

NECESSARILY GOD IS NOT ANALYTICALLY NECESSARY: A RESPONSE TO STEPHEN PARRISH

Blake T. Ostler

1.1 Parrish's Argument. In his contribution to *The New Mormon Challenge* ("NMC"), entitled "A Tale of Two Theisms: The Philosophical Usefulness of the Classical Christian & Mormon Concepts of God," Stephen Parrish argues that God as conceived by Mormons cannot explain the existence of and the order in the universe as well as the classical view of God. Parrish's target is not Mormon beliefs in general, but what he terms "Monoarchotheism." I will deal with this strange notion that Parrish attributes to some Mormons (primarily, I believe, Stephen Robinson) later. Suffice it to say for now that I don't know any Mormons who affirm "Monoarchotheism." As Parrish says:

Several LDS thinkers have expressed their understanding of God along the broad lines I will sketch below and it seems to be widely held in popular LDS thought. Because of the great variety of views within Mormonism, however, it should not be assumed that individual Latter-day Saints would necessarily affirm everything in my description.¹

One may wonder why Parrish would critique a fictional version of Mormon beliefs that no Mormon holds. His justification, so far as I can tell, is that he believes it represents "the most plausible version of the Mormon Concept of God," and so he is being charitable by critiquing the strongest view rather than a weaker view. Thus, if his critique is valid, it should also defeat the supposedly less plausible views as well. I will suggest later that Parrish is not critiquing the strongest view held by Mormons.

However, my initial response to Parrish is not affected by whether his view of LDS beliefs is adequate. All of Parrish's arguments rest on two notions that I intend to show are at best dubious: (1) God exists of *de re* analytic necessity; and (2) there is not an adequate explanation for existence or order unless that explanation is either analytically necessary or brought about by a being who has analytically necessary existence. Parrish asserts five arguments, each of which rests on these two propositions as given. First, Parrish argues that God, as conceived by Mormons cannot be a necessary being because his existence is not analytic – that is, it is not contradictory in first order logic to say that such a being does not exist in all logically possible worlds. Parrish asserts that only the God of "classical monotheism" can adequately answer the question, "why does God exist?":

To this question, classical monotheism has a ready answer, although fully explaining it is not easy. God exists because he is necessary being and therefore cannot fail to

¹ Francis Beckwith, Carl Mosser and Paul Owens, eds., *The New Mormon Challenge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 236. (I worked from a pre-publication manuscript and therefore the page numbers may not correspond to the published book)

exist. He cannot *not* exist any more than 2+2 can equal 5. To the further question as to why God is necessary, the best answer is that God is the Greatest Possible Being. He is omnipotent, omniscient, all-good, and sovereign. And, he is these things in all possible worlds.²

In his article in *NMC* Parrish says little about the justification for such a bold claim. He justifies this claim cursorily:

It might be asked, then, how the God of classical theism could necessarily exist. What contradiction is involved in his not existing? The answer to this is that, by definition, the God of classical theism is the Greatest Possible Being who by definition must exist in all possible worlds (since to exist is greater than not to exist). On such a definition, to say that this God might not exist is to entail a contradiction. Either the Greatest Possible Being exists necessarily, or cannot exist at all. Thus, there is an important disanalogy to the universe.³

Parrish argues that not only cannot Mormonism explain why God exists, it also cannot explain why the universe exists. He asserts that the universe either has the explanation of its existence internal or external to itself. The explanation cannot be internal to the universe because the universe does not exist of analytic necessity – that is, there is no contradiction in asserting that the universe does not exist or that it could be different than it is. He also argues that given the Mormon view, there is no external explanation for why the universe exists, for it is eternal and uncreated on the Mormon view. He then argues that unless the universe can be explained by some analytically necessary being, then there can be no ultimate explanation for why things exist at all or why the laws of the universe are as they are. Thus, he concludes that given the Mormon world view both God and the universe must exist for no reason at all or by chance. He also argues that Mormonism cannot explain order in the universe because the laws that define how matter is ordered must be prior to God as a material being and there must be laws that define how the matter will act that makes up God. Only a logically necessary being can explain such laws on his view. Finally, he argues that “ethical laws” are, among other things, necessary and transcendent, and can only be explained by a being that is analytically necessary.

As can be readily seen, virtually every one of Parrish’s arguments is based on the premise that only an analytically necessary being is sufficient to explain existence or order. My purpose here is to show that Parrish’s arguments against Mormonism are misconceived because they are based on a notion of necessity that is untenable. I intend to show that arguments used by Parrish to support the view that God must exist of analytic necessity are unsound. I will also suggest strong reasons to believe that not only has Parrish failed to show that God’s existence is analytic, but also that he *cannot* exist of analytic necessity. Now Parrish has not begun to justify these assumptions in his

² *Id.*, 239.

³ *Id.*, 242.

article in *NMC*. However, he refers readers to the fuller argument sustained in his closely argued book, *God and Necessity: A Defense of Classical Theism*.⁴ In the short statement in his article and in his book, Parrish relies upon what philosophers call the “modal ontological argument” to prove that God exists of analytic *de re* necessity. Because Parrish’s notions of necessity are somewhat unique to his particular argument, I will cite his definitions at length:

For a proposition to be a logically necessary proposition, it must be true in all possible worlds. If the proposition is in first order logic, then it is a formulated logically necessary proposition. A being that exists in all possible worlds is itself logically necessary. To be causally or factually necessary, some proposition or being must be true because of the laws of nature in some worlds, but not all. A tautology is merely a restatement of what has already been given. Analytic necessities are those that are essential positive properties that are entailed by the nature of the thing at hand, without consideration of concepts extrinsic to the thing at hand. Synthetic necessities are those wherein the concept is considered with other concept(s) extrinsic to the thing at hand. Metaphysical necessities are necessities of the identity and essential properties of kinds and individuals.... A *De Re* analytic necessity has its necessity in the nature of the object itself, apart from anyone’s determination to classify it as anything.⁵

The key concept is that if God’s existence is analytically necessary, then he exists in all possible worlds. A possible world is a maximally inclusive, coherent statement of the way things could be. Another way of putting it is that the denial that the Greatest Possible Being (the “GPB”) actually exists is contradictory because, by its very nature, the GPB includes actual existence within its meaning. I have used the redundant term “actual existence” here because in possible worlds semantics, things that “exist” in possible worlds do not necessarily exist in the actual world. To “exist” in a possible world is to merely be a logically possible thing. In other words, the things in question in a possible world, such as a ball, or a mermaid, or a centaur, or anything at all that is possible, might not really “exist” at all in the usual sense of the word. To avoid confusion, when speaking of God existing in the actual world I will state that “God actually exists.” When speaking of God “existing” in a possible world I will say that “God ‘exists’.”

1.2 Why God’s Existence Cannot Be Analytically Necessary. To support his view that God must exist of analytic, *de re*, necessity, Parrish relies on the modal ontological argument. I will give two versions of the modal ontological argument to show that my critique of it is not based on the particular form that it takes. Stated simply, the argument states: (1) If anything is possibly necessary, then it is necessary. (2) God’s existence is possibly necessary. Therefore, God’s existence is necessary. Charles Hartshorne constructed a modal argument to show that God’s

⁴ (New York: University Press of America, 1997). This book is an expansion of Parrish’s doctoral dissertation at Wayne State University.

⁵ *Id.*, 21.

existence is logically necessary. His argument is as follows, where “N(A)” means “it is logically necessary that A,” “~A” means “it is not the case that A,” “→” is strict implication, “v” means “or,” and “g” means “God exists”:

1. $g \rightarrow N(g)$
2. $N(g) \vee \sim N(g)$
3. $\sim N(g) \rightarrow N(\sim N(g))$
4. $N(g) \vee N(\sim N(g))$
5. $N(\sim N(g)) \rightarrow N(\sim g)$
6. $N(g) \vee N(\sim g)$
7. $\sim N(\sim g)$
8. $N(g)$
9. $N(g) \rightarrow g$
10. g

What shall we say of this argument? The argument is clearly valid. Moreover, premises 1 and 5 are merely statements of the Anselmian view of God and are therefore assumed to be true by definition. They say that if God possibly exists, then he exists necessarily. Premise 2 merely states the law of the excluded middle. Premise 3 is a law of modal logic in what is known by philosophers as logical system S5 -- which Parrish argues in his book is the most plausible theory of logic. Premise nine is clearly sound. Premise 8 follows from seven. That leaves premise 7 as the only questionable premise. Premise 7 says that “it is logically possible that God exists.” Hartshorne and others who rely on this argument take it as intuitively obvious that it is logically possible that God exists. However, premise 7 entails another premise:

7*. It is logically possible that God does not exist.

Now if we substitute 7* for 7, then it follows from premise 1 that:

10*. God (as conceived by Anselm) does not exist.

It may seem that we merely have a quandary over whether premise 7 or premise 7* is more intuitively plausible. But that is not the case. It is not merely a matter that these premises have equal prior epistemic probability that lead to different conclusions. The bigger problem (if that were not enough) is that “possibly x” logically entails “possibly not x.” The category of what is logically possible is the category of either possibly being the case or possibly not being the case. Thus, to say that “x is possibly necessary” entails a contradiction, for it entails that “it is possible that it is not the case that x is necessary.” It is the very mixing of the modalities of possibility and necessity that leads to the contradiction. But if we derive a contradiction from the premises, we have shown not merely that the argument is not sound, for because the argument is valid at least one of its premises must be false. Therefore, the notion that God’s existence could possibly be analytically necessary appears to be false.

However, Parrish does not rely on the form of the argument presented by Hartshorne.

Rather, he relies on the argument presented by Alvin Plantinga.⁶ In my view Hartshorne's argument is superior to Plantinga's because it does not have to deal with the added perplexities of possible world semantics. Plantinga maintains that Hartshorne's version of the argument shows only that there is a being who has maximal greatness in some possible world or another, but not necessarily that God actually exists in the actual world. To fix this problem, Plantinga gives a slightly different argument using possible world semantics as follows:

- (AP1) There is a possible world in which maximal greatness is exemplified.
- (AP2) Necessarily, a being is maximally great only if it has maximal excellence in every possible world.
- (AP3) Necessarily, a being has maximal excellence in every possible world only if it has omniscience, omnipotence, and moral perfection in every possible world.
- (AP4) Therefore, the property of possessing maximal greatness is exemplified in every possible world.

Once again, the argument is obviously formally valid. Premises (AP2) and (AP3) are merely definitions of the Anselmian notion of God. That leaves premise (AP1). Can it be restated in the same way that Hartshorne's argument can to entail a contradiction? Replace premise (AP1) with:

- (AP1*) There is a possible world in which maximal greatness is *not* instantiated.

From (AP1*) it follows that God does not exist in every possible world. But which is true, (AP1) or (AP1*)? Unlike the version of the modal argument presented by Hartshorne, it is not clear that if there is a possible world in which maximal greatness is exemplified that there *must be* a possible world in which maximal greatness is *not* exemplified. It appears that we have a stand-off of intuitions. Each of (AP1) and (AP1*) is initially plausible and there is no non-question-begging way to determine which is true. Given that a logically possible world is merely a description of a way things may or may not be, both could be true, depending upon the particular theory of possible world semantics one adopts.

However, we are not stuck with this war of competing intuitions and theories of possible world semantics because a fairly straightforward argument is possible to show that (AP1*) is true. In the standard version of possible world semantics developed by David Lewis, there are possible worlds that are not logically compatible with the existence of God as defined in (AP2). These are possible worlds in which there are vast amounts of unjustified or unmitigated evil. A God who is omnipotent, omniscient and all-good could not permit the existence of unjustified or unmitigated evil. Thus consider the proposition:

- (11) Unjustified evils exist in some possible world.

If such worlds are possible, a maximally perfect being who creates *ex nihilo* does not 'exist'

⁶ Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), ch x.

in those possible worlds. It follows that there are possible worlds in which “God ‘exists’” does not obtain – specifically, all those possible worlds in which (11) is true.

Now for many persons, it seems rather clear from experience that the possible world containing unjustified or unmitigated evil is not a merely possible world, but the actual world. However, Parrish considers this argument and rejects it. He argues that such a response amounts to “confusing epistemology with ontology.”⁷ Parrish argues that ontological questions (does evil or God exist?) are prior to epistemological questions (how do we know that God or evil exists?). He argues that if God exists, then the notion that there could be a possible world containing unjustified evil is mistaken, for such worlds are actually *logically impossible*:

*If God exists as a necessary being, then he would control whatever else exists. Therefore, the existence of morally unjustified evil is logically contingent on the existence of God. If a necessary God exists, then it is logically impossible for morally unjustified evil to exist. God is ontologically prior, or more basic. The belief that morally unjustified evil exists may give one a reason for believing that God does not exist, but this is epistemology, not ontology. From the perspective of the ontological argument, ontology is prior.*⁸

However, Parrish overlooks that the person who asserts that the proposition (11) “unjustified evils ‘exist’” is logically possible need not assert that the proposition is true in the actual world. Rather, all that needs to be shown is that the proposition “unjustified evils exist” is a logically possible proposition and therefore unjustified evils are exemplified in some possible world. Thus, the claim that it is possibly true that (11) “there is a possible world in which unjustified evil is exemplified,” is not a point about epistemology, or that we know that there are unjustified evils in the actual world; rather, the point is a point of logic. The denial of (11) is:

(12) Unjustified evils do not exist in some possible worlds.

Proposition (12) does not express a contradiction. What is being asserted is that the proposition “unjustified evils exist” cannot be analytically false for the simple reason that the proposition “unjustified evils do not exist” does not express a contradiction. Moreover, the Anselmian theist is logically committed to the view that the proposition “unjustified evils do not exist” is not a contradiction, for they claim that in the actual world there are no unjustified evils. Thus, the denial of the proposition “unjustified evils exist,” does not express a contradiction. It follows that proposition (11) is not logically impossible, contrary to Parrish’s claim. If (11) is not logically impossible, then there is a possible world in which there are unjustified evils and God does not ‘exist’ in such worlds. Therefore, God does not exist in all logically possible worlds.

⁷ *God and Necessity*, 115.

⁸ *Id.* 116.

There are two critical points to make about this argument. First, “the rules of logic” are logically and explanatorily prior to the ontological argument, for the argument presupposes the rules of logic as a point of departure. Parrish properly admits in his book that the rules of logic are more basic than God on his view – in fact the rules of logic are the ultimate reality on such a view.⁹ Given that an analytically necessary proposition is one whose denial entails a contradiction, it cannot be the case that (12) is analytically true because its denial does not express a contradiction. It follows that there are possible worlds containing unjustified evils and in which God does not ‘exist.’ Thus, God cannot ‘exist’ in all possible worlds and the argument fails.

Second, the very response given by Parrish begs the question, for he must redefine “logical space” to exclude those possible worlds that are incompatible with God’s ‘existence.’ Parrish tells us that we know (11) is necessarily false because it conflicts with his view that “God ‘exists’ in all possible worlds” is true. Yet if this is correct, then the issue as to which account of the nature of logical space to accept can be decided only by first assuming that “God ‘exists’ in all possible worlds” is true. But then it follows that there can be no modal argument for the view that God exists in all possible worlds or as a matter of analytic necessity that is not question begging, for the very argument must rely on a redefinition of logical space that can be justified only by the additional prior *assumption* that “God ‘exists’ in all possible worlds.”

Perhaps another argument that God cannot exist in all possible worlds will be useful, for the theist may retreat to the view, which I regard as untenable, that there is no such thing as even the concept of evil which ‘exists.’ There is a view among some theists that goes back at least to Augustine that evil does not exist and cannot exist, for all “evil” is merely the lack or privation of Being. The basic notion is that whatever exists must be good, and what we call evil is merely less good, less real, than the Being of God. In fact, Carl Mosser hints at such a view in his argument that Mormonism supposedly exacerbates the problem of evil.¹⁰ I regard this view as untenable because evils such as the Holocaust, or physical pain arising from being burned in a forest fire, or torturing little children just for the fun of it, are not merely the lack of good but positively evil.

There is an additional reason why the proposition “God exists” cannot be analytically necessary based on an argument given by Alvin Plantinga.¹¹ On Parrish’s view, a statement or proposition is necessary if and only if it is analytic. A statement is analytic if and only if its denial entails a contradiction. A self-contradictory statement can be characterized as one which entails two statements such that one of the statements is the denial of the other. Now statements asserting that something exists can be contradictory because they are complex. For example, that *Jones is a married bachelor* entails that Jones is married and that Jones is not married. Similarly, existential

⁹ Parrish, *God and Necessity*, 93: “A sovereign being has control over everything except his own nature and that which is entailed by the laws of logic.”

¹⁰ *NMC*, 250.

¹¹ Alvin Plantinga, “Necessary Being,” in James F. Sennett, *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 214-24.

statements are complex in the sense that to assert that “Jones exists” entails that “a person exists,” “a human head exists,” “a central nervous system exists” and so forth. Existential statements that assert the existence of something are therefore amenable to being contradictory because there is more than one statement being made. Statements which deny that something exists, or contra-existential statements, are not complex. When I say that “Jones does *not* exist,” I am not asserting the complex statement, “(A) a person does not exist; or (B) a head does not exist, or (C) a central nervous system does not exist,” etc. Such a statement can be regarded as asserting that either it is non-A or non-B or non-E. The key point is that the truth of any such statement requires only that *one* of its disjuncts is exemplified to be true. It follows that the statement in question cannot be *two* statements one of which is the denial of the other. Thus, a statement denying that something exists cannot be contradictory. It follows that “God exists” cannot be analytic because the assertion “God does not exist” cannot be contradictory.

There is also reason to doubt that *necessarily* a “maximally great being” must exist in all possible worlds as asserted by (AP2). One of the greatest problems confronting any theory of possible worlds semantics is comparing beings in one possible world with beings in another possible world.¹² For example, the intuition underwriting Anselm’s original argument is that a being that *actually exists* is “greater” than a being that is merely logically possible. If that is so, then it seems impossible to compare the greatest possible being that “exists” in merely possible worlds with the being that actually exists in the actual world. For none of the beings in the merely possible worlds can possibly qualify as a Greatest Possible Being since they lack a quality necessary to be the “greatest possible being,” i.e., they lack actual existence. One thing seems clear to me: it is inappropriate to worship a merely possible, non-actual being. But then it seems that what God may be in some merely possible world, as opposed to the actual world, may not be relevant to his “greatness.” What is relevant is that God can insure our salvation in the actual world. To do that, God’s power and knowledge must be sufficient to overcome any persons or forces that actually exist that could frustrate his will. He must be invincible and indestructible by any other force that actually exists as contemplated in the *Lectures on Faith*. His power and knowledge may exceed this minimal requirement, but he is not thereby “greater” or more worthy of our worship. Indeed, it seems that whether God “exists” in other possible worlds is irrelevant to faith; what matters is what God is in the actual world.

It also seems to me that some of God’s attributes do not admit of an absolute upper limit of perfection. Just as there is no greatest possible integer, there is no greatest possible joy, or happiness, or goodness or knowledge. Indeed, several theists have argued that there is no “best possible world” and it follows that there is also no greatest possible being.¹³ No matter how good

¹² See for example, T. Williamson, “Existence and Contingency,” *The Aristotelian Society: Supplementary Volume* 73 (1999), 181-203; “Bare Possibilia,” *Erkenntnis* 48 (1998), 257-73; and G. Ray, “An Ontology-free Modal Semantics,” *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 25 (1996), 333-61.

¹³ See e.g., Robert M. Adams, “Must God Create the Best?” in *The Virtue of Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). 51-64; Mark L. Thomas, “Robert Adams and the Best

God is, we can conceive him to be better in the sense that he creates a better world. Now consider the possible world in which God creates a world W1 that is not quite as good as another world he could have created W2. Or consider a possible world in which God is happier because there is more joy and less evil than another possible world. For any such possible world W1, there is another possible world W2 in which God could be “greater” or better. It follows that no matter how good God is in the actual world, there will always be a possible world in which he could be greater. Thus, the actually existing God cannot be as “great” as beings in other possible worlds. But if it is analytically true that God must be the Greatest Possible Being, then he cannot actually exist. It follows that the very notion of a “Greatest Possible Being” is misconceived. The very concept of a Greatest Possible Being is incoherent unless it is modified to allow that God can progress or surpass himself in certain respects. I believe that in Mormon thought the Godhead is a “maximally great being,” in the sense that God can surpass his own greatness at any given moment but is unsurpassable by any other actual being; but a “Greatest Possible Being” who could not exist in yet a better or greater possible world is misconceived.

For Plantinga, God’s perfection is “maximal greatness.” That is, whatever the greatest mix of compossible attributes could possibly be is what God is. However, Parrish substitutes the notion of maximal perfection with the notion of a “greatest possible being” to support his subsidiary arguments that only God could possibly be thought to exist of logical necessity.¹⁴ This transposition allows him to trade on intuitions underlying Anselm’s first argument that only a “greatest possible being” could be conceivably thought to exist of necessity. However, in making this trade-off Parrish has adopted a view of God that assumes greatness as an absolute upper limit in all respects. Because perfection is not statically absolute in all respects, but rather dynamic in some respects, the view of God we wind up with is incoherent. Such a god does not exist in all possible worlds, but in no possible world.

What then shall we say of Parrish’s argument that the classical God is more useful to explain such things as order and existence than the Mormon concept of God? Well, if God’s existence is not analytic then the supposed superiority simply evaporates, for it is this notion that Parrish uses as a point of comparison. *All of his arguments against the Mormon view of God are unsound and/or question begging.* The supposed notion of God that Parrish uses as a point of comparison cannot be compared to the Mormon God because there is no god who exists of analytic necessity in any possible world. Now I hasten to add that while this argument may confront Parrish’s view of God, it certainly has little impact on a large number of evangelicals and other theists. Very few have

Possible World,” *Faith and Philosophy* 13:2 (April 1996), 252-59; William L. Rowe, “The Problem of Divine Perfection and Freedom,” in Eleonore Stump, ed., *Reasoned Faith* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 230; Bruce Langtry, “Can God Replace the Actual World By a Better One?” *Philosophical Papers* 20 (1991), 183-92 and “God and the Best,” *Faith and Philosophy* 13:3 (July 1996), 311-28.

¹⁴See, Parrish, *God and Necessity*, 86-19. Parrish asserts, “the GPB is the only concrete, primary (non-derivative) necessary being which can be coherently conceived.” (86)

accepted ontological arguments as sound. It is therefore strange to me that Parrish would argue for a view that seemingly excludes not only the Mormon view of God, but also the views of many theists. Now I hasten to add that on my view, the Godhead as described in Mormon thought is indeed a maximally great being. No being could possibly be greater except God himself as he progresses.

1.3 Parrish's Statement of the Mormon View of God. To begin, I think that very few people would recognize Parrish's statement of the attributes of the 'monarchotheistic' view of God as an accurate statement of a Mormon view of God. However, I think that we ought to cut a great deal of slack to those outside our faith who make a good faith effort to understand what we say about God. I confess that I cannot define a single view of God as understood by all Mormons because the reality is that there are a wide variety of views regarding God among Mormons. Such a situation is hardly unexpected. There is even a wider range of views among Protestants, especially liberal Protestants. To deal with this problem, in responding to Parrish I am going to adopt a position that Stephen Robinson wisely adopted in the book *How Wide the Divide?* I am going to express my own understanding of Mormonism – limited though it undoubtedly is – with some comment on the range of possibilities I think that can be accepted within Mormonism.

1.3.a God and Embodiment. Parrish begins his elucidation of "Monarchotheism" with the observation that for Mormons God is not only embodied, he is *essentially* embodied. That is, "God" could not fail to have a body of flesh and bone. To support this claim, Parrish cites Joseph Smith's statement: "There is no other God in heaven but that God who has flesh and bones."¹⁵ However, Joseph Smith's statement does not refer to God's *essential* embodiment. On this score Parrish is simply and plainly inaccurate. Let me begin by observing that it is common to simply skip over the fact that when evangelicals like Parrish compare the Mormon view to the evangelical view they compare the Trinity as a whole to the Mormon view of the individual divine persons. But such a comparison seems to me to be a category mistake. Surely all Mormons accept that there is a description of the three divine persons as one Godhead, and in this sense as one God. Moreover, this Godhead is not embodied! Nor is it clear that the Godhead is in any sense material – and certainly not in the sense of being "flesh and bone." Given this essential distinction between the Godhead and the divine persons, it is somewhat misleading to simply say that "God is a body of flesh and bone" in Mormon thought. However, I can forgive Parrish's *faux pas* in this regard because Mormons often say the same thing and are "sloppy" with their statements regarding "God" in exactly the same way. But then again, Mormons who speak like this are not trying to be exact and accurate. So let's forgive the run-of-the-mill Mormon for the same sloppy usage while we're at it.

Moreover, if we compare beliefs regarding the individual divine persons it turns out that our beliefs are not far apart. There is a good segment of Christianity that holds that Christ, as the human nature of God, retains a resurrected body. Now both evangelicals and Mormons share something in common when it comes to understanding exactly what the properties of a resurrected body may be. There is a wide range of views within both Protestant and Catholic circles regarding whether the resurrected body should be understood to be something continuous with Jesus's physical body or,

¹⁵ *NMC*, 236.

as Paul says, a *pneumikos* or “spiritual” body. Further, what exactly is a “spiritual” body if that is what it is? Of course Mormons are more united in the belief that the resurrected body is properly physical in the sense that it is continuous in form with Jesus’s mortal body – but in the final analysis Mormons really have not, and I suspect cannot, define what the properties of a “glorified resurrected body” are. After all, neither evangelicals nor Mormons can understand the resurrected body to simply be a “physical” body in the same sense as a mortal body, for the resurrected Christ appeared to the Eleven “the doors being shut.” (John 20:26) The implication is that Jesus, as a resurrected being, went right through the walls. Therefore the resurrected body is something that is discontinuous with mortal bodies in the sense that it is not limited by physical barriers in the same sense and apparently is not subject to gravitation in the same sense. So neither Mormons nor evangelicals can be dogmatic when discussing what it means for one of the divine persons to have a resurrected body. However, the glorified resurrected body appears to be continuous with the way we understand a “physical” body in the sense that it retains its physical appearance.

Now it is true that Mormons believe that the Father is embodied in the same sense as the Son. However, I don’t see how an evangelical could object to this belief on *logical* grounds, for once it is admitted that the Son took upon himself flesh, there can be no *logical* barrier to believing that the Father could do so in exactly the same way.

It is of paramount importance to see that Parrish is simply incorrect to say that God is *essentially* a body of flesh and bone in Mormon thought. Neither the Father nor the Son had a body of flesh and bone *prior to* their mortal sojourns on any account of the Mormon view. Because they in fact did exist as individual divine persons prior to embodiment in a body of flesh and bone, it follows that they are not either *merely* or *essentially* bodies of flesh and bone. When I say that they are not *merely* flesh and bone, I mean that they are necessarily also something more. When I say that they are not *essentially* flesh and bone I mean that the divine persons need not be embodied in this sense to be either the persons they are or to be divine.

What of the view that the divine persons were nevertheless material prior to their mortal sojourns in the sense that they had spirit bodies? In the Book of Mormon, Christ showed his spirit body to the brother of Jared prior to his mortality. This spirit body was in the same form, the same image and likeness, as his mortal body. (Ether 3) The Doctrine & Covenants says that: “All spirit is matter, but more fine and pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes; We cannot see it; but when our bodies are purified we shall see that it is all matter.” (D&C 130:7-8) So is Parrish correct after all to say that even if the divine persons are not material bodies of flesh and bone; nevertheless, they are essentially embodied in some sort of *material spirit body*? Maybe and may be not. Are the Father, Son and the Holy Ghost each *necessarily* and *essentially* embodied as a material spirit in Mormon thought? I don’t know. Perhaps the divine persons are essentially “intelligence(s)” and a state of organization as a “spiritual body” came only later -- analogous (and not identical) to the way we gain material bodies at some time after we are spirits. This view is a possible way of seeing the statements in Mormon scripture. Thus it is possible that the divine persons existed as intelligence(s) prior to existence as an organized spirit body. It follows that “God” as a divine person is not essentially an organized state of “spiritual matter.”

And just what kind of “spiritual matter” are we talking about? Joseph Smith stated that “spirit is a substance; that it is material, but more pure, elastic, and refined matter than the body....”¹⁶ Now Mormon scriptures also say that “spirit” is a type of matter that can be seen only by “purer” eyes. I take this statement to imply that spirit matter is seen with “spiritual eyes,” and that such matter/spirit states cannot be seen at all with physical eyes and instruments. That is, even our most powerful instruments for detecting states of matter used by physicists cannot detect “spiritual matter.” Thus, *the “matter” of which the spirit is composed is not continuous in meaning with “matter” as it is used in modern physics.* This point is essential to grasp because virtually every evangelical author of *NMC* assumed that spiritual matter is the type of matter that physicists deal with. Spirits are the types of beings who can hover above the ground and do not seem to be subject to material laws as we experience them. Indeed, it is fairly well accepted Mormon doctrine that the “spirit world” where the spirits of persons go after death is “right here on earth,” but certainly not “right here” in the sense that it is in a dimension of existence that we can access through our physical senses. Spiritual matter thus seems to be a type of “matter” that is not continuous in meaning with what we mean in physics when we speak of “matter.” Of course, it may also be a type of material state that has a frequency that is simply too high for us to detect, or have other properties that make it impossible for us to detect it -- just as it was impossible to know about ultra-violet and infra-red frequencies before we had instruments to “see” them. To allow for the possibility that the spirit-material states in question are not continuous with what we mean by “material states” in modern physics, I will refer to it as “s-matter.” In so doing I will presume that at least something about what we mean by regular matter holds and other things that we mean of it do not – otherwise using the word “matter” is empty of content. Now I add that exactly what it is that holds for s-matter and what does not hold I cannot say exactly. I take it that spirit bodies retain a form that can be detected only by “purer and more refined spiritual eyes.”

The fact that s-matter and resurrected bodies may have different material properties than “matter” as discussed in physics seems to be required by the scriptural data. However, it must also be noted that stating exactly what is essential to “matter” as studied by physicists is not easy either. It is clear that the notion that matter is simply composed of ever-smaller particles is not quite accurate. Thus, the basic “forces” of nature such as the weak force, the strong force and electromagnetism are all included within our notion of “material states.” They are the same “stuff.” First, mass and energy can be converted into one another. Second, even “particles” of matter are not simply smaller bits of matter as we experience it; rather, at the quantum level of matter smaller than Planck’s constant, matter becomes just as much an event-wave as a particle. Further, space-time becomes “grainy” at such distances. We must extend our concept of “matter” to include states of energy, forces, wave-events, fields and indeed, space-time itself. This point is important because, as I will show later, an erroneous notion of matter underlies several of Parrish’s arguments against the M-Mormon view.

Now matter as we know and experience it, say something like salt and water, is just as real as “matter” defined at these sub-atomic levels of existence. Indeed, one of the properties of matter is

¹⁶ *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 207.

that it is not merely the sum of its parts. Salt is not just more chlorine and sodium. Water is not just more oxygen and hydrogen. To grasp the point that organization adds something “essential” that does not exist in the parts from which chemical compounds are constructed, it is necessary to grasp non-linear systems. Scientific “analysis” assumes that by understanding the parts of a complex system we can understand the whole. However, such analysis obscures the fact that real systems are almost always “non-linear.” It is not possible to proceed with analysis of the parts to understand the whole because the whole is now greater than the sum of the parts. Non-linear systems display a complex repertoire of behavior and do unexpected things. They are described as “chaos.” To understand such systems we must consider them as a whole and not merely as their parts. There are numerous examples of the holistic character of nonlinear systems. These include self-organizing phenomena such as chemical mixtures that grow “fractal” shapes such as crystals or pulsate with patterns of color in cooperative ways. The point is that an understanding of the forces between molecules may be necessary to grasp what is going on, but it certainly is not sufficient to explain the phenomena fully.¹⁷

Thus, it turns out that what is “essential” to a material state when speaking of non-linear systems is not smaller bits of matter, but *the organization per se* of the material forces as a whole. Organized matter is more than the sum of its parts. Further, what is essential even to the “particles” of matter is not something solid and extended, as Parrish assumes in his critique, but a “wave event” which can manifest in numerous different ways. Moreover, it appears quite likely that there are material states and “particles” that we have not yet discovered. Thus, it seems that we don’t have a good grasp on what matter may be “essentially.” Indeed, the “essence” of matter appears to be different things depending on whether we are speaking of sub-atomic wave-events, fields, elements or molecular compounds. It may be that s-matter is a form of matter that we haven’t discovered yet through measurable means. Just what its properties are is thus impossible to say - except that it is more “pure,” “refined” and “elastic” than matter as we know it. In all candor, I’m not sure what these descriptions mean either.

Further, the individual divine persons may not even be necessarily and essentially “s-matter” because they could have existed as unembodied, not-yet-spirit, “intelligence(s)” prior to obtaining a spiritual body. Just what is an intelligence? Now the Mormon scriptures never say whether intelligence is a type of matter. In fact, the only property that the Mormon scriptures affirm of intelligences is “being intelligent”! (Abraham 3:19) Mormon scriptures never refer to intelligence(s) as a material state. Is an intelligence a type of *non-material* awareness and self-consciousness that has capacity to further self-organize by “adding upon” it an organization of “spirit matter”? I just don’t know. Joseph Smith spoke of “intelligences” and “spirits” as synonymous terms. I cannot see any evidence that he thought of spirits as intelligences embodied in spiritual bodies.¹⁸ B.H. Roberts, a President of the Seventy Quorum of the Seventy, thought he

¹⁷ See, Paul Davies and John Gribbin, *The Matter Myth* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 38-41.

¹⁸ See Blake T. Ostler, “The Idea of Preexistence in Mormon Thought,” *Line Upon Line* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 127-144. See also Van Hale, “The Origin of the

could detect a distinction between spirits and intelligences in the scriptural statements, but it remains unclear.

Roberts' view is supported by two subsidiary doctrines. First, it is well-established in Mormon thought that all things were created "spiritually before they were naturally upon the face of the earth." (Moses 3:5) Thus, the creation of man and woman in the image of God in Genesis 1:26-27 (Moses 2:26-27) refers to the "spiritual creation" of humankind while Genesis 2:4 (Moses 3:4) refers to a physical creation of Adam. Indeed, Genesis 2:4 leads to a good deal of confusion unless such an interpretation is adopted because it states that plants did *not* yet exist and "there was *not* a man to till the ground," even though Genesis 1:11 says that God had just finished creating plants and herbs and 1:26 says that God had already created male and female.¹⁹ Second, Mormons typically interpret this spiritual creation of all things to explain how God is "the father of our spirits." (Heb. 12:9) For example, Acts 17:29 states that we are "the offspring of God," and D&C 76:24 states that through Christ "the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God." B.H. Roberts reasoned that if intelligences are eternal and uncreated, but we are the offspring of God, there must have been a time and a process of "begetting" us spiritually as his children before this life. Just how literally the process of "begetting" should be taken is uncertain - I don't take it literally. Moreover, in discussing such matters we are treading on holy ground and must walk lightly. However, Roberts' position seems to be a reasonable view to me. There was a time when intelligences were further organized as s-matter bodies and through which God's image and likeness was impressed onto us and bred into us. It follows on such a view that intelligences are not necessarily either physical matter or s-matter.

So let's take stock. "God" as the Godhead is neither matter nor s-matter. "God" in the sense referring to the individual divine persons of the Father and the Son is contingently, or non-essentially, embodied in "glorified resurrected bodies." These bodies are not subject to the same "laws of physics" that mortal bodies are. The Father and the Son are not essentially matter and it is also possible they are not essentially s-matter. They are essentially "intelligence." It may be that "intelligence" is not a material state but merely a center of self-conscious awareness and knowledge that has the capacity to causally interact with s-material and crass-material states – analogous to the way non-material "thoughts" interact with matter in Descartes' philosophy of the immaterial soul.²⁰

Human Spirit," *Id.* 115-26.

¹⁹ Of course, there are other resolutions of this apparent inconsistency based on the documentary hypothesis. I am open to the possibility that different texts may have been brought together, in particular the J (Jehovah or Yahwist) and E (Elohistic) texts respectively, which also explain these problems.

²⁰ I don't think of "thoughts" as things that exist independently of material states; rather, I conceive of "thoughts" as awareness that both arises from and also gives rise to the processes of complex material states, I think of consciousness as a type of information process that can refer back to itself in a "loop" of information processing. However, to adequately describe my view of mind-body would take a much longer articles even than this one already is.

However, “intelligence” may be a form of matter which gives rise to and is enhanced by the material organization. In this sense, the “laws” that describe and explain the organization of “s-matter” and “matter-as-we-know-it” are both grounded in intelligence. Whether intelligence is a material state is unclear, but it is pretty clear that if it is a “material state” it is “matter” in an equivocal sense that is not continuous with the way physicists speak of matter.

I suspect that one of the reasons “Mormon theology” has not been taken more seriously by Mormons themselves is that they realize that before we can intelligibly speak of such matters, we have to answer a lot of questions that we presently don’t have answers to. “Theology” tends to consist of endless speculation on matters that we don’t and can’t know much about until God tells us more. Moreover, the answers to such questions cannot be given by science because the realm of spirit and of resurrected bodies appears not to be continuous in meaning with the physical world that we know through our senses. Further, it is difficult to see how one could develop *a priori* or logical arguments to get a better grasp on these concepts. Like most Mormons, I believe that such answers will come, but only through additional light and knowledge through revelation. Moreover, these observations should be a caution to those who assume that they know what the terms such as “spirit matter” and “resurrected bodies” mean.

1.3.b God as Creator. Parrish next suggests that Mormons believe that “the material universe has existed forever, without an external cause.”²¹ He states that without God the “material universe” would exist in a state of chaos which “being uncreated, has certain innate properties and dispositions that God cannot change and which he must work around.” He states that what is unique to “monarchotheistic” Mormonism is that “it seems that God does make some of the laws that govern the universe.” In this way, he states, God imposes order on the pre-existing chaos.

If I understand Parrish, one difference between a “regular Mormon” and a “Monarchotheist” is that regular Mormons believe that God did not create and therefore is subject to natural laws, whereas Monarchotheists believe that God creates some of the natural laws and is not subject to those laws he creates. Now because God creates by organizing a preexisting chaos according to Mormon scripture, it is pretty clear that chaos exists prior to God’s organizing of it. It follows that God cannot simply exist already within an ordered universe, for the order is dependent on him. The *Lectures on Faith* state: “It was by faith that the worlds were framed - God spake, chaos heard, and the worlds came into order by reason of the faith there was in him.”²² As I see it, the order arises from the intelligence that originates in “God” and that “proceeds forth from his presence ... to fill the immensity of space.” (D&C 88:11) This light, truth and intelligence originates with “God” and is the “light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, *which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God ... who is in the midst of all things.*” (D&C 88:13). Thus, the view that God is the source of law that governs all things is grounded in Mormon scripture. It follows also that these laws are a manifestation of God’s power. I suppose that I must be a “monarchotheist”

²¹ *NMC*, 236.

²² *The Lectures on Faith*, I, 22.

on this count. (To avoid the too frequent use of the rather presumptuous title “monarchotheist,” let’s use the term “M-Mormons.”)

How then can the natural laws also be dependent in any sense upon the properties of “eternal elements”? Elsewhere I have explained at length my view of God’s relation to natural law.²³ Succinctly, on the Mormon view matter consists of realities that manifest “intelligence” in the sense that they exhibit law-like behavior. Mormons refer to these basic realities as “intelligences.” The individual “intelligences” (or natural substances or events) that comprise the basic constituents of matter have invariable natural tendencies. For example, molecules of water have a natural tendency to bond in such a way that when it is 32 degrees F, it is a solid. Because these natural tendencies are invariable within a range of behavior, we can formulate laws that describe how they act in given circumstances. Moreover, not only can we describe how these substances act, we can also discover the properties of these substances that explain why they act as they do in the given circumstances. However, these “intelligences” or natural substances cannot act or be acted upon unless God “concur[s]” by informing these realities with his light and intelligence. Thus, the fact that the “intelligences” (or natural substances or events) have the causal properties they do is a function of the essential properties of these realities, whereas the fact that these basic realities can manifest a power to act or be acted upon is dependent upon God’s concurring power. It is imperative to see that on this view of natural law, the eternal natures of the intelligences (substances or events) and God’s concurring power are more basic than the natural laws, for the natural laws arise from the essential natural tendencies of these intelligences rather than vice versa. This distinction is important because in Parrish’s account of natural laws, the natural laws are more basic than any material reality and are imposed on matter from outside by God.

Moreover, whether the “material universe” exists without an “external cause,” as Parrish says, depends critically upon what one takes to be the “material universe.” I assume that Parrish agrees with Paul Copan and William Craig that the “material universe” means our “local universe” that is causally accessible to us by light signals. However, if that is what “material universe” refers to, then I don’t believe that it exists without an “external cause.” I accept that some form of “inflationary” theory of the universe is true. If so, then prior to the big bang that evolved into our “material universe,” there are at least two types of realities that may have existed without beginning. First, if we reverse the expansion of our universe backward in time, we logically arrive at a universe that exists in a density smaller than the Planck density, which equals about 10^{94} power grams per cubic centimeter. At this range, the formulas that describe quantum physics are dominant. Because quantum physics governs the universe smaller than the Planck density, it is probable that any theory of big bang cosmology will have to accept the view that a quantum vacuum exists in non-measurable “time” prior to the so-called big bang out of which our local universe probably originated. It is possible that the quantum vacuum, the ultimate chaos, existed forever before the creation of our local universe.¹⁷ However, the chaotic inflationary theory predicts that ours is not the

²³ Blake Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Attributes of God* (SLC: Greg Kofford Books, 2001), ch. 4.

¹⁷ Alan H. Guth, (2000), [astro-ph/0002188](#); [astro-ph.0002156](#); and Alan H. Guth *The*

only “universe” that exists. If the chaotic inflationary theory is accepted, then it is probable that “universes” are self-reproducing.¹⁸ From this theory it follows that if the universe contains at least one inflationary domain of a sufficiently large size, then it begins unceasingly producing new inflationary domains. This process continues without end into the future. If so, then we must speak of the “multi-verse” rather than the “local universe” as comprising all reality. If there were prior non-local universes, then there is no reason why the process of one universe spawning from another prior universe could not be an eternal process that has no beginning. It is also possible that the quantum vacuum is the most basic state of material existence and that it has always “quasi-existed” in a state of absolute chaos prior to being organized by God. Far from supporting the notion of *creation ex nihilo*, the currently tenable theories of big bang cosmology are inconsistent with such a doctrine.

I am open to the view that God created our universe by bringing order out of a quantum field that existed prior to the existence of our local universe. The quantum field is truly the perfect description of “absolute chaos.” The quantum field is seething with “virtual particles” that pass in and out of “measurable existence.” At a point about 16 billion years ago, God willed to bring order out of the chaos by informing it with conditions necessary to bring about the big bang. Thus, instead of contradicting the account given in Mormon scripture that God created by organizing a material chaos, the chaotic inflationary theory seems to describe conditions precisely consistent with the Mormon view. I hasten to add that I am also open to the possibility that our pocket-universe arose from a prior “universe” as proposed by Linde’s self-reproducing universe theory. On either view, our physical universe was not created from nothing, but from prior material states.

1.3.c God’s Necessary Existence. Parrish next states that M-Mormons believe that God is “contingent and dependent” even though they really purport to believe that God is self-existing and does not depend on anything else for his existence. The basis for Parrish to impute an outright contradiction within the very formulation of M-Mormon beliefs about God’s self-existence is that Parrish mixes what he believes M-Mormons actually believe and what he thinks they ought to believe. Parrish asserts that for M-Mormons to speak of God as self-existing and not dependent on anything else is “a misleading way to use the term necessary.” He asserts that:

... [G]iven the logic of the LDS system, it is not at all clear that the Mormon God can even be self-existent. For, the Mormon God is necessarily embodied and thus depends on matter to exist. If matter had not existed God would not have existed. This makes matter more ultimate than God. He is further dependent on the existence

Inflationary Universe (New York: Addison Wesley, 1998).

¹⁸ See Andrei Linde, “The Self-Reproducing Inflationary Universe,” *Scientific American* (Nov. 1994); “The Inflationary Universe,” *Physics Today* 40 (1987), 61; and *Physics Review D* 59 (1999), hep-ph/9807493; John D. Barrow, *Impossibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 164-174; M.J. Reese, *Before the Beginning* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

of laws of nature and eternal principles in order to exist and rule.¹⁹

Parrish is not describing what M-Mormons believe at all. Rather, he describes what he thinks they should believe according to his own notions of analytically necessary existence. However, as I have endeavored to show, there are very good reasons for rejecting the view that God must exist of analytic necessity. Thus, from my perspective it is Parrish who uses the word “necessary” in a misleading way. Further, as I have already explained, the notion that God is dependent on matter in Mormon thought is false. Just what kind of “matter” is it that God is supposed to depend on for his existence? He also assumes that “God” is essentially a being embodied in the kind of matter that we experience as mortals.

Nevertheless, showing merely that Parrish may be mistaken is not very enlightening. So what do Mormons believe about God’s “ontological mode of existence”? Mormons are constrained to say that God is a self-existing being in some sense, for Joseph Smith asserted in the King Follett Discourse that God exists upon self-existing principles: “We say that God himself is a self-existent being. Who told you so? *It is correct enough*, but how did you get the idea in your head?”²⁰ How could God be a self-existing being? We have seen that the notion that God’s existence is logically or analytically necessary is dubious at best. In what sense then could God be said to be self-existing? We can begin by identifying the conditions which would be sufficient to identify a being as “self-existing.” I think this principle of self-existence (PSE) is a sufficient condition:

(PSE) A being is self-existent if that being never in fact fails to actually exist, and is not now, has never been and will never be dependent on anything else for its existence.

If these conditions are met, then nothing could cause God to exist or cause him not to exist. There is no explanation outside of God for his existence because he is a self-existing.

Parrish argues that it is impossible for a being that is composed of matter to exist of necessity. If we suppose that God’s existence as a material being *is dependent upon contingent laws outside of himself that describe why he is so organized as a material being*, then God cannot be self-existent because he depends on something other than himself for his existence. That is, it seems that the “bits of matter” of which God’s body is “composed” must be logically prior to his existence, for Parrish assumes that on the Mormon view “God” is composed of “bits of matter.” If this is so, then it also seems that the matter of which God is composed must exist based upon some natural laws which describe how it can be organized and how it can exist. It seems that any being that is composed of matter cannot exist on self-existing principles, for the natural laws are not self-existing in the sense that they are *analytically necessary* and they are logically prior to the material realities

¹⁹ NMC, 237.

²⁰ Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., *The Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (SLC: Deseret Book, 1974), 352.

whose behavior they describe. This is Parrish's argument in essence.

But I have already explained why it is doubtful that Mormons are committed to these premises given their view that God is essentially intelligence and is *not* essentially matter as we know it. Given that no being is analytically necessary, it is impossible to attempt an ultimate explanation based upon the existence of a logically necessary being. Thus, Parrish is not in a better position to ultimately explain matters than on a Mormon view. Even if there were such a being, if the logically necessary being were free in the sense that not all of its decisions are logically necessary, there remains an irreducible contingent (i.e., not logically necessary) fact in the series of explanation. Further, the theory of natural law adopted by Parrish assumes that "natural laws" are not defined in relation to the essential properties of the substances and events they describe, but that they exist independently of the material realm and are imposed from outside of the natural universe. Thus, Parrish has an idea of a transcendent law that may or may not require a transcendent law-giver. However, the view of natural law that I have elucidated adopts an imminent view of natural law that is essential to material realities. If a substance were not H₂O, it could not be water. If water did not freeze at 32 degrees F, it would not have the essential properties of water. Thus, even God cannot create "water" that is not hydrogen and oxygen in molecular unity. Natural substances on this view have essential properties from which natural propensities and tendencies arise. These natural propensities and tendencies are the basis for our mathematical formulas that describe natural laws and forces. On this view, natural laws are, in part, parasitic on the existence of dynamic physical realities that have essential natural tendencies. In contrast, Parrish assumes that the properties of natural substances are wholly parasitic on more basic natural laws. Thus, Parrish has assumed a theory of natural law as a basis for his criticism that Mormons are not committed to adopt. Further, the laws of nature are not logically prior to God; rather, God's organizing power is essential to the existence of natural laws.

Moreover, Parrish's view of natural law seems archaic. In modern physics we do not explain the existence of matter by referring to space and time as a receptacle in which matter can exist. Nor do we explain gravity as a law that exists independently of the matter and material states which it describes. Rather, space-time and gravity are dependent upon material states. For example, when a virtual particle appears in the quantum vacuum, it spontaneously creates dimensions of space-time and gravity. Space-time is an essential property of such material states. It is not as if there is "no space" and "no time" in which the virtual particle can exist simply because these do not "exist" prior to or independently of material states. Further, it is not as if there is a law of gravity and it is imposed from outside on the virtual particle when it occurs; rather, the gravity is a property of the material state itself.²¹ As Paul Davies explained: "How can the separate, transcendent existence of laws be established? If laws manifest themselves only through physical systems - in the way physical systems behave - we can never get 'behind' the stuff of the cosmos to the laws as such. The laws are *in* the behavior of physical things. We observe the things, not the laws. But if we can never get a handle on laws except through their manifestation in physical phenomena, what right

²¹ See, John D. Barrow, *The Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 192-95; and *Theories of Everything* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1991), 88-95, 110-11.

have we got to attribute to them an independent existence?”²²

However, Parrish could respond that this seems to get matters backwards. If God is a material body, then this body must be “composed” of “bits of matter” and these bits of matter must be organized based upon natural laws, and thus the natural laws must be more basic than God because his existence arises from being a body. However, this argument is unsound because God is not merely a body on any view of Mormon thought. Prior to taking on himself a body of flesh, God existed as a spirit body and prior to that as an intelligence. We don’t know that either s-matter or intelligence consists of “composed bits of matter.” Even if intelligence or s-matter were like the wide variety of material states studied in physics, it does not follow that the “matter” is composed of small bits of matter. It is possible to conceive of an intelligence as an undifferentiated field of force, or perhaps a wave-function, that eternally manifests a particular configuration or organization. It is also possible that intelligence is a particular energy state that we have not yet discovered. Nothing Parrish has said shows that such energy states cannot have always existed without an outside cause. That is, Parrish has not shown that the notion of self-existing being is contradictory.

For example, take the notion of an “individual” where we designate whatever is essential to that individual. The assertion: “This individual has existed uncaused from all eternity” is not self-contradictory. It is therefore logically possible that individual essences of persons actually exist uncaused from all eternity.²³ Not only is it logically possible, it also appears to be physically possible. Given that in a closed system of energy the quantity of energy is always conserved, it seems to be physically impossible for a particular quantity of energy to be created from nothing or be destroyed. Given that there are energy states, it appears that the energy always exists in some form or other. There is no logical reason why a particular field of force could not have existed in a

²² See Paul Davies, *The Mind of God* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 84. Davies remains open to a Platonist position regarding the “initial conditions” of the universe, or the “breaking of symmetries” that gives rise to the physical constants of the weak, strong and electromagnetic forces. He explains that the initial conditions must “transcend” the local physical universe because they must explain why the universe comes to be and why the particular laws that describe how material states act exist rather than some other set of laws. See, 91-92. However, if there are laws that describe the quantum vacuum or the prior universe from which our local pocket-universe originated, there is no such necessary “transcendent” explanation. Further and ironically, Copan, Craig and Parrish *cannot accept the Platonic view of “transcendent” laws* for such a view entails that there *really* exist an actually infinite set of real numbers, which they all hold to be absurd. From the Mormon viewpoint, it is possible that God establishes the initial conditions from a position “outside” or transcending the local universe, but from within another framework established by the quantum field or the prior universe.

²³ Indeed, this logical structure of what it is to be a person is demanded by a coherent Christology, for if humans are essentially created, then an uncreated Christ cannot be both man and God as the Chalcedonian creed claims. See, Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought*, chs. 13 & 14.

distinctive form from all eternity. It is possible that an intelligence is analogous to a field of force that has always existed uncaused by anything outside of it.

So why is God self-existent? On the Mormon view, the reason that God self-exists is because that is essentially the kind of being that God is. Intelligence is an eternal reality. It does not have a beginning and cannot be destroyed. Intelligence is “the light of truth,” and such truth simply is what it is. I don’t propose to prove that God has always self-existed (I don’t believe that there is any such logical “proof”) but only that such an idea is logically possible within the broad range of possibilities open to Mormons. We have knowledge of God’s existence, but it derives from revelation and God’s self-disclosure and not from logical certainties.

1.3.d. Immanent and Transcendent. Parrish also argues that Mormons believe that God is immanent in reality but *not* transcendent. To be immanent means “to be present in and manifested throughout” the material universe. To be transcendent means “to be outside of” or over and above the material universe. He argues that God as conceived by M-Mormons “is entirely within the space-time universe.”²⁴ However, as I have explained, on my view God transcends the local universe to the extent that all order is dependent upon God’s concurring power. Thus, God transcends the local universe in the sense that there could not be a local space-time universe without God’s creation, for space-time itself that defines our local universe arises out of the organization of the chaos that precedes the creation. The essential properties of intelligence include the ability to purposefully organize information, and organized information is the necessary basis for the existence of material states as we know them. God is immanent in all of the processes whereby order arises out of the chaos, for the manifestation of order that arises out of the material universe expresses (in part) God’s intelligence and arises (in part) from God’s organizing power. The “intelligences” (substances or events) which make up the material universe cannot express their inherent and essential tendencies unless God concurs. Order arises from intelligence and physical matter arises from order.

Now I add in Parrish’s defense that whether God transcends the “material universe” in any sense is not well-established in Mormon thought. It is possible to conceive of God as “wholly” within a space-time universe in Mormon thought. It depends largely on what one means by “universe.” However, given advances in our knowledge of the space-time universe, it would seem that if the big bang theory is accurate in the sense that our local space-time pocket-universe in which we live had a beginning a finite amount of time ago, then God must be conceived as transcending the local pocket-universe because he organized the chaos that preceded the big bang. If all that existed in the local material universe “before” the big bang event was a quantum vacuum, then Latter-day Saints can adopt the view that both God and intelligences existed as intelligence and/or s-matter spirits in a different dimension of reality and are not subject to the same laws as physical matter in the measured universe. If so, then God created the physical universe as a realm in which such intelligences could progress further than they could if they remained as they were. Of course, if our pocket-universe was preceded by another physical universe, then perhaps intelligences and God

²⁴ *Id.*

existed within other physical realms, though the “natural laws” that describe such realities could be different than those that are manifested in our pocket-universe.

By now it should be clear why Mormons have not discussed how and to what extent God transcends our own pocket-universe, for such discussions lead to a good deal of speculation about matters that we don’t know much about. I have merely indicated (very briefly) some ways in which Mormons could coherently maintain that God transcends the local space-time pocket-universe and is also the basis of all order manifest therein. Issues as to how an s-matter being could act upon and move from one pocket-universe to another, what kind of matter God’s spirit body is made of, how such spirit bodies could interact with physical matter as we know it simply require more knowledge to answer than we at present possess. However, there is nothing absurd or logically impossible about the idea that God and intelligences exist in a dimension of reality that is not coextensive with physical reality as we know it but are nevertheless “material realities” in some sense. The dimension in which God exists according to Mormon scriptures gives God access to all physical reality at once and allows him to transcend the local physical universe discovered by physics – and perhaps it is not discoverable by physics. There is, after all, a good deal of work being done with respect to dimensions other than our own in M-theory and other branches of physics and thus the idea of dimensions not accessible to us is not only possible, but likely. I hasten to add that none of the dimensions discussed in M-theory seem to be good candidates for such a spiritual dimension of existence because they are all sub-atomic in size -- my point is that other dimensions are not impossible but quite probable.

Now I add, there are similar problems that plague evangelical thought. Just how a wholly immaterial being could interact with matter, how an immaterial being outside of space-time could enter into a spatio-temporal relations with the material universe, how any being could possibly bring something out of nothing just by thinking or speaking are matters that evangelicals cannot fully explain. Nor is it reasonable to demand that they must explain such things. To demand that any person fully explain *how* God creates is nonsense. The answer is – we don’t know. However, it seems to me that Parrish is demanding that Mormons provide explanations for matters that he could not provide himself. Saying that the universe exists because God decided to create it doesn’t really explain much. Why did God decide to create it? Is there something which explains God’s decision? How could a decision to create be sufficient for creation without some physical process? Just why these particular physical laws rather than others, perhaps more conducive to a peaceful natural world? Why didn’t God create persons more morally sensitive than us? None of these things have been explained by evangelicals or anyone else to my satisfaction. To suggest that everything is neatly explained on the evangelical view is absurd. Indeed, if God *freely* decided to create the universe, then there will always remain something that does not have a sufficient explanation, i.e., God’s free decision. Why did God create? Because he decided to. Why did he decide to? Because he decided to. What more can be said? Perhaps that God wanted to express his love in endless ways. Well, then, why did God decide to create when he did? Why did he create these types of creatures rather than others? There is no end to the questioning. .

Parrish also argues that it is difficult to conceive “how a material object the size of a man can

control the entire physical universe.”²⁵ Parrish observes that “this is a simple point, but I have not seen any LDS thinker address this objection.” The answer is simple and straightforward. If God were *merely* a “material object having the size of a man” there may be a problem. But that of course is not what any Mormon believes. God’s spirit proceeds from God’s immediate presence to be in and through all things in the universe as the law by which all things are governed. The analogy used in Mormon scripture is that God’s spirit proceeds from his physical presence like light proceeds from the sun, for even though the sun is limited in physical extension, its scope of influence is not limited to its “physical size” (D&C 88:). God is immediately present to all things in the sense that he acts upon, is acted upon by and is aware of all things immediately. Looked at another way, God’s relation to all reality is analogous to the relation a person has to his or her own body.

Parrish also argues that because it is logically possible that “the Mormon God” might not have existed (because God’s existence is logically contingent) that everything must exist and happen “for no reason.” As I have shown, given the failure of the ontological argument, Parrish is at best in the same boat. However, does everything have to be explained by an analytically necessary being to have “a reason”? We explain the fact that a rock moved by its immediate preceding causes, for example that I lifted it or a natural force (like gravity) acted on it. Does it follow that the rock was lifted for “no reason” simply because it is logically contingent that I lift the rock? Hardly. The rock’s movement is sufficiently explained by reference to my intentions and powers. Of course, ultimately explanation must stop somewhere. In the Mormon scheme of things, explanation stops with the essential and eternal nature of intelligence. Intelligence or the light of truth simply exists because it is its nature to exist. I regard the question, “why is there something rather than nothing,” as an impossible question for existing individuals to coherently conceive. It is impossible to conceive of absolute nothing, for the very activity of “conceiving” presupposes existence. I am not asserting that the denial of any existence at all is contradictory, but simply that we cannot conceive what it would be for there to be nothing as a matter of pragmatic necessity. Admittedly, just why there is order in the universe needs to be explained, but existence does not need to be explained, for existence is the natural state of things. Order is ultimately explained by referring to the intentions and powers of God in relationship with the natural tendencies and propensities of eternal intelligences.

Parrish also argues that there is no reason why matter should be inherently subject to God’s control -- to the extent it is within his control. However, Parrish fails to give any reason why it should not be within God’s control. It seems to me that there is at least an equal open question for evangelicals. For example, is there a reason that matter is supposedly inherently susceptible to being created *ex nihilo* on Parrish’s view? If so, what could it possibly be? It seems to me that the notion that God is material coheres better with the view that matter is subject to God than the view that God is immaterial. We know how one material object can act on another. We have no experience of a wholly immaterial object acting on a material object.

²⁵ *NMC*, 244

CONCLUSION

I appreciate the good faith effort that Parrish has made to grasp Mormon thought and how it might relate as an explanation of existence and material order to the creedal view of God. It seems to me that Parrish's reliance on the ontological argument to gain a strategic advantage for the God of the creeds over the God who revealed himself to Joseph Smith is ill conceived. There can be no comparison because the argument is not sound. Because the ontological argument fails, Parrish cannot explain everything that exists by referring to logical necessity. I have endeavored also to show why there are necessarily open questions about God's relation to the material world in Mormon thought. There is too much we do not know about cosmology, physics, matter, s-matter and intelligences to be dogmatic about such matters. However, I see no reason why the God who revealed himself to Joseph Smith cannot be the self-existent creator of all things -- and certainly Parrish has not given me any reasons that I find persuasive.