

Sin, Suffering, and Soul-Making: Joseph Smith on the Problem of Evil

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Nothing tests our trust in God or challenges the rationality of our belief in him more severely than human suffering and wickedness. Both are pervasive in our common experience. At the moment, the mention of the World Trade Center and Afghanistan evokes images of unspeakable human cruelty or grief, and Auschwitz and Belsen still haunt our memories. Truman Madsen has powerfully portrayed the unfathomable depth of human pain and anguish in his descriptions of persons seeking to maintain their faith in the face of seemingly horrendous evils:

As a beginning, let us walk into a hospital: Here. This newborn infant with the lovely face. She could not have worthier parents. But she was born in total paralysis and is blind. The doctors do not know if she will survive. And if she does . . . This bed is empty. Its occupant, a quivering psychotic with a wild stare, is upstairs undergoing shock treatment. He collapsed when his wife and two children were maimed in a fire, one beyond recognition. Over here is a surgeon who had a rare brain disease and asked his closest friend to operate. The operation failed; and he has been, for nearly three years, a human vegetable. His friend has since committed suicide. Somewhere tonight the families of these souls are crying themselves to sleep. Now, if your arm will hold out, write as many zeros after a “1” as will portray similar reenactments of these scenes that are, or have been, or may be, on this planet. And that will be one thread in the tapestry of human misery.¹

This, then, is the challenge: our moral sensibilities are so outraged by such evils that we may begin to question whether our world is really the product of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and morally perfect Creator. We are at a loss to see how a perfect God could have any morally sufficient reason for permitting such evils to occur. Of course, our perplexity is not merely conceptual, nor does it involve only the suffering of others. Few of us escape deep anguish, for it is no respecter of persons and arises out of our experiences of incurable or debilitating diseases, mental illness, broken homes, abuse, rape, wayward loved ones, tragic accidents, untimely death—the list goes on. Many of us are constrained to cry out from the depths of our souls: “Why, God? Why?” And many of us have prayed, often on behalf of a loved one, “Please, God, please help,” and then wondered why all that we seem to hear is a deafening silence. All of us have struggled, or likely will struggle, in a very personal way with the problem of evil.

We say *the* problem of evil, but actually there are several.² We will consider here just three: the logical problem, the soteriological problem, and the existential problem. The logical problem of evil is the apparent contradiction between the world’s evil and an all-powerful and all-loving Creator. The soteriological problem of evil is the apparent inconsistency between an all-loving Heavenly Father and particular Christian doctrines as to the means and scope of salvation. The existential problem of evil is the personal challenge of living trustingly and faithfully in the face of what seems to be overwhelming evil.

As Truman Madsen has long and well pointed out to us, Joseph Smith provided revealed insights that help us comprehend and cope with human sin and suffering. In this essay we draw on Truman’s interpretive presentations of these insights in addressing these problems of evil. Truman first explored the bearing of Joseph Smith’s revelations on the problem of evil in *Eternal Man*³ and *Four Essays on Love*,⁴ a project to which, as evidenced by the references to his work in this essay, he often returned.

The Logical Problem of Evil

Soaked as it is with human suffering and moral evil, how is it *possible* that the world is the work of an almighty, perfectly loving Creator? So stated, the logical problem of evil poses a puzzle of deep complexity. But the conundrum evoked by our reflection on this question appears to be more than just a paradox: we seem to stare contradiction right in the face. The ancient philosopher Epicurus framed the contradiction in the form of a logical dilemma: Either God is unwilling to prevent evil, or he is unable. If he is unwilling, then he cannot be perfectly good; if he is unable, then he cannot be all-powerful. Whence, then, evil? And eighteenth-century skeptic David Hume expressed the contradiction in much the same way:

Why is there any misery at all in the world? Not by chance, surely. From some cause then. Is it from the intention of the deity? But he is perfectly benevolent. Is it contrary to his intention? But he is almighty.

Nothing can shake the solidity of this reasoning. So short, so clear, so decisive.⁵

Hume's succinct statement has since provided the framework within which the logical problem of evil is discussed. However, we believe Hume's way of formulating the problem is far too narrow and therefore unjust to both challenger and defender of belief in God—especially to the Christian defender. We do not believe that for the challenger intent on disproving God's existence, the problem has been stated in its starkest terms. For in addition to affirming that God is (1)perfectly good and (2)all-powerful, traditional Christian theologians commonly affirm two additional propositions that exacerbate the problem: (3)God created all things absolutely—that is, out of nothing; and (4)God has absolute foreknowledge of all the outcomes of his creative choices. While apologists for belief in God have labored long to reconcile the world's evil with God's goodness and power, they have often overlooked the much more difficult task of reconciling evil, not only with his goodness and power, but with his absolute creation and absolute foreknowledge as well. Twentieth-century English philosopher Antony Flew takes these additional premises into account by arguing that any such reconciliation is impossible. It is perfectly proper in the face of apparently pointless evil, he says, to look first for some *saving* explanation that will show that, in spite of appearances, a loving God really exists. But Flew claims that believers have assigned God attributes that block a saving explanation altogether:

We cannot say that [God] would like to help but cannot: God is omnipotent. We cannot say that he would help if he only knew: God is omniscient. We cannot say that he is not responsible for the wickedness of others: God creates those others. Indeed an omnipotent, omniscient God must be an accessory before (and during) the fact to every human misdeed; as well as being responsible for every non-moral defect in the universe.⁶

We can formulate Flew's version of the logical problem of evil as follows:

1. God exists; is morally perfect, omnipotent, and omniscient; and created all things absolutely.
2. Evils occur.
3. A morally perfect being prevents all the evils it can.
4. An omnipotent, omniscient, absolute creator can prevent all evils.
5. Hence, all evils are prevented. (1, 3, and 4)
6. Therefore, evils occur, and all evils are prevented. (2 and 5)

By means of this argument, Flew attempts to reduce traditional assumptions about the nature of God to a logical contradiction. Or, to state the argument less formally, if God creates all things (including finite agents) absolutely (that is, out of nothing), knowing beforehand all the actual future consequences of his creative choices, then he is an accessory before the fact and ultimately responsible for every moral and nonmoral defect in the universe. And if, as some believers allege, some human agents will suffer endlessly in hell, God is also at least jointly responsible

for these horrendous outcomes. But if so, how can he possibly be perfectly loving? Given the traditional understanding of God, whatever our consistency-saving strategies, in the end (we believe) we must candidly confess that they are not very convincing.

On the other hand, this exclusive focus on reconciling evil with *just* a set of divine attributes is unfair to those of us who are Christian. For it fails to acknowledge the incarnation of God the Son in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and his triumph over suffering, sin, and death through his atonement and resurrection. Any Christian account of the problem of evil that fails to consider this—Christ’s mission to overcome the evil we experience—will be but a pale abstraction of what it could and should be. We propose, then, to consider the problem of evil from this broader perspective, confronting it in terms not only of its starkest statement, but also of its strongest possible solution: a worldview centered in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

Christ revealed insights to Joseph Smith that *do* address the problems of evil in their broadest terms. These revelations suggest what we call a soul-making theodicy⁷ centered within a distinctively Christian soteriology (or doctrine of salvation) but framed within a theology that rejects both absolute creation and, consequently, the philosophical definition of divine omnipotence, which affirms that there are no (or no nonlogical) limits to what God can do. These revelations also disclose the Lord’s loving response to the question of the fate of the unevangelized: the redemption of the dead. The worldview framed by these revelations dissolves the logical and soteriological problems of evil while infusing with meaning and hope our personal struggles with suffering, sin, and death. To show that this is so is our purpose in this essay. As background for both understanding and appreciating the value of these revealed insights on the problems of evil, it will be useful to sketch some of the traditional Christian attempts to deal with the issues.

The Deterministic Tradition

The problem of evil is especially acute for those traditions which maintain that all things that occur are the effect of God’s all-determining causal activity. Such prominent theological luminaries as Calvin,⁸ Luther,⁹ Augustine (on the dominant interpretation),¹⁰ and Thomas Aquinas (on the majority interpretation)¹¹ all held that God predestines and causally determines all events that occur from the moment of creation. Truman Madsen explains,

Augustine begins with a premise that God is all-powerful. To him that means all things, all else beside God, including space, time and the souls of men, were created by God from nothing. The puzzle arises as to why a being of unlimited power should have chosen to create such a universe as this: of pain, torment, and (on some views) endless damnation. Specifically, evil and the devil were among the realities God chose to create. Why, being good, could He—would He—do such a thing?¹²

Indeed, it can be further stated that since according to these views, God creates the universe out of nothing and determines every event that will occur in each moment of the world’s existence,¹³ he thus intends and causes all murders, rapes, abuses, diseases, cancers, earthquakes, death, pain, and so forth. These traditions make God at least the ultimate author, if not the proximate cause, of all evils.

In reply to these objections, defenders have argued that even though such events appear to be evil, God has a morally sufficient reason for causing each of them. A perfectly good being should not prevent all evils, for some evils may be instrumental in bringing about a greater good—a state of affairs whose value more than offsets the disvalue of the evil that gives rise to it. For example, a doctor may morally inflict the pain of a shot or even the amputation of a limb if the benefits will outweigh the cost. Thus a morally perfect being does not necessarily

prevent all evil; rather, he maximizes the good, permitting those evils that bring about a greater good. So premise 3 of Flew's argument must be amended to take account of this insight. So revised, it might read as follows:

3'. A morally perfect being prevents all the evils it can without thereby preventing some greater good or causing some greater evil.

But the objector may persist: If God must allow evil to maximize the good, how can he be omnipotent? Surely, if God were omnipotent he could bring about all good without having to use evil as an instrument. Only if his power were limited in some way would he be so constrained.

To this, defenders of the traditional view might reply: To affirm that God is omnipotent does not mean that he can do absolutely anything. Rather, God can do anything that is logically possible—that is, he can do anything that has a self-consistent description. But not even an omnipotent being can create a perfectly round square or a four-sided triangle. So premise 4 of Flew's argument must also be modified. What the proponent of the traditional view really affirms is not 4, but rather

4'. An omnipotent, omniscient creator can do anything that is logically possible.

Given these amendments to premises 3 and 4 of Flew's argument, it would now read:

1. **God exists; is morally perfect, omnipotent, and omniscient; and created all things absolutely.**
2. **Evils occur.**
3. **A morally perfect being prevents all the evils it can without thereby preventing some greater good or causing some greater evil.**
4. **An omnipotent, omniscient creator can do anything that is logically possible.**
5. **Hence, all evils are prevented.**

But with premises 3 and 4 replaced with 3' and 4', 5 no longer follows as a matter of logic. What does follow is:

5'. Whatever evils occur are logically necessary to bring about a greater good or to prevent a greater evil.

Hence, 5' and 2 are no longer mutually contradictory.

True, our objector might answer, but one can easily resurrect the contradiction by plausibly revising premise 2 as follows:

2'. Evils occur that are not logically necessary to bring about a greater good or to prevent a greater evil.

When we replace premise 2 in the argument with premise 2', we can deduce:

6'. Therefore, evils occur that are not logically necessary to bring about a greater good or to prevent a greater evil; and all evils are logically necessary to bring about some greater good or to prevent a greater evil. (2' and 5')

So 6' is again a contradiction. The issue then becomes: Is premise 2' true? Do evils occur that are not logically necessary to bring about a greater good or to prevent a greater evil, given that God is all-controlling and determining?

In answering this question, it is important to clarify what is meant when one asserts that some state of affairs, *x*, is *logically* necessary for some different state of affairs, *y*. First, it does *not* suffice to show that *x* is *necessary* for *y* by showing that *x* is a *cause* of *y* since there may be alternative ways to bring about *y*. The claim that “*x* is logically necessary for *y*” entails that the state of affairs consisting of *y* without *x* is impossible. And this means not just biologically, physically, causally, or even ontologically impossible—an all-determining, absolute Creator who can do anything that is logically possible is not constrained by even the most basic structures of the world. He could have made those structures other than they are. Rather, the claim that “*x* is logically necessary for *y*” entails that the state of affairs consisting of “*y* and not *x*” is *logically* impossible—that is, it is self-contradictory.

Is it really the case that every evil that occurs in the world is such that, without it, God’s achieving his good ends is self-contradictory? On pain of inconsistency, defenders of the view of God and creation presently under fire must answer affirmatively, but how this can be the case is totally incomprehensible. Can it really be believed in the integrity of one’s heart that the dehumanizing abuse of a little girl is logically necessary for some greater good? If so, what greater good? And why *logically* necessary? Those who accept such a divinely deterministic view assert that, in some way incomprehensible to human reason, *every* instance of evil—the Holocaust, the attack on the World Trade Center, the brutal repression of women by the Taliban, the horrific acts of serial killers—is *logically* necessary for some greater good. However, in the end they must take refuge in sheer mystery, for one cannot even begin to fathom how this can be the case. Even if it were possible that such horrendous evils are logically necessitated by God’s good purposes, such a claim fails to foster trust in God. As Peter Appleby claims: “If [God’s] goodness is radically different from human goodness, there is little reason for calling it goodness at all, and still less for praising and glorifying it, as faith is wont to do. The child who is totally ignorant of his parents’ values has no reason for admiring them, and still less for trying to emulate them.”¹⁴ If the purpose of a revealed religion is to assist mortals in comprehending their relationship to God and the meaning of their experience in the world that surrounds them, then the least satisfying theology is one that takes refuge in the claim that God’s ways are totally beyond human understanding.

The Free-Will Defense

Some headway toward resolving the logical problem of evil is made when one gives up the notion that God is all-determining and all-controlling and affirms rather that God has endowed his human creatures with “free will,” or a power of self-determination. Proponents of this position often claim that the intrinsic and instrumental value of human free will more than offsets any disvalue arising out of its misuse. This attempt to exculpate God from responsibility for the world’s evils by tracing them instead to the bad choices of human beings is typically called “the free-will defense.”¹⁵ Some philosophers have claimed that the free-will defense, especially as that defense has been formulated by Alvin Plantinga,¹⁶ solves the logical problem of evil. Let us look briefly at Plantinga’s presentation of this defense.

It must be noted that Plantinga does not attempt to provide a theodicy, or a believable explanation of God’s allowing evil to exist. More modestly, he argues only that the proposition that evil exists cannot be shown to contradict the proposition that God exists. He formulates his own version of free-will defense in response to J. L. Mackie’s argument that it is logically possible for an omnipotent being to create a world containing free creatures who never choose wrongly. If there is no logical impossibility in a person’s choosing the good on one occasion, Mackie argues, then there is no logical impossibility in a person’s choosing the good on every occasion. Indeed, Mackie points out, Christians themselves believe that Jesus, though tempted and free to sin, remained spotless throughout life. Thus it is a logically possible state of affairs that all persons choose rightly on all occasions. So, Mackie continues, if God can, as traditional theists maintain, bring about any logically possible state of affairs, then he can bring about the state of affairs of all persons always freely choosing the good. Moreover, if God is perfectly

good, that is certainly what God would have done.¹⁷ Thus the fact that our world is permeated with evil logically precludes its being God's creation.

Now, it must be recognized that Mackie's argument is sound and seemingly decisive against those in the deterministic tradition who maintain that human freedom is compatible with causal determinism, like Augustine, Calvin, and possibly Aquinas.¹⁸ Plantinga bases his defense on a stronger version of freedom known as "contra-causal" freedom—a mode of freedom not compatible with causal determinism. Thus Plantinga's defense assumes that human beings are endowed with contra-causal freedom and their actions are not controllable by God. It is not, therefore, logically consistent that God could create such persons and also *bring it about* that they *freely* choose the good, for that would amount to God causing their actions. The fact, then, that it is logically possible for a person to always freely choose the right does not entail that God could create such a person absolutely. It is logically impossible for God to *cause* someone to always *freely* (that is, without being caused to) choose the right.¹⁹ Plantinga tries to stretch his free-will defense even further so that it also covers what is typically referred to as "natural evil." Natural evil is the human and animal pain and suffering that seemingly arise out of the operations of the laws of nature, such as disease, earthquakes, tornadoes, and volcanic eruptions. Plantinga urges that it is logically possible that even these evils are the outcome of the malevolent free choices of nonhuman spiritual agents. Hence, it is logically possible that all evil is consistent with the existence of God. And if so, Plantinga claims, the logical problem of evil is resolved.

However, we are far from convinced that Plantinga has adequately resolved the logical problem of evil. For example, merely showing that the claim that God exists is consistent with the observation that evils occur is not enough if the notion of God employed in the defense is divorced from the full conception of God accepted by believers. As already pointed out, in addition to affirming that God is (1) all-powerful and (2) perfectly good, traditional Christian theologians also affirm that God (3) created all things out of nothing and (4) has absolute foreknowledge of all the outcomes of his creative choices.²⁰

Given this view of God, even if God endows his human creatures with contra-causal freedom, he still remains an accessory before the fact and is ultimately at least jointly responsible for everything that happens in the world, including the evil choices of those creatures. Additionally, God is responsible for every evil inasmuch as he knowingly chose to bring them all into existence when he created the world *ex nihilo*. Furthermore, God could have made a better world. For instance, he might have created a world with persons who are morally more sensitive than we are, or brighter and better able to prevent abuses and natural disasters. These qualities would certainly not reduce our free will.

In addition, it seems that a deep metaphysical dilemma exists in Plantinga's free-will defense. Plantinga essentially re-created Luis de Molina's notion of God's "middle knowledge," whereby God's knowledge includes not merely knowledge of what *will* in fact happen but also what *would* happen if creatures were placed in any specific circumstances.²¹ According to Plantinga (and de Molina), before the creation out of nothing, God surveyed all the possible worlds that were within his power to create and he "saw" the *individual essences* of every person who could be created in those worlds. He also knew the truth value of all the propositions describing what those persons would do if created, including their free actions. (These propositions are known as "counterfactuals of freedom.") To his horror, argues Plantinga, it is just possible that God discovered that every individual essence would suffer from *transworld depravity*, because each individual would commit some evil action(s) in every world God could possibly create. Thus not even God could have created, for example, Zeno without instantiating (bringing about) in his creation of possible worlds those distinguishing properties essential to him, defining him

uniquely as Zeno in every possible world. According to Plantinga, it is possible that the property of transworld depravity could be a part of every creaturely essence.

The problems in Plantinga's defense arise from the ontology of persons it assumes, for this ontology is not consistent with creation *ex nihilo*. Plantinga assumes that contingent realities (those that are not logically necessary) condition God's power even prior to the creation. However, for Plantinga, these contingencies are not actual intelligences or spirits who have existed from all eternity and were not created by God; rather, they are merely "individual essences" of *possible* persons who come to exist only if God chooses to create them. But we must ask how there could be any such limitations on God prior to his creative act. What could determine what a free creature will do? Certainly not God, for then the person would not be free. Nor could the circumstances in which the possible person is created determine his actions; if it were otherwise, the person would not be free in a contra-causal sense. Neither could the possible person herself determine what she would do because the merely possible does not exist and therefore cannot determine anything.²² How could there be any truth value for propositions about a merely potential person whom God chose not to create? The notion that there is a foreknown truth about what possible free persons would do seems unintelligible.

Further, Plantinga's defense has a difficult time showing how natural evils are consistent with the existence of God. Plantinga argues that it is logically possible that so-called natural evils could actually be brought about by evil spirits who have free will. And indeed, it *is* logically possible—that is, if creation of such spirits with such powers is consistent with God's goodness in the first place. However, Plantinga has not shown (or even attempted to show) that God could have a morally sufficient reason for granting evil spirits such powers, especially when he knows beforehand that they will exercise them to bring about horrendous evils. The attempt to pass off the blame for natural evils to evil spirits does not relieve God of ultimate responsibility for natural evils. As Stephen T. Davis observes in his attempt to elucidate and defend Plantinga's free-will defense:

Obviously, whether one speaks of the devil or not, it is *God* who is ultimately responsible for natural evil. He created the world in which natural evil occurs and, although God has the power to prevent natural evil (whether proximately caused by the devil or not), does not do so.²³

Likewise, the story that evil spirits cause natural evils would not exonerate God from responsibility because God is responsible for creating these spirits in the first place. In order to grant evil spirits their own free will, God need not provide them with special powers enabling them to manipulate natural causes. For, on Plantinga's view, he also created us free but did not endow us with such powers. If God created these evil spirits out of nothing, knowing beforehand all the actual consequences of his creative choices, then he remains an accessory before the fact and ultimately responsible for every evil such agents bring about. The claim that it is possible that a world including evil spirits with such immense power granted to them is the best world an absolute creator can produce seems dubious indeed. It seems that rather than providing a defense, Plantinga succeeds only in creating an analytic scenario of God's culpability for natural evils.

Finally, Plantinga's defense, even if logically coherent, is wildly implausible. Few have seriously suggested that evil spirits actually cause earthquakes, cancer, and other such occurrences. Of course, Plantinga does not purport to provide a defense that is true or even plausible. He is only trying to show that the proposition that God exists is not logically incompatible with the proposition that evil exists. While his careful analysis has significantly contributed to our understanding of the strictly logical problem of evil, it is wholly inadequate to resolve the problem of evil that actually confronts believers. A response concerned only with logic does little to vindicate trust in God in a world racked with horrendous evils. Plantinga assumes that faith is not challenged as long as God's

existence is not shown to be logically incompatible with the existence of evil. But this assumption is false. His consistency defense is simply not satisfying to persons seeking to find meaning in the face of what seems to be overwhelming evil.

John Hick's Theodicy

Unlike a defense that merely attempts to show that God and evil are not necessarily incompatible, a theodicy is an attempt to actually reconcile God's goodness with the evils that occur in the world, thus affording the sufferer hope and comfort in the midst of trials. Contemporary philosopher of religion John Hick has developed a complete theodicy in his fine book *Evil and the God of Love*, which is widely recognized as a watershed work on the problem of evil.

Hick constructs a "soul-making" theodicy that resembles Joseph Smith's revelations in many respects. Setting out this theodicy, comparing and contrasting it with Joseph's revelations, and then assessing its strengths and weaknesses will enable a better understanding and appreciation of the bearing of Joseph's insights on a solution to the logical problem of evil.

Hick rejects the Augustinian position that Adam and Eve were originally created as perfect beings and then inexplicably chose evil. Instead, he constructs an "Irenaean theodicy" that harks back to Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon (ca. a.d. 220). Both Hick and Joseph Smith affirm that God's fundamental purpose in creating mortals and this world environment was twofold: first, to enable them, as morally and spiritually immature agents created in God's image, to develop into God's likeness through a process of deification, or *apotheosis*,²⁴ and second, to enable them to enter into an authentic (that is, free and uncoerced) relationship of love and fellowship with him. Hick argues that persons could not be created in this relationship as beings who were already spiritually perfect, for such a relationship would not be authentic: it would be coerced and contrived by God unilaterally. Rather, a genuine relationship must be freely chosen. To achieve these ends, it was necessary for God to endow human beings with the power of self-determination (or, as Hick calls it, incompatibilist freedom) and to preserve that freedom by placing them at an epistemic distance from himself. God effects this distancing, Hick suggests, by having humankind emerge out of a naturalistic evolutionary process as a race of largely self-centered, spiritually immature creatures. We begin our existence, according to Hick, as creatures who can at length be made into the image of God.

Like John Hick, Joseph Smith maintains that human beings begin as spiritually immature individuals in a state of innocence but that they are capable of spiritual growth through life experiences.²⁵ He also asserts that an epistemic distance is essential to spiritual growth; however, in Joseph Smith's view this distance is achieved through God's veiling of each individual's memory of him in the premortal existence so that all could exercise faith. Furthermore, like Hick, the Prophet also maintains that God gave mortals freedom to act for themselves and not merely to be acted upon (see 2 Nephi 2:26–27). The world is divided into "both things to act and things to be acted upon" (2 Nephi 2:14). Additionally, God gave mortals agency "to act for" themselves by placing them in an environment of "opposition in all things" so that they might know the sweet by tasting the bitter, know joy by experiencing misery, and know good because they must face evil (see 2 Nephi 2:16, 23). Hick says God also endowed us with a rudimentary awareness of him and some tendency toward moral self-transcendence. The Prophet identifies this awareness or predisposition as the Light of Christ, or the Spirit, that "giveth light to every man that cometh into the world" (D&C 84:46). Soul-making—that is, spiritual development into the likeness of God—occurs as mortal beings overcome self-centeredness by making moral choices within an environment fraught with hardship, pain, suffering, and genuine risk.

To this point, the worldviews of John Hick and Joseph Smith are strikingly similar. However, they diverge on the mode of God's creation. Joseph denies creation *ex nihilo*, whereas Hick affirms it. Thus Hick affirms all four theological postulates—perfect goodness, absolute power, absolute foreknowledge, and absolute creation—which confront him head-on with Flew's divine complicity argument. To his credit, Hick expressly acknowledges the logical consequences of his position: God is ultimately responsible for *all* the evil that occurs in the world. Hick explains why this is so:

One whose action, A, is the primary and necessary precondition for a certain occurrence, O, all other direct conditions for O being contingent upon A, may be said to be responsible for O, if he performs A in awareness of its relation to O and if he is also aware that, given A, the subordinate conditions will be fulfilled. . . . [God's] decision to create the existing universe was the primary and necessary precondition for the occurrence of evil, all other conditions being contingent upon this, and He took His decision in awareness of all that would flow from it.²⁶

While acknowledging, given his theological assumptions, that God is ultimately responsible for all the evils that occur in the world, Hick believes that he can still consistently maintain that God is perfectly loving. Unlike those who affirm divine causation of all events, Hick need not show that *every* evil is logically necessary for a greater good. Rather, Hick need only show that evil is an inevitable consequence of the type of world necessary for God's purpose of bringing humankind to his likeness and into loving fellowship with him. To explain how God's love is possible, Hick affirms a doctrine of universal salvation. In Hick's view, all human beings will finally achieve an authentic relationship with God in a postmortal life, the value of which will far outweigh any finite evil suffered here. He explains:

We must thus affirm in faith that there will in the final accounting be no personal life that is unperfected and no suffering that has not eventually become a phase in the fulfillment of God's good purpose. Only so, I suggest, is it possible to believe both in the perfect goodness of God and in His unlimited capacity to perform His will. For if there are finally wasted lives and finally unredeemed sufferings, either God is not perfect in love or He is not sovereign in rule over His creation.²⁷

Though we find Hick's reasoning compelling and appealing, its scriptural warrant is questionable, and it gives rise to conceptual difficulties of its own. We will consider just four.

1. Though, in Hick's view, God endows humankind with a strong power of self-determination, it does not follow from his view that choices are made in a vacuum. They are always choices of particular persons with a particular nature. Recall that Hick describes mortal beings' primordial nature as being largely self-centered, with a rudimentary awareness of God and some tendency toward morality or self-transcendence. Since in Hick's account God creates these primordial tendencies in human nature, there is no reason why God could not have made human beings significantly more virtuous than they are. Why not, for example, give them some significant reduction in their sometimes overwhelming tendencies toward selfishness that lead to violence, rape, stealing, and other such behaviors? Why could God not have increased their natural aversion to violence? Why could he not have made them more morally sensitive or more intelligent and compassionate so as to see the consequences of their actions on others? Such creative choices on God's part might have narrowed the options over which mortals' own choices might range, but such limitations are entirely compatible with a strong notion of self-determinative freedom and with God's soul-making objectives. Hick's absolute creator could have made a much better world than

this without forfeiting the goals of bringing its human inhabitants freely into his image and fellowship.

Indeed, such changes would decrease the evil, suffering, and struggle involved with realizing these goals.

2. On the other hand, it could not possibly be certain (as Hick claims) that God will *inevitably* lure every finite creature into a loving relationship with himself, given that mortal beings in Hick's view must have incompatibilist freedom to enter into such a relationship. One cannot be certain that there will not be, as C. S. Lewis suggests, "rebels to the end," with "doors of hell . . . locked on the *inside*."²⁸ This possibility cannot be precluded. Hick suggests that although, theoretically, God cannot guarantee that everyone will finally be saved, as a practical matter universal salvation may be affirmed because

God has formed the free human person with a nature that can find its perfect fulfillment and happiness only in active enjoyment of the infinite goodness of the Creator. He is not, then, trying to force or entice His creatures against the grain of their nature, but to render them free to follow their own deepest desire, which can lead them only to Himself. For He has made them for Himself, and their hearts are restless until they find their rest in Him.²⁹

But now Hick is waffling, for it appears that humans are not free after all: in his view, their natures compel them to God. Hick's position is inconsistent. To account for moral evil, he asserts that God gives mortals incompatibilist freedom and genuine independence to choose for themselves. But given Hick's affirmation of absolute creation and absolute foreknowledge, God's perfect goodness is possible only if not one soul is lost. To salvage God's goodness, Hick is forced to accept some mode of determinism that undermines his free-will defense.

3. Hick suggests a reason why God cannot simply create morally virtuous creatures. Virtue that God grants from the beginning is less valuable than virtue that is hard-won through real-life experience and the overcoming of temptations. A value-judgment underlies Hick's argument that God is justified in creating humankind less than perfectly virtuous, because "One who has attained to goodness by meeting and eventually mastering temptations, and thus by rightly making responsible choices in concrete situations, is good in a richer and more valuable sense than would be one created *ab initio* [from the beginning] in a state either of innocence or of virtue."³⁰ However, Hick's justification for creating a less than perfectly virtuous human nature is not consistent with the notion of God's perfect goodness which he seeks to defend. If tried moral virtue is somehow of greater value than untried moral virtue (and we agree with Hick that it is), then mortals who progress in moral virtue by rightly making virtuous decisions in concrete situations and in the face of genuine temptation possess a virtue greater than the absolute God who possesses such virtue necessarily. In other words, according to Hick's conception of deity, God did not overcome the obstacles and temptations required to attain the richest and most valuable type of virtue. Indeed, if Frederick R. Tennant is correct that the very notion of "good" has meaning only in the context of genuine temptation and trials, then calling God "good" is contradictory.³¹ To maintain consistency, Hick needs to concede either that untried virtue can be as valuable as virtue tried in the crucible of human experience or, as Joseph Smith suggested, that God underwent such a crucible as a means of attaining his virtue.³²

4. Both John Hick and Joseph Smith agree that the ultimate purpose for creating this mortal world is to bring human beings to God's likeness through the crucible of its refining fire; for overcoming temptation and the experience of suffering assist in perfecting them.³³ Mortals are works in progress aimed ultimately toward deification. According to one tradition, especially strong in the Christian East, persons will be made divine. As Irenaeus himself stated: "Our Lord Jesus Christ . . . did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself."³⁴ Irenaeus did not hesitate to say that the goal was that humankind may be gods: "We have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first merely men, then at length

gods.”³⁵ The goal of deification is a very great good indeed, for there is no imaginable greater good. The tradition that it was possible to achieve such a goal was dominant in the early church. As A.N.Williams explains:

What is human destiny? To become God. That, at least, was the belief of the earliest Christians. Such an understanding is evident in the letters of St. Paul (Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:49; and 2 Cor. 8:9) and the first Christians found it in the pages of the Hebrew Bible (Ps. 82:6, quoted in John 10:34). Above all, the nascent theological tradition pointed to 2Peter 1:4: “Thus has he given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from corruption that is in the world because of him, and may become participants in divine nature.” As the tradition reflected on these texts, deification became the dominant model of salvation and sanctification in the patristic period, from Ignatius of Antioch to John Damascene, in the West (in the writings of Tertullian and Augustine) as well as in the East.³⁶

Yet neither Hick nor the earliest theologians of the tradition can consistently assert that mortal beings shall be as God is, or that they shall truly be gods. The problem is the doctrine of absolute creation from nothing. Given this doctrine, there is an infinite ontological gulf between God’s mode of existence and ours. God necessarily exists; he cannot *not* exist. However, persons are created and have merely contingent existence. Not even God, in such a view, can create persons with the potential to be what they are, for by definition not even God can create an uncreated being. Hick realizes this and asserts merely that they shall be a “finite likeness” of God. But what is a created “finite likeness” of the infinite Uncreated Creator? The very idea expresses a vast and infinite difference that can never be bridged. In the end, the notion that humans may be as God must be seen as a conceptual contradiction within a tradition that maintains creation out of nothing. That, of course, is why so many in the tradition reject Joseph Smith’s revelation that as God is, mortals may become.

Though we find John Hick’s theodicy grounded in his doctrine of universal salvation most appealing, it, nonetheless, as outlined above, engenders a complex of conceptual difficulties. This brings us to consideration of Joseph Smith’s revelations and their bearing on a solution to the problems of evil.

Joseph Smith’s Way Out

Joseph Smith’s way out of the logical problem of evil is to avoid going in. He remains outside this by rejecting the fundamental premises that give rise to the problem in the first place, including, prominently, the premise of creation out of nothing. Truman Madsen describes Joseph Smith’s view of God this way: “He is not the *total* cause of anything. . . . God is forever surrounded by us, by co-eternal intelligences, and by the self-existent elements and principles of reality. . . . In His relationship to us, ‘all things are possible’ that are possible. But some things are impossible.”³⁷ In contrast to the absolute creator of traditional theology, Joseph Smith affirmed that God is related to and hence conditioned by an eternal environment that, because it is not totally his creation, is not absolutely subject to divine fiat. The importance of this fundamental departure from traditional theology can hardly be overstated. The Prophet taught that God is a dynamic being involved in progression and process of time who intervenes to bring order out of chaos. God did not bring into being the ultimate constituents of the cosmos nor the space-time matrix that defines it. Hence, unlike the Necessary Being of classical theology who alone could not *not* exist and on whom all else is dependent for existence, the God of Latter-day Saint doctrine confronts realities that exist of metaphysical necessity independently of his own creative activity. Such realities include inherently self-directing beings (Joseph Smith called them “intelligences” or “premortal spirits”), primordial elements (matter or possibly mass-energy), the lawlike structures of reality, and eternal moral principles grounded in the intrinsic value of selves and the eternal requirements for their growth. With respect to creation, Joseph stated:

You ask the learned doctors why they say the world was made out of nothing; and they will answer, “Doesn’t the Bible say He *created* the world?” And they infer, from the word create, that it must have been out of nothing. Now, the word create came from the [Hebrew] word *baurau* which does not mean to create out of nothing; it means . . . to organize the world out of chaos—chaotic matter. . . . Elements had an

existence from the time [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.³⁸

Joseph Smith also taught that persons were not created. Thus God did not survey all the possible persons he could create and then pick and choose those he wanted. Rather, he found himself in the midst of intelligences. His task was not to create beings out of nothing but to provide a plan for their growth if they were willing to confront the risk inherent in such an undertaking. As Joseph Smith explained: “We say that God himself is a self-existent being. . . . [But] who told you that man did not exist in like manner upon the same principles? Man does exist upon the same principles. . . . The mind or the intelligence which man possesses is co-equal [co-eternal] with God himself.”³⁹

The first principles of humankind are self-existent with God. God himself, finding that he was in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have the privilege of advancing like himself. The relationship mortal beings have with God places them in a situation to advance in knowledge. He has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences that they may be exalted with himself, so that they may have one glory upon another and all that knowledge, power, and intelligence that are requisite in order to save them in the world of spirits.⁴⁰

Indeed, these intelligences had freedom and will. Truman Madsen explains what this means in terms of God’s ability to influence events in the universe:

Actually, as soon as it is recognized, as in modern revelation it is, that there is more than one eternal will in the universe—indeed, an infinity of such wills or autonomous intelligences—we have cut the thread that supposes God can “do anything.” In all-important ways even He, the greatest of all, can only do with us what we will permit Him to do.⁴¹

Of critical importance in Joseph Smith’s view is the realization that human beings were not thrust into this existence without their consent. Truman Madsen also spells out this aspect of Joseph’s worldview,

Again, you assume that God alone accounts for your being here. . . . Instead, you and the child of your bosom counseled intimately with God the Father. Freely, fully, and with courage . . . you elected and prepared for this estate. The contrasts of the flesh, its risks, its terrific trials were known to you.⁴²

According to Joseph Smith, God had a plan to facilitate growth by allowing individuals to exercise their agency in the presence of genuine danger, where they would not be coerced to choose righteousness or form relationships with God. There was no guarantee that they would return to God’s fellowship and gain the goal of eternal life, or godlike existence, if they rejected God in this life. In Joseph’s view, Satan also had a plan to coerce all persons to choose God and thus take all the risk out of mortality. Prior to this earthly existence, all were given a concrete choice regarding whether to confront this existence with its inherent risk as a means to grow into God’s likeness, or to not confront the risk and be “damned,” or stopped, in our progression toward incommensurate joy in the godlike existence of eternal life. All who confront the evils and temptations of this life chose to take on this experience. However, mortal beings were also promised a Savior who could redeem them from evil choices if they freely chose to enter into a relationship with him.⁴³

Joseph also taught that each individual agreed that it would be necessary for all recollection of the premortal life to be blocked from consciousness during this mortal life in order to enable each to come freely to God in faith. However, God has created a way to recognize, know, and remember him that will not interfere with agency and exercise of faith. According to Joseph Smith, God enabled human hearts to remember and respond to him at the level of subjective feelings and stirrings in the soul (see D&C 8:2; 9:8). Thus only those who have humble and receptive hearts open to God's loving overtures will be aware of his existence and constant presence. People can choose to shut him out completely if they harden their hearts (see Alma 12:9–13). Consequently, remembering and entering into a relationship with God is a function of choosing to be open to his love.

God's purposes in creating the world, then, were to provide an environment in which mortal beings could learn by experience to grow from grace to grace, enter into a loving relationship with God, and gain the possibility of becoming as God is. Some laws God has instituted exist to facilitate such growth, but, as Joseph Smith taught, there are also "laws of eternal and self-existent principles"⁴⁴—normative structures of some sort, we take it, that constitute things as they eternally are. What are some possible instances of such uncreated laws or principles? The risen Lord taught that "Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be. All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence" (D&C 93:29–30). We take this to mean that humans are eternal and inherently free to act for themselves independently of God. This implies as well that human beings are not necessarily equal in intelligence (see Abraham 3:18–21).

These eternal principles have illuminating implications. First, persons are eternally self-determining. If not free to act for themselves, they would lose their essential identity as individuals, for it is through the exercise of agency that individuals express their uniqueness and individuality. Second, the level of one's growth and intelligence is not a product of God's creative choice, but a primordial fact of the universe. Mortal souls cannot complain that God did not make them more virtuous and intelligent, for such factors are essentially up to them; God can only give assistance when it is sought.

Third, eternal principles define the ways in which matter may be organized. While it is more or less clear that there would be only chaos without God's organizing power (see Abraham 4), it is less clear which laws are instituted by God and which are eternal. Nevertheless, it seems that Joseph Smith maintained that matter has inherent tendencies that are eternal. In other words, God could not create matter out of nothing, he could not create matter that is not already extant in space-time, and he could not create the laws that define how matter acts once it is organized. Rather, the natural tendencies of organized matter are based on eternal principles. For example, not even God could organize an atom of oxygen and two atoms of hydrogen without the properties of water emerging from this organization. If God organizes oxygen and hydrogen into a water molecule, it has a natural tendency to freeze at 32 degrees Fahrenheit. Because these natural tendencies of organized matter exist independently of God's creative fiat, the possibility of indiscriminate natural evils is endemic to any creation God could bring about. Indeed, if God creates water, the possibility that persons may drown is also present.

The Book of Mormon prophet Lehi made reference to what we believe are some further eternal principles in his enlightening explanation of evil recorded in 2Nephi 2 of the Book of Mormon. (In fact, Lehi provides a rather complete theodicy in this chapter.) According to Lehi, "Adam fell that man might be; and men are, that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25). However, to attain this joy, Lehi taught,

it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, . . . righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. . . . And [so] to bring about

his eternal purposes in the end of man, after he had created our first parents . . . , it must needs be that there was an opposition; even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other bitter. Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other. . . . [If Adam and Eve had not fallen] they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin. (2Nephi 2:11, 15–16, 23)

According to Lehi, God’s purpose in creation was to provide a way for mortal beings to grow through experiencing opposition and thus to know joy. However, there are apparently states of affairs that even God, though almighty, cannot bring about. Even God could not bring one to joy without moral righteousness, to moral righteousness without moral freedom, or to moral freedom without an opposition in all things.⁴⁵ With moral freedom as an essential variable in the divine equation for spiritual growth, two consequences stand out: human beings must face the possibility of genuine moral evil, and they need a Redeemer.

In Joseph Smith’s view, obtaining a mortal body is a great good that allows humankind to grow toward God’s likeness. If all that one accomplishes in this life is to obtain a body, that in itself fulfills a primary purpose of God’s plan.⁴⁶ Joseph Smith elaborated:

Spirits are eternal. At the first organization in heaven we were all present and saw the Savior chosen and appointed, and the plan of salvation made and we sanctioned it. We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the Celestial Kingdom. The great principle of happiness consists in having a body.⁴⁷

This life is not all that there is. Indeed, this life is only a moment in comparison to the eternity for which men and women are here preparing. If there had been no Savior, all would have been lost, and human suffering would be truly unredeemed and meaningless. However, because the Savior has overcome both spiritual and physical death, mortals can be brought back into God’s presence and overcome death (see 2 Nephi 9). All will enjoy that degree of joy and divine glory that they are willing to abide, and those willing to keep all God’s commandments will be granted the supreme joy of eternal fellowship with him as gods and goddesses (see D&C 76:51–58; 88:20–32).

Given Joseph’s theological premises, we must modify the traditional definition of omnipotence. B.H. Roberts plausibly suggests that God’s omnipotence be understood as the power to bring about any state of affairs consistent with the natures of eternal existences.⁴⁸ If omnipotence is so understood, we can, unlike those who affirm that God has unlimited power, consistently adopt an “instrumentalist” view of evil wherein pain, suffering, and opposition may become the means of moral and spiritual development. God is omnipotent, but he cannot prevent evil without preventing the possibility of greater goods or ends—the value of which more than offsets the disvalue of the evil. In Joseph Smith’s theology, we see that these ultimate goods include soul-making, joy, and eternal (godlike) life in a relationship of intimate unity with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Armed with Joseph Smith’s doctrine of entities coeternal with God and our revised definition of omnipotence, let us consider again the logical problem of evil and Antony Flew’s argument charging God with complicity in all the world’s evils. From Joseph Smith’s theological platform, it does not follow that God is the total or even the ultimate explanation of all else. Thus his worldview does not imply that God is an accessory before the fact to all the world’s evils. Nor does it follow that God is responsible for every moral and nonmoral defect that occurs in the world.

Within the framework of eternal entities and structures that God did not create and cannot destroy, “the [logical] problem of evil . . . [and] a host of traditional paradoxes dissolve.”⁴⁹

First, God is neither the total cause of existence nor the author of all events that occur. Agents who are free to act for themselves have a power of self-determination that cannot be caused by God without violating free will. They possess this power of agency eternally. Thus God does not and cannot control the free action of agents—not, at least, without obliterating their identity as individuals. Indeed, perfect love could never sanction destroying a person’s agency and, consequently, dissolving that person’s identity. Therefore, the problem of an all-determining deity is avoided. Given Joseph Smith’s view of eternally free intelligences and the gift of agency as a necessary condition to their growth to his likeness, the possibility of moral evils is a necessary feature of any world that could accomplish God’s purposes for mortal beings.

Second, Joseph Smith’s view is not plagued by genuinely evil events arising from the natural order such as diseases, earthquakes, and cancer. These events are features of any natural order that can exist as a cosmos rather than a chaos. God’s choice was to create an ordered state of affairs out of a chaotic state of affairs consistent with the natural laws that actually obtain. Because only an ordered state of affairs can function in the process of soul-making, the choice to create this world and the ordered cosmos is an expression of his love for humankind. We hasten to add that Joseph Smith’s view of natural law arose out of the idea that all aspects of reality, including the most minute particles, exercise some degree of intelligent activity of their own and respond to God in faith. Indeed, the ordering of the universe occurs because all elements “obey” God’s word through their faithful response to him.⁵⁰ Thus God’s power to bring about miracles increases according to the faithful response of realities cooperating with him in the process of this ongoing creation. God cannot work such miracles where faith is not present. Further, God is enabled by his divine knowledge to use eternal laws to overcome the effects of natural laws. For example, it is possible to lift tons of steel into the air by virtue of a jet engine and airfoil without revoking the law of gravity. In a similar manner, God utilizes his knowledge of eternal principles to work what appear to human beings to be miracles, or violation of the natural order. Thus because God has superior knowledge, he can utilize eternal principles to overcome the effects of some natural evils. He may do this in a manner analogous to the way humans created a vaccine for smallpox and eradicated the disease.

Moreover, in light of Joseph Smith’s ontology of persons, it is not necessary to explain why God did not create better, more virtuous, or more morally sensitive individuals to people the earth. God never had the option of creating persons from nothing with just the characteristics he wanted. Rather, those persons who actually exist have always existed in their most essential form. His choice was to express his love for them by providing a way whereby they could experience consummate joy by becoming like him in a relationship of intimate unity and love. To do that, it is necessary to pass through this mortal life with all its attendant dangers.

Finally, Joseph Smith does not make God the exception to Hick’s value judgment that freely developed virtue is better than any virtue creatable *ab initio*. For, according to Joseph, God also once experienced a mortality in which, presumably, he confronted genuine temptation and confronted real challenges.

Joseph Smith’s revealed worldview not only dissolves the logical problem of evil, but it also throws light upon the experience of evil as mortal beings actually encounter it. We do not believe that we can explain why God allows each particular evil, nor that any theodicy has an obligation to do so. There remain genuine evils—both moral and natural—that cannot be explained away and whose character indicates that they are also real for God. In Joseph’s thought, God too is confronted by the entailments of evil. God does not stand aloof; rather, he fully engages himself in winning human beings with his love and enhancing their capacities to feel joy in relationship with him.

God shares humanity's struggle, sorrows over human failures, rejoices in mortal triumphs, and suffers when individuals suffer. God waits on our faith in him so that he may be enabled to eradicate more evil. An earnestness in human experience exists because the possibility of genuine triumph entails the possibility of genuine defeat. God truly feels a loss when humans choose evil over good, yet the possibility of victory justifies the harsh conditions of mortality. All mortal beings freely and knowingly chose to undertake mortal life. They are truly co-laborers with God in the work of eradicating evil, for God has not created evil nor the physical conditions from which it inevitably arises, nor would he allow evil could he end it without thereby making the victory impossible. Truman Madsen concludes,

Thus, it is not a "decree" that stress and pain are part of growth and enlightenment. The universe and the selves within it simply operate that way. It is enough to know that God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, though not the source of tragedy, yet have the power to enable us to climb above it, into everlasting joy.⁵¹

The Soteriological Problem of Evil

Earlier, when we introduced the logical problem of evil, we argued that most discussions of the problem were too narrow and especially unfair to the Christian believer in that they failed to take into account the problem's strongest solution—the incarnation of God the Son in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and his triumph over sin, suffering, and death through his atonement and resurrection. But ironically, the strongest solution to the problem of evil, when understood in traditional terms, becomes itself another problem.

There are two types of soteriological problems of evil.⁵² The first type arises out of the New Testament teaching that salvation comes *only* through Christ. We call this the "exclusion problem." The second problem, which we call the "foreknowledge problem," arises because God created persons knowing that they would be consigned to hell.

The exclusion problem arises because some are said to be excluded from salvation for reasons beyond their power to alter. This would mean that God has unfairly curtailed their chances of entering into a loving relationship with him. For instance, John reports that Jesus claimed this very thing: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Similarly, Peter affirms, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Yet, many people have lived and died without ever hearing of Jesus Christ or having a fair chance to understand and accept salvation through him. Thomas Morris, professor of philosophy at Notre Dame, in his book *The Logic of God Incarnate* calls the exclusion "a scandal" and explains it this way:

The scandal . . . arises with a simple set of questions asked of the Christian theologian who claims that it is only through the life and death of God incarnated in Jesus Christ that all can be saved and reconciled to God: How can the many humans who lived and died before the time of Christ be saved through him? They surely cannot be held accountable for responding appropriately to something of which they could not have knowledge. Furthermore, what about all the people who have lived since the time of Christ in cultures with different religious traditions, untouched by the Christian gospel? How can they be excluded fairly from a salvation not ever really available to them? How could a just God set up a particular condition of salvation, the highest end of human life possible, which was and is inaccessible to most people? Is not the love of God better understood as universal, rather than as limited to a mediation through the one particular individual, Jesus of Nazareth? Is it not a moral as well as a religious scandal to claim otherwise?

Claremont professor of philosophy Stephen Davis expresses a similar perplexity. In a recent issue of *Modern Theology* he puts the problem this way:

Suppose there was a woman named Oohku who lived from 370–320 B.C. in the interior of Borneo. Obviously, she never heard of Jesus Christ or the Judeo-Christian God; she was never baptized, nor did she ever make any institutional or psychological commitment to Christ or to the Christian church. She couldn't have done these things; she was simply born in the wrong place and at the wrong time. Is it right for God to condemn this woman to eternal hell just because she was never able to come to God through Christ? Of course not[;] . . . God is just and loving.⁵⁴

The problem that Morris and Davis state can be expressed in terms of an inconsistent triad—a set of three premises, all of which are apparently true, yet the conjunction of any two of which seemingly entails the denial of the third:

- 1. God is perfectly loving and just and desires that all his children be saved.**
- 2. Salvation comes only in and through one's acceptance of Christ.**
- 3. Millions of God's children have lived and died without ever hearing of Christ or having a chance to receive salvation through him.**

Premise 3 is indisputable, forcing us to repudiate either 1 or 2, both of which seem clearly warranted on biblical authority. So how do we resolve the problem? One proposed answer is universalism, or the view, as John Hick believes, that God will finally save all his children. Universalists reject premise 2, but this seems inconsistent with biblical revelation. On the other hand, exclusivists affirm premise 2, concluding that Oohku and millions of others like her must be lost. But this leaves them unable to square their view with premise 1, for they must deny that God is just and loving in the way he deals with his children. Thus neither view is satisfactory.

However, Joseph Smith added another premise in his theology that renders the other three compatible:

4. Those who live and die without having had a chance to respond positively to the gospel of Jesus Christ will have that chance postmortally.

Thank God for Joseph Smith! Not only was he God's conduit in the resolution of one more thorny problem of evil, but he was the instrument through whom God restored the knowledge and priesthood powers that make the redemption of the dead possible.

The soteriological problem of foreknowledge is similar to the exclusion problem, but it focuses on God's complicity in creating agents whom he knows will be damned and languish in hell. Why did God not create only those persons whom he could foresee would be blessed and not those whom he could see would be damned? The notion that God creates persons whom he knows will cause great evils and suffer eternally is inconsistent with perfect love. A related problem is: Why did God not foresee and refrain from creating those of the damned who would be moral monsters, who would create much more evil than good in this life? The responses to these problems are similar to those offered for the exclusion problem. Some adopt universalism and deny that any persons will ultimately be damned, but universalism struggles to resolve the second version of the foreknowledge problem, for certainly there are persons who are moral monsters (Hitler comes to mind). Others admit that some persons are damned but deny that hell is a place of eternal suffering and punishment. Indeed, perhaps the damned do freely choose hell because they would be unhappy in God's presence. It would simply be a better result for them to be placed in hell

rather than in heaven. However, this reasoning fails to resolve the second version of the foreknowledge problem. God's creation of the embodiment of evil in the person of the devil, foreknowing that he would rebel and wreak havoc on this earth, is simply inexplicable within traditional theology. If God created the devil, knowing in advance of his rebellion and his intention to entice everyone he could into the depths of horrendous evils, then God is, again, ultimately responsible for these evils—indeed, he is the initial perpetrator of and accomplice in these evils. Stephen Davis responds to the question of why God didn't avoid creating those agents whom he foresaw would be moral monsters:

Again I must say here that I do not know. It is similar to . . . particularly heinous events in world history: Christians need not feel that they can explain why God allowed them to occur. Ultimately it comes down to trust. Some people trust in God and some do not; the ones who do trust in God choose not to question him inordinately.⁵⁵

But surely this refusal to countenance honest questions is unacceptable. Davis says that we will just have to trust in God, but the view that God created devils, knowing that they would perpetrate all the evil that they could in the world, certainly seems to be a breach of trust. To give the devil special powers to bring about devastating “natural” events, as Alvin Plantinga countenances, is simply unwise and inexcusably negligent. As an analogy, if a friend had knowingly recommended a child molester to watch our children and was aware of those tendencies that would lead to abuse, we would be entirely justified in distrusting that friend's judgment. Moreover, if that friend knew that the person hired to watch our children had a plan to molest them, then the friend would be culpable as an accomplice in the crime—and wouldn't be a friend! The view that God created Satan to tempt others to perpetrate evils on mortal beings leads to the same conclusion: God is an accomplice in Satan's evil.

Traditional theology apparently lacks adequate answers to assist one in maintaining both intellectual integrity and trust in God. It is inconsistent for the traditional theologian to maintain that God creates any persons, foreknowing that they will bring about more evil than good or will not be redeemed. Perhaps the traditional theologian could respond that after this life, the persons who caused so much evil will repent and bring about good that outweighs the evil for which they were responsible. Yet such a view of personal growth and repentance after this life is at odds with the traditional view that such persons are “damned” and consigned to hell. Only a view that sees humans as continually progressing toward God's likeness, even after this life, can offer such a response in the first place.

Of course, Joseph Smith significantly mitigated the foreknowledge problem by rejecting the crucial assumption that God created persons out of nothing. According to him, God started his creation of humankind with actual intelligences, each having a definite personal identity. Thus the opportunity to experience this world with all its trials and evils, its blessings and beauties, is an expression not only of the fact that these premortal intelligences trusted God but of the fact that God also trusted them. Moreover, in Joseph Smith's view, there is no need to answer the embarrassing question of why God created the devil if he knew beforehand all the vile evils that being would originate. Lucifer is as eternal as the other intelligences and just as inherently free to rebel if he so chooses. However, Joseph Smith's revelations suggest that God instrumentally uses Lucifer's rebellion as a means to move his plan forward, for Lucifer's negative labor provides an opposition in all things. Thus God deals with genuine evil using genuine power: he prepares a way that evil can be negated or turned to good within the scope of his plan, if mortals will cooperate with him in the enterprise. Conversely, because Lucifer has only as much power as mortals freely give him, Lucifer's evil is merely an extension of human evil. God, then, is responsible neither for the existence of evil nor for its effects on mortal beings. Instead, he is the means by which these effects may be mitigated and eventually vanquished.

The Existential Problem of Evil

Truman Madsen suggested that in terms of evil, “The problem you and I face is not simply the problem of exonerating God, but of coping with actual evils.”⁵⁶ The existential problem of evil arises because the evils in the world challenge our ability to trust God. The challenge arises from a simple fact: the world can appear as if it were not made by a loving Father but by blind chance or by a wicked, malevolent being. The depth of the problem was stated perhaps most forcefully by Dostoyevsky in his novel *The Brothers Karamozov*. The fictional character Ivan Karamozov sets the problem in bold relief:

This poor five-year-old girl was subjected to every possible torture by those educated parents. They beat her, birched her, kicked her, without themselves knowing why, till her body was covered with bruises; at last they reached the height of refinement: they shut her up all night, in the cold and frost, in the privy. . . . they smeared her face with excrement and made her eat it, and it was her mother, her mother who made her! And that mother could sleep at night, hearing the groans of the poor child locked up in that vile place. . . . I’m not talking about the sufferings of grown-up people, for they have eaten the apple and to hell with them.⁵⁷

In light of such horrendous evils, Ivan then tempts his brother Alyosha with this piercing question:

Imagine that it is you yourself who are erecting the edifice of human destiny with the aim of making men happy in the end, of giving them peace and contentment at last, but that to do that it is absolutely necessary, and indeed quite inevitable, to torture only one tiny creature, the little girl. . . . would you consent to be the architect on those conditions?⁵⁸

Ivan rebels. He cannot accept any way of reconciling such innocent suffering with a theory of “higher harmony.” He rejects the idea that the ends justify the means—especially for a being who has absolute control not only over the purposes to be achieved but the infinite array of means to achieve them. In the end, the means appear to Ivan to be wholly unjust and immoral, regardless of the glory at the end. Ivan’s protest is based on the simple fact that he cannot understand how there could possibly be any morally sufficient reason for permitting such evils. His rebellion is not a rejection of God’s existence but of God’s goodness. His outrage is that his trust has been breached by what others say is a God of love. His point is but a cry in the dark: “How can I trust God if he allows the most unthinkable evils to destroy innocents like the little girl?”⁵⁹

We believe that Joseph Smith has a valuable contribution to make in responding to the existential problem of evil—the challenge of living trustingly and faithfully in the face of what seems to be overwhelming evil.⁶⁰ Joseph left us much by the way of revelation that speaks to this problem of evil, but perhaps his own life speaks more powerfully than words.⁶¹

In 1831 Joseph Smith resided in Hiram, Ohio, at the John Johnson farm. His wife Emma had lost twins in childbirth. In part to salve the pain of the loss, Joseph took in twin babies, Julia and Joseph, who were born to a church member whose wife had died in childbirth in Kirtland. On the evening of 24 March 1832, the twins were infected with measles, and Emma took Julia, while Joseph fell asleep on a trundle bed just inside the door of the farmhouse with baby Joseph. While Joseph slept, a mob broke down the door to the house. The men beat and choked Joseph Smith until he lost consciousness, and then they dragged him and Sidney Rigdon to a nearby field, where they were beaten and tarred and feathered. The pain of the beating was severe; the pain of removing the tar was excruciating. The morning following the assault, though he was still in pain and exhausted from being up all night after the beating, he preached a sermon at the John Johnson farm to a crowd that included many of those

who had beaten him the night before. He baptized three people that day. However, baby Joseph, exposed to the cold of winter during that night, died within a few days as a result. Four of Joseph Smith's eleven children⁶² died at birth, and a fifth died at fourteen months. In the face of such overwhelming loss, the Prophet taught: "All your losses will be made up to you in the resurrection, provided you continue faithful. By the vision of the Almighty I have seen it."⁶³

Joseph's assurance was not a matter of speculation and argument but of prophetic vision. He knew that in the resurrection those who have lost children will have the opportunity to raise them—that is how the loss will be fully made up.⁶⁴ Further, little children who die in infancy are assured exaltation (see D&C 137:10). Their death is not an ultimate loss, for God in his perfect love has provided a way to overcome the loss. Their exaltation in great joy with God is guaranteed. These are words of comfort and love.

Joseph Smith's view of God's plan of salvation is a source of trust in God's perfect love.⁶⁵ The knowledge that all mortal beings consented to confront life's challenges as an opportunity to obtain the crown of eternal life in endless fellowship with God removes a sense of betrayal when life presents challenges that appear to be overwhelming. If the challenges were not real, the victory could not be won. Rather than Ivan's question, Joseph Smith envisions a God who asks us something like William James's famous proposition in his book *Pragmatism*:

Suppose that the world's author put the case to you before creation, saying: "I am going to make a world not certain to be saved, a world the perfection of which shall be conditional merely, the condition being that each several agent does its own 'level best.' I offer the chance of taking part in such a world. Its safety, you see, is unwarranted. It is a real adventure, with real danger, yet it may win through. It is a social scheme of co-operative work genuinely to be done. Will you join the procession? Will you trust yourself and trust the other agents enough to face the risk?"⁶⁶

Thus one's willingness to take on the challenge of mortal life was the ultimate expression of trust—trust in God, trust in others who would face the challenges as well, and trust in oneself to see it through. The question each individual faces is whether he or she will keep the trust and win the victory.

Perhaps another experience from the Prophet's life will illustrate his deep grasp of the meaning of evil in human experience. Even Joseph, who walked so closely with God, on occasion experienced the troubling sense of God's absence. In the dark days of 1838, a vast number of Latter-day Saint families had been driven from their homes by mobs. Fathers were tied to trees and bullwhipped. Thirty-four people, including women and children, had been massacred at a settlement known as Haun's Mill. Shortly thereafter, the Latter-day Saint settlement at Far West, Missouri, was besieged and sacked by state militia. Soldiers repeatedly raped some of the women. Joseph Smith was betrayed by a friend and turned over to "military" mobsters to be killed. He was taken to a small dungeon, ironically called Liberty Jail. During their four months of imprisonment there, Joseph and his companions were abused, beaten, given human flesh, poisoned, and left in unspeakably filthy conditions where the stench of human waste was ever present.

Joseph agonized over the tales of abuse of his beloved family and friends who had been turned out in the cold of winter while the homes they had built were pillaged and burned by mobs. Joseph felt abandoned by God. The world was upside down—the Saints were homeless and destitute, while the mobs enjoyed the spoils. In a prayer he questioned from the depths of his soul:

O God, where art thou? And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place? How long shall thy hand be stayed, and thine eye, yea thy pure eye, behold from the eternal heavens the wrongs of thy people and of thy servants, and thine ear be penetrated with their cries? (D&C 121:1–2)

In response to Joseph’s prayer of desperation, God heard and spoke:

My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high. Know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he? (D&C 121:7–8; 122:7–8)

Confronted with what seemed to be overwhelming evil, Joseph found meaning in his suffering, maintained hope, trusted God, and kept the faith. And God spoke peace. Truman Madsen summed up Joseph Smith’s triumphant message:

The mortal experience will enable us to fly if we will let it, help it, use it with faith in the Christ who “descended below all.” . . . There is meaning and purpose in all things we suffer; that “all these things” can be for our good, however empty and barren they now appear. The elements of truth in the classical theories have been caught up in a greater whole. The Lord is not playing games with us. The outcome will far exceed the price; the “chastening” will be visioned as our blessing, the fiber of soul-quality will leave no regrets, only an infinite and eternal gratitude, and the partnership we forged with Him before we entered this refining fire will loom as marvelous to us as does the face of a loving mother in the eyes of the child who has just emerged from his fever . . . healed, alive, and prepared for life, eternal life, life like God’s.⁶⁷

The bottom line for Joseph is that the God we mortal beings worship participates in our struggles, suffers when we suffer, grieves for our failures, and rejoices in our triumphs. We cannot complain that God does not know, does not understand, has never been there, for both the Father and Son joined us in the mud and blood of human experience. God is our fellow laborer; he did not create the agents of evil, he did not contrive the natural world to overwhelm us with crushing evils, nor would he allow genuine evils if he could simply eliminate them by divine fiat. The ultimate purpose in human life is revealed through the experience of moral struggle and instances of suffering, to which we are challenged to respond in love. As Madsen said regarding Joseph Smith, “The blows, the searing trials that fell repeatedly on his mind, spirit, and body came trip-hammer hard. Yet his life, thoroughly documented by friend and enemy, shows that the sevenfold furnace need not destroy man. It may ennoble him and perfect him.”⁶⁸ We mortals could have remained in a world where such challenges were not presented, but we chose life because through it we can come to the incomparable joy of fellowship and eternal life with our God and thereby grow into his likeness.

Notes

This essay is an expansion of a shorter piece by David L. Paulsen, entitled “Joseph Smith and the Problem of Evil,” which was given as a forum address at Brigham Young University on 21 September 1999 and was published in *BYU Studies* 39/1 (2000): 53–65.

1. Truman Madsen, *Eternal Man* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1966), 53–54.

2. Presently, “the evidential problem of evil” is being much discussed. Under this rubric, the question is not whether God and evil are logically compatible, but whether, given the extent and kinds of evil we experience, it is

reasonable to believe that God exists. Though we do not here explicitly address the issue under this name, our presentation of a Latter-day Saint theodicy bears significantly on a proper answer to the question. For an excellent anthology containing some of the best recent discussions of the issue, see Daniel Howard-Snyder, ed., *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

3. Madsen, *Eternal Man*; see esp. chap. 5, "Evil and Suffering," 53–61.

4. Truman Madsen, *Four Essays on Love* (Provo, Utah: Communications Workshop, 1971); see esp. "Human Anguish and Divine Love," 55–71.

5. David Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Nelson Pike (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970), 91.

6. Antony Flew, "Theology and Falsification," in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 107.

7. Or what Truman calls an "instrumentalist" theory of evil. Refer to his lecture *The Problem of Evil*, recorded at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 17 October 1966.

8. John Calvin's views are set forth in *Institutes of Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.13.6.

9. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnson, *Martin Luther on the Bondage of the Will* (Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1957), 784–86.

10. Christopher Kirwan, *Augustine* (London: Routledge, 1989), 119–24.

11. Michael Miller, "Transcendence and Divine Causality," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 73/4 (1999): 537–45; Brian Shanley, "Divine Causation and Human Freedom in Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72/1 (1998): 99–122.

12. Madsen, *Four Essays on Love*, 56–57.

13. Many in the deterministic tradition maintain that a distinction can be made between God's intending and God's merely permitting evils. However, given divine determinism, the distinction simply will not hold. See David R. Griffin, *Evil Revisited* (New York: New York State Press, 1991), 13–14.

14. Peter Appleby, "Finitist Theology and the Problem of Evil," *Sunstone*, November/December 1981, 53.

15. In his works, Truman Madsen examines and rejects four theories of evil that attempt to reconcile the existence of God with the existence of evil. These include what he labels the punitive, illusory, perspective, and privative theories of evil. A fifth, which he believes is at the center of Joseph Smith's view, is the instrumental theory of evil. We will not explicitly address these here, but for his commentary, see Truman Madsen, *The Radiant Life* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994), 59–62.

16. Alvin Plantinga, currently a professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, is widely recognized as one of the premier contemporary Christian thinkers and as the author of *God, Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974).

17. J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind* (April 1955): 200–212.

18. See James F. Sennett, "The Free Will Defense and Determinism," *Faith and Philosophy* 8/3 (July 1991): 340–53.

19. Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 45–53.

20. Traditional theologians are divided over whether God's foreknowledge consists in "simple foreknowledge," meaning knowledge of what will in fact occur in the future, or in "middle knowledge," which includes all things that could occur in addition to what will occur.

21. For excellent recent expositions of the notion of middle knowledge, see Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge* (part 4 of *Concordia*), trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988); and Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998). Plantinga's more sophisticated treatment of the free-will defense and middle knowledge is presented in *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974).

22. The issue as to what or who brings about the truth of counterfactuals of freedom is an ongoing debate in the philosophy of religion. Thomas Flint argues that the truth value of counterfactuals of freedom assumes that *actually existing* persons have a type of "counterfactual power over the past," or ability to bring about the truth value of counterfactuals before they even exist, through backward causation. See Flint's "A New Anti-Anti-Molinist Argument," *Religious Studies* 35 (1999): 299–305. However, he does not show how the truth value of counterfactuals could be brought about by possible persons who are never created and therefore never exist! Flint is responding to William Hasker, "A New Anti-Molinist Argument," *Religious Studies* 35 (1999): 291–97; and William Hasker, "Middle Knowledge: A Refutation Revisited," *Faith and Philosophy* 12/2 (April 1995): 223–36. The literature on the argument is legion. See William Hasker, "Anti-Molinism Undefeated!" *Faith and Philosophy* 17/1 (January 2000): 126–31; William L. Craig, "On Hasker's Defense of Anti-Molinism," *Faith and Philosophy* 15/2 (April 1998): 236–40; Edward Wierenga, *The Nature of God: An Inquiry into the Divine Attributes* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), 150–60; Thomas Flint, "Hasker's God, Time and Knowledge," *Philosophical Studies* 60 (1990): 103–15; William L. Craig, "Hasker on Divine Knowledge," *Philosophical Studies* 67 (1992): 89–110; Timothy O'Connor, "The Impossibility of Middle Knowledge," *Philosophical Studies* 66 (1992): 136–66; Robert Adams, "An Anti-Molinist Argument," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 343–53. For a more complete discussion of the issues surrounding the viability of middle knowledge, see Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Attributes of God* (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2001), 163–80.

23. "Davis Response," in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, ed. Stephen T. Davis (Atlanta: Knox, 1981), 97.

24. In expounding B.H. Roberts's treatment of the problem of evil, Truman Madsen suggested that suffering is necessary to obtain through experiences such attributes as love, gratitude, and joy. Thus the world environment containing evil is a positive thing in the sense that it satisfies some prerequisite for obtaining at least one divine attribute: love. See Truman Madsen, "The Meaning of Christ—The Truth, the Way, the Life: An Analysis of B.H. Roberts' Unpublished Masterwork," *BYU Studies* 15/3 (1975): 284; and B.H. Roberts, *The Truth, the Way, the Life*, 2nd ed. (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1996), 609–12.

25. See 2Nephi 2:23, where Adam and Eve, as initially created, are described as being in a state of innocence.

26. John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 326.

27. Ibid., 376.

28. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 115, emphasis in original.

29. Hick, *Evil*, 380–81.

30. Ibid., 291.

31. Frederick R. Tennant, *Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: University Press, 1935), 2:188–89.

32. For a fuller presentation of this objection, see David L. Paulsen, “Divine Determinateness and the Free Will Defence,” *Analysis* 41/3 (June 1981): 150–53.

33. Madsen suggests that Christ endured suffering as a part of his growing process, “But Christ went through what he had to in order to generate in his own center self compassion for us.” *The Highest in Us* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1978), 30.

34. Irenaeus, *Adverses Haereses* book 5, preface.

35. Ibid., 4.38.4.

36. A. N. Williams, “Deification in the *Summa Theologiae*: A Structural Interpretation of the *Prima Pars*,” *Thomist* 61/2 (1997): 219.

37. Madsen, *Eternal Man*, 56–57.

38. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 350–52. The view that matter is eternal and that God created by organizing chaotic matter is also taught in the Book of Abraham 3–4.

39. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 352–53.

40. See *ibid.*, 354.

41. Madsen, *Four Essays on Love*, 57.

42. Madsen, *Eternal Man*, 58.

43. These points are discussed in Joseph Smith’s revelations found in D&C 29:35–43; Moses 4:1–4; 5:9–11; and Abraham 3:23–28.

44. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 181.

45. Madsen further suggests that the law of opposition—the “have to suffer”—is eternal. See “The Meaning of Christ,” 279–80.

46. *The Words of Joseph Smith*, comp. and ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), 62 (19 January 1841; McIntire Minute Book): “Joseph said that before the foundation of

the Earth in the Grand Counsel that the Spirits of all Men were subject to oppression & the express purpose of God in Giving it a tabernacle was to arm it against the power of Darkness” (spelling as in original).

47. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 60 (5 January 1841), extracts from William Clayton’s Private Book.

48. B. H. Roberts, *The Seventy’s Course in Theology*, vol. 2 (Dallas: Taylor, 1976), fourth-year lesson, 12, 70. More technically, we can say that an agent A has maximal power (in effect, the greatest power coherently possible) at a time t if A is able to bring about any state of affairs SA such that (a) SA does not entail that A does not bring about SA at t ; and (b) SA is compossible with all events that precede t in time in the actual world up to t .

49. Truman Madsen, *Joseph Smith among the Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1965), 11.

50. Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith* (Grantsville, Utah: Archive, 2000), lecture 1, 22, states: “It was by faith that the worlds were framed—God spake, chaos heard, and worlds came into order, by reason of the faith there was in Him.”

51. Madsen, *Eternal Man*, 18.

52. Madsen identifies another kind of soteriological problem of evil that we will not discuss here. In this view, if God created all evil, then the atonement wrought by his Son to overcome its effects is a drastic and cruel solution. But Joseph Smith’s teachings, specifically those explained above, provide a rationale for the atonement by demonstrating that the eternal law of justice requires it. See Roberts, *The Truth, the Way, the Life*, 605.

53. Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), 174–75.

54. Stephen T. Davis, “Universalism, Hell, and the Fate of the Ignorant,” *Modern Theology* 6/2 (January 1990): 176.

55. Stephen T. Davis, “Free Will and Evil,” in *Encountering Evil*, 82.

56. Madsen, *Problem of Evil*.

57. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamozov*, trans. David Magarshack (England: Penguin, 1982), 283.

58. *Ibid.*, 287.

59. See Brian K. Cameron, “A Critique of Marilyn McCord Adams’ ‘Christian Solution’ to the Existential Problem of Evil,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 73/3 (1999): 419–23.

60. In a hypothetical dialogue between Joseph Smith and a mother of an infant born blind and paralyzed, Truman Madsen paints a dramatic picture of Joseph’s response to the existential problem of evil. See *Eternal Man*, 53–61.

61. Madsen writes that Joseph Smith said “adversity had become second nature, but had only ‘wafted me that much closer to Deity.’” *Joseph Smith among the Prophets*, 21–22.

62. Emma gave birth to nine children, and Emma and Joseph adopted the Murdock twins when their own twins died.

63. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 296.

64. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 347, 354.

65. Truman Madsen speaks to this point extensively in the chapter of *The Radiant Life* entitled “Human Anguish and Divine Love.”

66. William James, *Pragmatism* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1948), 290–91.

67. Madsen, *The Radiant Life*, 68.

68. Madsen, *Joseph Smith among the Prophets*, 23.