Worship Worthiness and a Finite God
by Kevin Winters

The Accusation

One would be hard pressed to find a seasoned (or even neophyte) LDS Apologist who has not heard the Being whom they worship termed 'god' (small "g") or a 'small god.' Though not being so explicit (for fear of immediately scarring away LDS readers), critics of the Church have taken a more implicit and subdued approach to this aspect of LDS theism. In 1991, Francis Beckwith and Stephen Parrish (among our more congenial critics) described the LDS God concept as "subject to the laws and principles of a beginningless universe," "limited in power," "limited in knowledge," and "subject to values and eternal principles external to God."[1] They ultimately conclude, "the Mormon universe is fundamentally irrational."[2] Then, in 2002, Parrish kindly concluded: "LDS theism is improbable to the point of being impossible… Mormons have not yet done enough philosophical work to make their view a viable position."[3] He bases this conclusion on such factors as "the laws of nature are necessary for the existence of the LDS God," "he cannot necessarily exist in the sense that the God of classical theism does," and "he is dependent for his existence on external factors like the laws of nature and the existence of matter."[4]

With the above, which is really only a small summary of the issues at hand, our Evangelical critics have come to the conclusion that the LDS God-concept is beneath our

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[1] *The Mormon Concept of God: A Philosophical Analysis* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen Press, Ltd., 1991), 38.
[2] *Ibid*, 53.
[3] "A Tale of Two Theisms: The Philosophical Usefulness of the Classical Christian and Mormon Concepts of God," in Beckwith, Francis J., Carl Mosser and Paul Owen, ed., *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 218; hereafter *TNMC*.
[4] *Ibid*, 205.

worship, finite beyond repair, and incoherent, hence the small 'g'-'god.'   While it is

undoubtedly true that the LDS have not done a large degree of philosophical reflection in

relation to their faith, I believe the claims to irrationalism are premature.   Here I will

argue this point.   After presenting the preconceived notions that bring our critics to these

conclusions and a brief critique thereof, I will use one case study of LDS theism and

demonstrate the inadequacies of our critic's criticisms in dealing with such.   In the end, I

hopefully will have demonstrated that God, as conceived in the LDS faith, is worthy of

our worship and praise.

Foundations

Before pushing ahead to a refutation of our critics, I stand in need of clarifying the

foundational principles of this enquiry. First, the terminology:

Metaphysics

The area of consideration is termed 'metaphysics.'   Within its history,

metaphysics has had many definitions and has been given the ultimate importance,

rejected as useless, and everywhere in between.   For the purposes of this paper, I will

define metaphysics as that field of inquiry that deals with the ultimate generalities and/or

the most universal aspects of reality.   In saying "ultimate generalities" I am speaking of

those principles, laws, or modalities that find universal application, either as founding

principles (upon which all others are derived) or necessary prerequisites for the existence

of such principles.

For one historical example, Heraclitus (fl. 500 B.C.) argued, "war [meaning 'strife'] is the father of all and king of all," for "what is in opposition is in concert, and from what differs comes the most beautiful harmony."[5] In this way, Heraclitus claims that strife, difference, and contrast among distinct entities (pluralism) are fundamental aspects of reality, the basis upon which things can exist "in concert" and "harmony." Within the context of Heraclitus' thought, one cannot see reality as unchanging, timeless, or monotonous as such would make existence impossible. Still, it should be obvious that some philosophers have attempted to make unchanging timelessness the foundation of reality, just as others have seen reality as a phantom or figment of the imagination. Here it is worth noting the words of Alfred North Whitehead: "It is, therefore, no valid criticism on one metaphysical school to point out that its doctrines do not follow from the verbal expression of the facts accepted by another school."[6] Each metaphysical system needs to be examined under its own coherency and arguments and one must not simply assume a metaphysical worldview is true in order to critique another.

A derivative area of concern is termed 'ontology,' from the Greek *ontos* – 'to be.' Ontology deals with the question of existence, such as how one defines 'existence' or 'to exist,' what principles make existence possible (such as Heraclitus' 'strife'), and how this relates to the real world. In relation to existence, philosophers have developed a set of terminology termed 'modal semantics.' As a grammarian uses the modal terms 'might' and 'must,' the philosopher uses the modal terms 'contingent' and 'necessary,' respectively. Something exists of necessity if either its existence or non-existence entails a logical contradiction. For example, it is logically impossible for a round square to exist

[5] Baird, Forrest E. and Walter Kaufmann, *Ancient Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000), 17.
[6] *Process and Reality* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1985 [1978]), 12.

as the properties given to round-ness and the properties given to square-ness cannot logically exist in a single entity (i.e. they are not compossible). Likewise, it is a logical necessity that a circle is round and a square is four-sided; one cannot have a non-round circle and a non-four-sided square.

The last metaphysical principle to be given is that of the 'possible world.' A possible world is any given state of affairs that is logically compossible. Consider the life of George Bailey, from the Christmas classic *It's a Wonderful Life*. In the beginning of the movie, we have one possible world where the individual 'George Bailey' existed; upon his meeting the angel Clarence, Bailey is shown a possible world without his existence, one that markedly differs from the world he knew due to his absence in its state of affairs. From this we see a few modal examples: the person of 'George Bailey' is a contingent aspect of the world; there are possible worlds where the person of 'George Bailey' does not exist; there are possible states of affairs that are contingent in a set of possible worlds. Yet we can also surmise that in both possible worlds a square still has four sides and a bachelor is still an unmarried man; these things are necessary (even though there might be a possible world where no squares or bachelors exist).

In relation to my use of 'finitism': a number of LDS have used and now decidedly disposed of the use of the term 'finitism' in relation to God.[7] The primary reason is the way the term has been abused: when most people use the term 'finite' they are referring to mere humans, the glory of which are most certainly not of the degree of power and glory held by the Father. I use it here for two reasons: 1) because the term is already out

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[7] Most LDS philosophers prefer the term 'Maximally Great' to that of 'finite.' For example, see David Paulsen's "How Deep the Casm: A Reply to Owen and Mosser's Review," *FARMS Review of Books* 11/2, 235-236.

there and is used quite a bit by our critics (usually for rhetorical flair) and 2) so that I might rid it of its negative meaning and expand its use.

In relation to the above, 'finite' and 'finitism' have a wide range of application. Given any particular attribute, of either Deity, man, or dog, there is a continuum of 'greatness' or 'proficiency' in that attribute. On one end, we see the 'infinite' degree of greatness of that attribute as held by a particular entity (and the ambiguities of the 'infinite' will be addressed below); on the other end, we see an entity that has no degree of proficiency or greatness in using or having a particular attribute. Classical theism, as will be argued below, seeks to find itself completely on the end of the 'infinite': every attribute that God has he possesses to an infinite degree and no degree of 'finitism' can be found. On the other extreme we can see a small continuum of hardcore naturalists who hold that only the finite, physical, quantifiable world exists. Then, everywhere in the middle, we have countless possibilities.

LDS theism, at least of the kind I will present below, can be found much closer to the classical view than to our naturalistic friends, but not on its farthest extreme; it may be termed 'finite' but not extremely so. 'Finite,' then, can be loosely defined as 'less than infinite,' which can mean an incredibly high degree of efficiency or almost a complete lack of skill. To be more precise (and in accord with the explication of 'infinite' in what follows): 'finite,' in the context of this paper, will have as a necessary prerequisite that the being in question can grow, advance, or move beyond previous realities.[8] When discussing this issue, understanding this continuum will prove useful.

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[8] As will be seen, even an entity described as 'infinite' is capable of such growth, so an ambiguity will be inherent in using these two designations. For the purposes of this paper, as long as the ambiguity is understood no problems should come up.

'Worship worthiness' seeks to find what properties, actions, and/or ways of existing are sufficient to warrant worship of the possessor of those properties, performer of those actions, or entity existing in a certain way. In relation to God, one must ask, 'What properties are essential/necessary for God's being worthy of our worship?' How this question may be answered will be addressed throughout this paper. With the preliminary topics laid out, we come to the foundations of the Evangelical conception of God and his attributes.

Plato, Anselm, and Perfect Being Theism

The particular form of theism I will address is termed Perfect Being theism, it being the one generally accepted by Evangelicals.[9] The Evangelical foundations of theism can most easily be seen in the writings of two individuals: Plato and Anselm of Canterbury. As the latter depends on the former, the Platonic view of perfection needs to be explicated first. For Plato, something is 'perfect' when it is beyond change; it is at the zenith of its ability to grow or advance. Consider his argument in *The Republic*:

> Socrates: But surely the God and the things of God are in every way perfect?
> Adeimantus: True.
> Socrates: Then he can hardly be compelled by external influence to take many shapes?
> Adeimantus: He cannot.
> Socrates: But may he not change or transform himself?
> Adeimantus: Clearly…that must be the case if he is changed at all.
> Socrates: And will he then change himself for the better and fairer, or for the worse and more unsightly?

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[9] Perfect Being theism has been the accepted form of theism in Christian history, though it has been challenged on several fronts, Evangelical and otherwise.

> Adeimantus: If he change at all he can only change for the worse, for we cannot suppose him to be deficient either in virtue or beauty.
> Socrates: Very true…but then, would any one, whether God or man, desire to make himself worse?
> Adeimantus: Impossible.
> Socrates: 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.[10]

The implications of this argument is clear: if something is perfect and it changes, it must change for the worse; if something changes to become perfect, it could not have been perfect to begin with. Likewise, on this view, perfection necessarily entails changelessness. Anselm was the most notable explicator of what this means for God.

In his *Prosologion*, Anselm would provide the classical benchmark definition of God and God's perfection that has been perpetuated to the present day.[11] Therein he states, "Now we believe that you [God] are something than which nothing greater can be thought."[12] Another common formulation of this statement is that God is 'that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-conceived.' Here, I will use the shortened version of 'Greatest Possible Being' (or GPB). The implication is clear: God is only limited by the laws of logic, as no ontological limitations may be attributed to Him. Hence the terms: Greatest—meaning 'that which it is better to be than not to be'; Possible—that which is confined only within the laws of logic; and Being—sometimes taken to mean Being-itself, but for now consider it to mean simply an existing entity. If it is a great-making property and those properties (theoretically) are 'compossible,' God has them to the fullest degree, or infinitely.

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[10] Plato, *Republic*, Benjamin Jowett, trans. (New York: Vintage Classics, 1991), 78-79.

[11] There are many intimations of this idea in earlier writings, but Anselm stands as the most readily recognized proponent and, as such, will be used here.

[12] Anselm, "Prosologion," in *Classics of Western Philosophy*, Fifth Edition, Steven M. Cahn, ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1999), 310.

Infinity and Existence

By way of critique, there are two direct challenges that must be made: 1) the issue of infinity and 2) the question of the primacy of logic. In relation to the former, Plato's definition of 'perfection' rested on the mathematical knowledge of the Pythagoreans and utilized by the Eleatics (i.e. Parmenides and Zeno). For them, to speak of 'infinity' is to speak of a well-ordered mathematical set, or a set with a first term, that moves forward to infinity;[13] furthermore, this set cannot be added to, it being the 'greatest' set one may have. Such a view of the infinite would reign for over 2000 years, from the Pythagoreans to Georg Cantor, who demonstrated the limitations of such a view of infinity.

In his foundational work, Georg Cantor presented a coherent and cogent theory titled 'infinite set theory' or 'transfinite set theory' that has continued to the present day. He demonstrated that not all infinite sets are equal; that there is, in fact, a hierarchy of infinite sets. This required some redefining of terms: 'equal to' is equivalent to saying that one set 'has every member that the other set has'; 'greater than' is equivalent to saying that one set 'has every member the other set has and some members it doesn't have.'[14] For example, the set of all whole counting numbers, consisting of $\{1, 2, 3, 4, 5, \dots\}$, could be said to be 'equal to' the set of all even whole counting numbers, consisting of $\{2, 4, 6, 8, 10, \dots\}$, giving us a counter-intuitive $n = 2n$, where n is any infinite set. However, if we make the original set an exponent of a new set, such as 2^n, we have a 'greater' set than we had before, giving us $n < 2^n$, where n is any infinite set. This principle is made clearer in relation to the subtraction of infinite sets. For example, $n - n$

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[13] The Kalam cosmological argument, the most commonly made argument against the possibility of an infinitely old cosmos, simply assumes that we are dealing with well-ordered sets and, as such, I will extend this assumption to this discussion of the infinite as it relates to God.

[14] See Paul Draper, "A Critique of the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument," in Louis P. Pojman, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology* (New York, NY: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1998), 45.

may equal anything from 0 to *n*, where *n* is any infinite set; given the different degrees of infinity, subtracting one infinite set from another does not guarantee that we get 0, despite that they have 'the same' number of terms, namely 'infinite.' What this demonstrates is that for any given infinite set of entities there is a 'greater' infinite set that may be appealed to: "It follows from this proposition that there is no maximum of the infinite cardinal numbers. However great an infinite number *n* may be, 2^n will still be greater."[15] Likewise, to say that God exemplifies 'infinity' to its highest degree in relation to any given attribute is akin to speaking of the 'greatest possible integer'—it is incoherent and lacks any semblance of meaning, as no such thing can logically exist.

Some have tried to move beyond this difficulty by arguing that God's infinity (the 'theological infinite') is not akin to mathematical infinity. With this understanding of infinite set theory, Evangelical theologian John Feinberg argues: "I am inclined to add that an unlimited being with G-properties [Great Making-properties] that have no intrinsic maximum must possess those qualities to a degree unsurpassed also by any being that could but won't exist; hence, it is unsurpassed by any conceivable being."[16] But, as we have seen, there is no 'conceivable' limit on any infinite set; given any infinite set there is a greater one that is 'conceivable.' But this raises an interesting point: must all infinites have easily quantifiable (or merely quantifiable) parts? Put another way, must all infinites have easily definable parts wherein a one-to-one comparison between infinites is possible?

Some have proposed three types of 'infinite': first, that which has quantifiably defined parts; second, that which does not have quantifiably defined parts; and three, that

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[15] Bertrand Russell, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (New York: Dover Publications, 1993 [1919]), 86.
[16] John Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 244.

which is only 'infinite' in appearance, but truly is finite.[17] In relation to the first, we have examples from mathematical set theory: {1, 2, 3, 4, …}, {…, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, …}, etc. One can coherently speak of the different attributes of quantifiable infinites: they consist of all odd numbers, all even numbers, all ordinals, etc. In relation to the second, there is ambiguity; I will use the term 'unbounded' in relation to this infinite. The unbounded infinite consists of non-quantifiable parts: of 'love,' 'compassion,' or 'relatedness.'[18] With this conception of the 'infinite' Feinberg's comments can retain meaning.

But the question still remains of whether the 'unbounded' conception of the infinite retains Plato's definition of perfection as totality. With non-quantifiable parts, the unbounded infinite is not decisive   The unbounded could coherently be seen to be bounded, in that more cannot be added to it, but it doesn't categorically reject the possibility of further growth and expansion. What this means is that the 'infinite,' given either quantifiable or non-quantifiable parts, is not necessarily seen as static, incapable of change, or absolutely complete in its makeup. To return to the beginning, I defined 'finite' in terms of that which is capable of further growth, advancement, or moving beyond previous realities. Given the above understanding of the 'infinite,' in either of its positive modalities, the 'infinite' (in this sense) could be said to be 'finite' (in the sense defined above). Thus, it might be a mistake to refer to a God who is capable of further

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[17] Here I am borrowing from Leibniz's analysis of infinities.
[18] This notion of the infinite draws on what has often been termed an 'open' view of philosophy. In the 'open' view not all things are capable of description, of being fully described propositionally or mathematically; there is a degree of 'openness' and 'emptiness' that escapes quantification but is still a very real aspect of reality. Rationalism and empiricism is examples of 'closed' systems wherein quantification (particularly mathematical) is possible (and even necessary for it to retain its coherence). Various forms of postmodernism, pragmatism, or more Eastern forms of thought can be seen as 'open' systems.

growth, advancement, or forward movement as 'finite,' if the infinite is understood in a particular way.[19]

This alternative view of the infinite has been considered and utilized by Charles Hartshorne. In light of the issues of infinite set theory, Hartshorne argues that "The divine, to be worthy of worship, must excel any conceivable being other than itself; it must be unsurpassable *by another*, exalted beyond all possible rivals."[20] The important qualification here is "other than itself"; given certain attributes, God may surpass himself and advance beyond previous degrees of perfection. This brings in the important principle of time: God is 'perfect' in that he is the greatest a being can be given prior actualities. To use one example, given the history of a person, let's call her Sally, God may find increasing joy due to the decisions Sally makes. Thus, at t_2 God may have more joy than he had at t_1 due to Sally's decision at t_2 to finally accept God into her life; he genuinely feels joy and satisfaction that another of his children has decided to enter into interpersonal relationships with him, but the temporal scale must be taken into consideration.

From the above, one conclusion needs to be emphasized: it appears that if we are to describe God as 'infinite,' given current understandings of infinite set theory, the issue of whether God is within time or if he is self-surpassing is left undecided. In relation to the latter, it could be argued that self-surpassing makes no sense without an environmental or worldly context in which to consider it. Without anything outside of

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[19] I am quick to point out that in doing this I am not equivocating nor playing word-games: both views of the infinite are coherent and, much like our metaphysical presuppositions, either is a genuine possibility; the question is more of the context of its use rather than any previously defined absolute in meaning. I may also say that such a view makes Feinberg's use of the infinite in relation to God meaningful, which should be a welcomed thing for our Evangelical friends.

[20] *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1984), 8-9; emphasis in original.

God, it is unclear how he might surpass himself; the existence of other entities outside of God who act in novel ways that contribute to the divine life seem to be necessary.[21]

There is also the question of describing all of God's attributes in terms of quantifiable properties. Love, being God's defining characteristic, does not appear to be a quantifiable property; rather, it seems to be more abstract, as is God's beauty and mercy. Likewise, the capacity for interpersonal relationships inherent in that love defies quantification or description; it must be experienced.[22] Though more vague, the unbounded concept of infinity is probably more appropriate when dealing with the attributes of living beings (as opposed to mathematical entities), the reasons for which may become clear shortly. By its very nature, this mode of infinity is not committed to changelessness or advancement and either can be applied (i.e. it is a contingent fact that an 'unbounded' being either change or not change).

An Epistemology for All Seasons?

At the foundation for all the above stands a particular epistemology (theory of knowledge) wherein the metaphysical conclusions are made necessary: rationalistic foundationalism. By rationalism I mean an epistemological worldview where two interrelated axioms are held to be ultimate: 1) the intelligibility of the natural world and 2) the power of propositions to capture that world. I will elaborate each in their turn.

In saying that the world is intelligible, the rationalist is claiming not only that there is order in the world, or that things 'make sense,' but that the world is such that a conscious mind can cognize and gain full knowledge of it. Thus, there is a natural order

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[21] This implies that creativity is a necessary part of God's existence and if God were not creating as optimally as he can (to be considered more below) then he might not be considered perfect.
[22] A relationship that does not include experiencing the other and the unity of self with the other would be a strange relationship indeed.

that human minds can understand, comprehend, and quantify. In saying that the proposition is capable of capturing and describing the world, I mean that it is held that the world can be adequately described using language. For the scientist, our best example of modern rationalism in action, this means that the physical world is describable using logic and mathematics, there being a one-to-one correspondence between the parts of a given mathematical equation and the natural world. As mathematics is simply a more specialized form of language, the world is inherently quantifiable and describable.

Since Rene Descartes, rationalism has been part-and-parcel to the Western mind. Not only that, but Descartes was the founder of a particular form of rationalism: foundationalism. The rationalistic foundationalists are Archimedean's through and through: they try to find one (or a few) fixed and immovable point(s) from which to deduce all truths. For Descartes, this was called 'first philosophy': by discovering what are held to be indubitable and necessary axioms of understanding (the 'first' principles from which all else emerge), the foundationalist feels that he/she can find all other truths through the logical process of deduction. Descartes attempted to exemplify this view by the following method: if there is anything that can be doubted in any way, it is to be rejected as a foundation; if there is anything that cannot be doubted, that will stand as the foundation. From this line of reasoning we have the famous '*Cogito ergo sum*' – 'I think therefore I am.' From this point, supposedly, Descartes deduced the existence of God, the physical world, and mathematics.

The immediate connection with Anselm and Plato should be clear: from a logically necessary definition of perfection (or so they thought) they could deduce the existence and attributes of God, the being that exemplifies the fullness of perfection.

Furthermore, the ontological argument for God's existence lies on the supposedly axiomatic premise that 'it is better to exist than not to exist.' So, the matter summarized: rationalistic foundationalists use propositional statements that are supposedly beyond question and deduce other propositional truths from them.

Though it has been the cultural norm over the last 300 years, rationalism of this sort has fallen into general disfavor among many schools of philosophy. The postmodern movement, in all its varied forms, stands as one prominent example of non-rationalists, though many may not be termed anti-rationalists. In many ways, postmodernism stands as a critique of language/propositions and their place in human experience and knowledge.[23] Whereas the rationalists claim that the proposition is the foundation of human knowledge and even experience (due to experience's intelligibility), postmodernists will either provide an alternative foundation or reject any sort of foundation to begin with. As I believe the latter to be riddled with problems, consider two examples of the former from two prominent postmodernists: Alfred North Whitehead and Martin Heidegger.

Whitehead sought to describe reality in terms of experience, which he defined as the "self-enjoyment of being one among many, and of being one arising out of the composition of many."[24] Put in plainer terms, to experience is to integrate many aspects into one new complex whole. The 'many' that are integrated are spoken of in terms of 'feelings,' and the complex feeling is non-reducible (i.e. it cannot be reduced simply to the 'many' that are integrated). A proposition, in line with the above, is "a lure for

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[23] Both of these could easily be said of most forms of pragmatism, which might be more palatable to Latter-day Saints. For similar views see the relative works of Charles Sanders Peirce, John Dewey, and/or William James.

[24] *Process and Reality*, 145.

feeling."[25] Thus, when I provide the proposition, "A purple elephant dancing in a tutu," that proposition directs the listener to the experience of 'purple-elephant-dancing-tutu' and if they've never seen something purple, an elephant, someone dancing, or a tutu they would be incapable of bringing this interesting sight to mind. From this theory of language, we see that propositions are bankrupt as to meaning without a 'feeling' or 'experience' to back it up; meaning is dictated by experience. By this directionality of meaning, from experience to proposition, one cannot go backwards: one cannot have a proposition and then develop an experience from it *unless* the proposition had meaning *prior* to its being said. Put another way, propositions are not able to capture the meaning of a given experience but can only direct one towards having that experience. One may heap on proposition after proposition and yet still miss the core of what the proposition is about: the experience. Whitehead, as he admits, could be said to base his ontology on the foundation of experience and aesthetics, from which the rational is derived/dependent.

For Heidegger, "*that which* gets taken as a sign must first have become accessible in itself and been apprehended *before* the sign gets established."[26] Thus, there must be a prior grasping of the sign before it can be used as a sign. As for its function, "Signs always indicate primarily 'wherein' one lives, where one's concern dwells, what sort of involvement there is with something."[27] Before I can use the red, yellow, and green lights at a stop sign, I must have a grasp of the existence of traffic lights, the totality of motor vehicle function, and my position within that totality, after which the theories of 'stop,' 'slow down,' and 'go' can be appropriated. Likewise, before I can use the word

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[25] *Ibid*, 184.
[26] *Being and Time*, John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, trans. (New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, 1962), 112 (H81); emphasis in original.
[27] *Ibid*, 111 (H80).

'cat' in its indicative function, I must have a background understanding of the alphabet (which is also founded) and experiencing a cat (the foundation). Due to the need of having a prior grasping of the sign (and its environmental context) before one can take up its indicating function in language and that towards which it indicates, that of lived experience, it cannot stand as a foundation of knowledge or understanding. There must be something upon which the sign/language is founded: that of its environmental context and being-in such a context. As Heidegger put it: "To significations words accrue. But word-Things do not get supplied with significations."[28]

This proposal should not be foreign to the LDS as it was given by Elder Boyd K. Packer in a much repeated talk titled "The Candle of the Lord." There Packer speaks of a discussion he had with a hardcore atheist on how Packer can 'know' that God exists. The atheist, being a good rationalist (I'm sure), demands of Packer that he provide an argument for how he can 'know' that God exists. After a few attempts with repeated refutations by the atheist, Packer asks the atheist to argue for a simple experience: that he knows what salt tastes like. Being unable to do so, Packer draws the analogy that his knowledge is the same: it cannot be argued, but knowledge is present.[29] Though a quaint story, Pres. Packer makes a valuable point: many experiences are not quantifiable or capable of description; to attempt to describe them is to lessen their reality and cogency, often with a pitiful failure. The point should be clear: human existence cannot rest on propositions alone, but must have a more primordial foundation of which experience is the primary candidate and on which words and propositions are subsequently added.[30]

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[28] *Ibid*, 204 [161].

[29] *The Ensign*, January 1983, 51-52.

[30] One common retort is to man's finitude, but *if we were God* we would be able to describe everything perfectly! What is interesting is that such an argument is impossible to demonstrate as all arguments where

So, what relevance does the above have for this topic? Two areas may be considered. First, our descriptions of reality are inherently incomplete as they rely on propositions. To attempt to speak of the world in propositional form, as if we are able to subdue and control it through words, is faulty on a fundamental level. Some have theorized that such a view of reality literally does 'violence' to the world by limiting it to domineering words by which we exhibit control.[31] As humans are part of the world, any description that is limited to propositions (and hence mathematics) would be pure hubris, denying the entity that is making the propositions to begin with. Along similar lines, to use our linguistic abstractions as a method of finding the 'reason' for the existence of the laws of nature as they are is to have a backward conception of where meaning comes from.

Second, a theoretical description of God (or man), especially from supposedly indubitable premises, will largely miss the point of either his existence and/or his role in the cosmos. One cannot be intimate with a proposition, or a series of dogmatic statements, or an abstract deduction from indubitable axioms; it is a hubristic misassumption of the rationalist and natural theology camp to think that knowing propositions about God is to know God himself, though the rationalist worldview makes such an assumption necessary. Put in simple form, the argument goes as follows:

1) All knowledge is propositional.
2) I know God.
3) Therefore, my knowledge of God is propositional.

God is the 'grand exception' are impossible to demonstrate. Even should God wish to demonstrate such facts to us, our finitude would continue to get in the way; relaying such facts would be an ontological impossibility.

[31] See the works of Immanuel Levinas.

Though such is the dominant epistemology in our culture, I would imagine that most would reject the above by sheer common sense. Still, as a recent discussion online with some Evangelicals demonstrates, some will still stubbornly hold to the rationalistic paradigm. With the above, we now consider the unique 'restrictions' placed on God by LDS theology and their relevance within classical Christian thought and the issue of worship worthiness.

The Co-Existence of Matter/Intelligence

LDS theology dictates that 'matter' and 'intelligence' are eternal principles that are incapable of either being destroyed or created *ex nihilo*: "Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be... The elements are eternal" (Doctrine and Covenants 93:29, 33). Similarly, in the famous King Follett Discourse, Joseph is reported to have said, "Element had an existence from the time he [God] had. The pure principles of element are principles which can never be destroyed; they may be organized and re-organized, but not destroyed. They had no beginning, and can have no end."[32] This naturally implies a limitation in God's omnipotence: it is not within God's *power* to create or destroy matter/intelligence.

This brings up two particular issues: God's relationship to 1) his embodiment and 2) the natural world. For the first, it is a common argument that if God is embodied then he is incapable of being omniscient or omnipotent. Based on Einstein's theory of relativity, that states that no information can be transferred faster than the speed of light,

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[32] Smith, Joseph Fielding, ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1997), 351-2.

it is postulated that God would have to wait light-years to gain knowledge of things occurring even in the nearest galaxy. Given these difficulties, our critics argue, the classical conception of God transcending time and space by being outside them is viewed as necessary.[33]

There are a few possible answers that could be given, but I will focus on two: first, physical experiments in the last 100 years have opened up the possibility for non-local or faster-than-light interactions. We define 'local' interactions as those that occur within the limits of the speed of light; 'non-local' is that which occurs outside possible influences within the speed of light. Though it is not unanimous, many physicists are willing to admit that the principle of locality is either false or limited in its applications. In this way, the possibility of the instantaneous transference of information or phenomena is not completely ruled out by science.[34] This could be given more credence given general field theory where fields are taken as the foundational entities or occurrences of the world, not atoms or matter; the largest question would be the receptivity of the person receiving the information, of whom we could consider God a paradigm example.

The second option questions the soundness of the view of light that makes the above (theoretically) impossible. For many years, light was considered a wave that moved through the 'luminiferous ether,' that wonderful substance that was denser than steel and yet gave as much resistance as a vacuum. With the advent of quantum physics, it was demonstrated that light acted as a particle, with Einstein's speed of 300,000 km/s, hence doing away with the need for a medium such as the ether. Then it was shown that light sometimes acts as a wave and sometimes as a particle. Furthermore, with Einstein's

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[33] See, for example, *The Mormon Concept of God*, 72-73.
[34] For a general overview of this possibility, see Robert Nadeau and Menas Kafatos' *The Non-Local Universe: The New Physics and Matters of the Mind* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999).

theory of relativity light's speed was demonstrated to be the same for every frame of reference: if you were traveling at half the speed of light, from your relative position light would still travel at 300,000 km/s, not 450,000 km/s as our general intuitions would predict.

Given these difficulties, a number of modern theorists are arguing that the categories of 'wave' and 'particle' are inappropriate when dealing with light.[35] Their reason for rejecting these categories of thought have to do with our genuine experience with light: light is not something that we see or experience, rather we see and experience light-illumined things in the world. In this way, light is accessible only in its interactions with other entities and should not be confounded with the entities they illuminate. To use one common example, when using a flashlight we do not see light but we do see illumined entities, such as dust particles, bodies, and such; without such entities to illumine, light could not be experienced in any way. Furthermore, given relativity theory, light is essentially eternal and non-local. As objects approach the speed of light time is slowed; when an object reaches the speed of light, all time stops relative to that object. Thus, from the relative viewpoint of light, the 'movement' (if it can be called such) from point A to point B occurs in 'no time,' giving instantaneous interactions on the luminous level. In this way, one could just as well say that light transcends space and time and even circumscribes space and time in its absoluteness.

Given the above, what would remain is to provide an ontological connection between man and light. In 1994 LDS philosopher Truman Madsen proposed that "[man]

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[35] David Grandy has written a number of articles summarizing and applying this new perspective. For a purely scientific approach, see his "Light as a Solution to the Puzzle About Light," *Journal for General Philosophy of Science* 33 (2002): 369-79. For a mixed discussion of applications in both science and religion, see his "Light as an Absolute in Science and Religion," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* XII (2000), 159-177.

is somehow in his very primal makeup composed of light."[36] Though he proposed ways

by which we can interpret this perspective,[37] there are two well-known and respectable

philosophical traditions that provide possible answers: phenomenology and process

thought. For phenomenology, *Dasein* (or the human way of existing) is essentially an

entity that brings things to light as phenomena, or 'that which shows itself' or 'is brought

to light (*lichtung*).' In his famous *Being and Time*, phenomenologist Martin Heidegger

states that "*as* Being-in-the-world [Dasein] is cleared [*gelichtet*] in itself, not through any

other entity, but in such a way that it *is* itself [or is the ground of] the clearing [or

lichtung]."[38] To be Dasein, to exist as humans do, is to be a source of light; literally "the

light of truth," as spoken of in Doctrine and Covenants 93:29.[39]

Similarly with process thought: founder Alfred North Whitehead, in speaking of

the foundational quanta of the physical world, argues:

> The mysterious quanta of energy have made their appearance, derived, as
> it would seem, from the recesses of protons, or of electrons. Still worse
> for the concept, these quanta seem to dissolve into the vibrations of light.
> Also the material of the stars seems to be wasting itself in the production
> of the vibrations.[40]

The "vibrations" are related to the form of 'process' which is the benchmark of the

process metaphysic; the "light," though not explicitly done so in *Process and Reality*,

easily refers to the concept of 'prehension' (Latin – literally 'to grasp') whereby objects

are brought to light and made relevant for each 'actual entity' in the world. It is by

prehension that actual entities announce themselves and by which other entities are

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[36] *The Radiant Life* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1994), 20.
[37] See *Ibid*, 19-30.
[38] *Being and Time*, John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, trans. (New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, 1962), 171 (H133). The translators point out, "The force of this passage lies in the fact that these words [i.e. 'cleared' and 'clearing'] are cognates of the noun 'Licht' ('light')" (*Ibid*, f.n. 2).
[39] For explicit connections on phenomenology and light, see Grandy's "A Heideggerian Approach to Human Understanding," in *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs* 122:1 (1996), 5-20.
[40] *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1985 [1978]), 78-79.

announced; it is the process of enlightening and making an entity present to another. Though process thought has been explicitly used in relation to LDS theism by Blake Ostler,[41] an explicit interpretation with phenomenology has yet to be provided.[42]

Given the properties of light and man's possible ontological connection to such, it would not take much theoretical metaphysics to explain both God's awareness and interaction with the world given his limited spatio-temporal position in the cosmos. Granted, it would appear that a different concept of 'knowledge' would be needed as opposed to a propositional form, but both phenomenology and process thought already provide alternatives. In the least, the findings of modern physics do not categorically reject the possibility, though the physical and metaphysical commitments of our Evangelical critics do.

The question of God's relation to the natural world are closely related to the attribute of omnipotence: some have argued that the necessary existence of matter and intelligences make God less than omnipotent; there are things that are out of God's control and hence limit his existence and power. I don't think that an immediately jettisoning of 'omnipotence' is necessary. In his classic work, *The Coherence of Theism*, eminent philosopher Richard Swinburne provides the following definition for omnipotence:

> a person *P* is omnipotent at a time *t* if and only if he is able to bring about the existence of any logically contingent state of affairs *x* after *t*, the description of the occurrence of which does not entail that *P* did not bring it about at *t*, given that he does not believe that he has overriding reason for refraining from bringing about *x*.[43]

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[41] See his *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Attributes of God* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2001).
[42] James Faulconer (of BYU) has long provided examples of an active LDS phenomenologist who is explicitly using such concepts in relation to religion in general, though nothing specific has been written particularly addressing LDS theism.
[43] *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 160.

Translated into plane English, God is omnipotent if he can bring about a state of affairs that 1) are not logically contradictory (i.e. he cannot create round-squares),[44] 2) do not conflict with past actualities (i.e. he cannot bring it about in 2003 A.D. that the statement, 'Socrates drank hemlock in 399 B.C.E.,' is false),[45] 3) do not entail the actions of others (i.e. he cannot bring it about that I freely choose to eat eggs for breakfast rather than pancakes), and 4) if the agent has reason for not performing a given action (like God's decision not to sin).[46] The primary item to focus on is 2) which is entirely applicable to the LDS worldview. Given the LDS metaphysical presuppositions, it is always the case that intelligence and matter exist and, hence, God's inability to bring it about that they do not exist does not impinge on his omnipotence due to their temporal priority. It is still a point of contention within Evangelical circles whether God can change the past and here I simply assume its impossibility.[47] Granting that not all accept Swinburne's definition of omnipotence, he provides one example where the LDS conception of things can adhere to a classical definition, though it might apply it in a slightly different way given LDS metaphysical presuppositions.

Lastly, Stephen Parrish has recently argues that the eternal existence of matter is un-reasonable: i.e. that there is no 'reason' that the universe should exist at all. This he compares with the classical view where God exists of analytic necessity (i.e. not existing is contrary to the perfection of God so he must exist by definition) whereby the world exists because of God. Immediately you should be able to see the rationalistic

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[44] See *Ibid*, 149-150.
[45] See *Ibid*, 150-152.
[46] See *Ibid*, 158-161.
[47] My rejection largely rests on the question, "*Why* would God *need* to change the past?" Given his attributes, it would seem that such an ability would be superfluous; it would simply be attributing to God powers that are completely unnecessary. To say that denying God this ability would be compromising his omnipotence seems moot as an omnipotent and omniscient being would have no need of doing so.

foundationalism at work: the world exists by 'reason' of the axiom of a perfect being that exists of necessity and his willful decision to create. With the LDS, there is no necessary reason in the existence of the physical world as it is an analytically contingent reality, thus it is arbitrary and meaningless for the world to exist.

Two primary points need to be made: first, we should question the primacy of logic in asking for a 'reason.' I first ask why it is better that there be a logical reason for something's existence at all than not. From the above, I have argued that rationalism is a derived form of knowing, founded on the basis of non-theoretical experience (and perhaps even experience that defies theoretical explication). Thus, why must I rely on the abstraction for both 'reason' and 'meaning' when at least the latter comes from non-logical grounds and the former requires those grounds for its existence (i.e. it is dependent). This leads directly to my next point: the apparent necessity of a spatio-temporal world.

If language and rationality depend on a non-theoretical environmental context of experience and references, a spatial and temporal frame of reference appears to be necessary; the kind that a physical world could provide. Such may not exist of analytic necessity, but the possibility of analytic analyses (at least in human subjects) necessarily depend on its existence.

In a response to this sort of possibility, William Lane Craig has recently argued that God's knowledge does not require such a spatio-temporal frame of reference:

> Given some relational theory of time, God's solitary and unchanging consciousness of tenseless truths [i.e. truths that do not require temporal designations] would not be temporally extended. As various defenders of

divine timelessness have pointed out, knowing is not necessarily an activity which takes time.[48]

Finally, quoting William Mann, he argues that "knowing is not a process whose fulfillment takes time, or an activity which entails the existence of earlier and later stages in the mental life of the knowing agent."[49] Again, though knowing may not of analytic necessity require a temporally prior event whereby the knowledge is gained,[50] human experience (essentially the only experience we know) requires such a temporal succession before knowledge can be gained. Likewise, Craig's reference to "tenseless truths" (such as $2 + 2 = 4$) attempts to reduce God's knowledge to propositions which, I have argued, are literally meaningless without an experience from which it can abstract the tenseless proposition. The classical theist could then argue that God is the grand exception; that because God created and is not limited by the mechanisms of the world he must by necessity know experiences. While I grant that such is necessary, the theist must then be pushed on how such is possible given their views, for what 'reason' or 'rationality' there is in simultaneously affirming God's inherent rationality and his experiential knowledge.

In short, then, while it might be formally meaningless and of non-analytical necessity that the material world exists eternally, I would likewise point out that notions of 'meaning' and 'necessity' are incomprehensible without the existence of a spatio-temporal world whereby experience is possible. Similarly, to appeal to the logical necessity of God's existence *completely* ignores the being that is making that claim and

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[48] "Divine Timelessness and Personhood," as of August 5, 2003.
http://www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig/docs/timelessness-personhood.html.
[49] "Simplicity and Immutability," in *International Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1983), 270, quoted in Ibid.
[50] Pragmatic views of knowing will often deny this proposition. For many (if not all) pragmatists, to know is to perform an act and hence to be in time; the classical distinction between 'theory' and 'practice' is essentially denied as to have a theory (as well as to develop it) is to have performed a 'practice.' Perhaps God is again the 'grand exception,' but such cannot be argued (though it may be believed).

the means by which he/she is able to make it; ignoring the Saying (or expressing) while monopolizing on the Said (or proposition).

Lastly, in relation to worship worthiness, I would seriously question the worship of power. For the Perfect Being theist, God is worthy of worship as he is the most powerful and great entity that could logically exist; there is no possibility of a being that is grander than the logically necessary, logically perfect, logically powerful God. This can be encapsulated by the statement, 'My God is more powerful than your god,' a theologically sophisticated schoolyard taunt. Consider the words of John Feinberg:

> What a magnificent, majestic God we have! Who or what is like the God described in the preceding pages? Even if he never did anything, he would be eminently worthy of our adoration and praise in virtue of who and what he is! Creating a world, redeeming lost sinners, establishing his kingdom of righteousness and peace add absolutely nothing to God's infinite worth.[51]

I would ask the question: since when has the mere existence of a being warranted its worth? In the Biblical text we have scripture after scripture that describe God's worthiness to be praised, linking it explicitly with his goodness, his mercy to man, his creations, etc., but never merely for his existence. A God who does not act, and who does not interact, is a worthless entity; a Narcissus who glories in its own image; Aristotle's Most Moved Mover who, being limited to only contemplating perfection, is eternally self-inspecting and reveling in its own perfection. We do not praise the dictator for his power, nor the king who does not use his power to help others; why should God be the exception? I believe John's words sum it up well: "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

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[51] *No One Like Him*, 501.

Likewise, we praise God for being able to fulfill his promises, for keeping his word and being faithful to his covenants. In and of itself, the existence of matter does not impede God's will in doing what he says. Even given free will where God must interact with man's decisions, God's knowledge and wisdom is sufficient to eventually fulfill his plans; he knows all the possibilities of action, all the contingency plans he could perform in reaction to which possibilities are actualized, and has sufficient power to perform those acts that only depend on his own will. Though not as tidy as the God who controls all actions and thus ensures his victory, God's love for us and his desire for loving relationships genuinely entered in to trumps all the controlling power in the world for upon love "hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:36-40).

Conclusion

In the above, I have attempted to explicate the underlying assumptions of 'Perfect Being' theists, their general arguments against LDS theistic and ontological commitments, and a refutation of both. I have argued that the rationalistic foundations of Perfect Being theists are inappropriate as foundations and derivatively that their conclusions from such are unfounded (at least in human experience). Lastly, I have defended both the use of 'omnipotence' in relation to the LDS God-concept and the meaningfulness of an eternally existing physical world.

The above is an admittedly brief and simplified account of what could be a lengthy technical paper on this subject and, as such, it suffers from what most papers on brevity do: simplification and a lack of argumentation. Still, it is hoped that the general

ideas have been presented and the philosophical tools that should be used when dealing

with this and other philosophical issues have been succinctly grasped for future use.