the Modern World* (New York: New American Library, 1925); *Religion in the Making* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1926); and *Adventures of Ideas*, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1933). Some of Charles Hartshorne's contributions include *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1948); *Man's Vision of God and the Logic of Theism* (Chicago: Willet, Clark & Company, 1941); and *The Logic of Perfection and Other Essays in Neoclassical Metaphysics* (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing Company, 1962).

FOLLOWING THE LEAD OF PROCESS THOUGHT

We Mormons have a vague sense that acts of creation involve a two-sided dynamic, a "call and response" activity such as that described in the Book of Abraham. But we haven't gone nearly as far as process thought has to understand exactly how that might work—what the gods' seeing "that they would be obeyed" might look like (Abr. 4:21). Process theology has wonderful breadth in its literature about God providing an "initial aim" for each and every entity at each and every moment, and about the nature of the kinds of responses that each level of existence might possibly give (from the "experience" of electrons on up to more complex entities). We do not. Yet!

Closely related to these ideas is the LDS notion of "enjoyment," that God has an interest in having all of creation know "joy" in the sphere in which it is created. Yet, without close work on the kinds of experience each existent is capable of, we'll forever remain vague about that claim, and because it is so unintelligible without a decent level of reflection, it will fade away into obscurity, just some vague, poetic, or romantic notion in the scriptures or that the Pratts tried to do something with way back then.[2] Process literature has given a great deal of attention to these ideas, and Whitehead even uses the term "enjoyment" in his system.

Better elucidating our basic sensibilities also has important ethical ramifications. Process theology is very much like Mormonism in paying far more explicit attention than most other traditions to the *imitatio dei* urge, the innate attraction humans have to align their behavior after their conception of Godly ways of being. It is reasonable to posit that this human tendency to make ourselves in the image of God could have helped shape some of the most negative features of our current society. For instance, the traditional Christian idea that God can bring worlds in and out of existence *ex nihilo*—from nothing—rather than through "working with" other existents, as well as the notion that God can and does act by divine fiat and at times exercises coercive power, might be understood as subtle or not-so-subtle contributors to the nuclearism and militarism that threaten us all. If the alternative conceptions about God and the nature of power held by process thought and Mormonism can be internalized to the depth that traditional theistic notions have been, perhaps these negative tendencies can and will become less pronounced.

Out of a close examination of the process and Mormon ideas that all of existence is comprised of "experiencing" entities and that God's aim is for all to "enjoy" their actuality comes the need for careful work on perception. The

2. See *The Essential Orson Pratt*, ed. David H. Whitaker (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991); and Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology*, 7th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1915).

question of how it is that beings with a level of complexity far below organisms with sensory organs can "perceive" God's aims as well as those of other existents in their surrounding environment has led process thinkers to make wonderful explorations of perception far beyond what any Mormon thinker has attempted. And in developing a model that has built into its metaphysic an element of non-sensory perception, process theologians have come up with a robust view of how it is that humans might have direct experience of values and norms. If internalized deeply, such an understanding could do much to cut the feet out from the value relativism that is so pervasive today. By asserting that everything in the universe genuinely experiences everything else at a non-sensory level (to at least some degree), it makes discussions about, and experiences of, ontological value possible.

An attractive sensibility that both process theologians and Mormons share is the notion of the intrinsic value of all things. A non-sensationist epistemology grounds that proposition in fact: even individuals that dance in the cosmic web without the aid of language, culture, and sense organs must be ascribed some consideration. When even the most basic existents are seen as capable of genuine experience and joy, ethical relativism is dealt a telling blow. The ground under those trying to act against or stand aloof from their deep interconnection and relations with the rest of the universe falls away. Because of the fundamental claim that everything is an experiencing entity with its own value, its own ends, Mormonism's epistemology has the potential to claim a legitimate place at the same table with others whose systems allow them to make a genuine claim that, at some level, we can truly know if this is "better than" that, if this is "right" or "wrong."

I have mentioned deep interconnection and relationship with others. Whitehead often called his system a "philosophy of organism" because one of its most fundamental claims is about the genuineness of relationship, that every existent arises out of and is inescapably in relationship with all others. Furthermore, it claims these relationships are "internal" rather than "external"—that we're not interacting as billiard balls that collide but never alter each other's basic nature or constitution.[3] One of the two primary focuses of my doctoral dissertation was to suggest that through its concept of the "Light of Christ" and understanding that all entities are to some degree "intelligent," Mormonism potentially also has a strong doctrine of internal relations and solid ground for proclaiming our radical interconnectedness as human beings with each other as well as every element of our environment.[4] My thinking

3. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 286.

4. Daniel W. Wotherspoon, "Awakening Joseph Smith: Mormon Resources for a Postmodern Worldview," (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1996).

there was only a beginning. Process theology is miles ahead of us in exploring the implications of such an ennobling and powerful claim of such interrelatedness. Process notions of "incarnation" that come out of this metaphysical claim are breathtaking in their beauty and ability to elucidate the idea of God's immanence in all, while still honoring freedom and self-determination. They are powerful in their ability to inspire committed and ethical action.

There are many connections with process ideas that Mormons could mine to advance our sensibilities to where they could become powerful, well-reasoned arguments for positions that I firmly believe we in our best hearts would be delighted to stand squarely behind in the public arena we are just now entering. Some of these would include what Whitehead calls "the ontological principle," the idea that things differ from one another only in degree, not in kind; handling dualism as "organizational" rather than ontological; placing the value of experience front and center; describing God's life as always urging greater depth of experience for not only God but all entities, envisioning God is a Cosmic Adventurer; exploring how novelty enters the world and keeps entropy at bay, clarifying God's role in history; and illuminating the fundamental reality and importance of time and space.

We need to engage the intricacies of the process metaphysic and what it means to claim that all reality is comprised of "actual occasions of experience." Latter-day Saints might want to look very hard at what we mean by the "eternal" nature of our spirits, and if we need to explore changing our rhetoric which seems to imply a commitment to a substance metaphysic. I'm not sure that we are able to explain the mechanics of eternal progression and increased depth of soul without moving toward an event metaphysic such as process theology's with its understanding of enduring individuals as temporally ordered societies. In an effort to try to avoid this conclusion and maintain a substance metaphysic, I chose in my dissertation to dialogue with emerging understandings in physics and to concentrate on the metaphor of us and everything else as "patterns" of different levels of complexity, but I'm not sure how successful I was or others will be unless we really allow individual, discrete "moments" in which novel experience truly becomes embodied, in which there is a "stop" (Whitehead's notion of an experiencing entity's "concrescence"). Each of these particular instances now becomes a datum for the next concrescence (Whitehead's "the many become one, and are increased by one"). In any case, process thought provides an amazing template for the kinds of questions we have yet to ask but someday must if we are to really feel confident putting forth our claims in something other than confessional language.

DOING THEOLOGY IN TWO DIRECTIONS

Religious traditions start with revelation and work backwards to make sense of what the world and God must be like for this or that aspect of the revelation to be true. Process thought began in empiricism, in observation and the quest to imagine the organizing principles of a world in which relativity and quantum mechanics seem to be a reality. I believe it is important to work in both directions. We can still accept LDS revelations as true even as we recognize that greater detail and understanding of their power will only come as we are capable of receiving them. If we will also work in Whitehead's "what must the universe be like if . . . ?" vein, we will be better ready for better revelation. And as Doctrine and Covenants 9 expresses so forcefully, God doesn't reveal unless there's a question asked. I'm not satisfied with every answer suggested by process theology, but I am thrilled by my encounter with the questions it has taught me to ask.

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