

# Room to Talk: Reason's Need for Faith

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Truman G. Madsen's slim volume *Eternal Man*<sup>1</sup> had a profound effect on me, and when I ask others who were students in the late sixties or early seventies about it, I find that it was equally important for them. The book was not academically profound, but then it had no pretensions to be. As Madsen says in the introduction, its chapters were intended "as a kind of 'midrash.' ... The goal has been to clarify rather than to verify, with little room for argument, except an implicit appeal to introspection" (p.viii).

The result of that goal was that one can find much to challenge in the book: Must we understand the doctrine of premortally existent intelligences to imply that we have existed eternally as individuals? Does Madsen not create straw persons in his descriptions of orthodox Christian and other beliefs? For example, is it true that religious existentialism, such as that of Søren Kierkegaard, is "utter pessimism" (p.29)? And does Madsen not reify being when he argues against the dualism of traditional theology by dismissing its concerns for nothing and for being (see pp.31–32, 44)? Does he not dismiss too easily some of the traditional problems of theology and the philosophy of religion, such as how it is possible to speak meaningfully of a being who transcends our mortal finitude (see p.35)? How does defining freedom as self-determination remove all the problems of freedom and determinism (see p.66 n. 9)? It would not be difficult to add to the list.

But adding to the list would be beside the point. It would mean refusing to recognize the book for what it claims to be and is: a primer to aid us in our introspection about the intellectual strengths of our belief in the premortal existence of spirits. If, as such a primer, the book raises these questions and more, it fulfills its function, inducing us to think about its topic. Perhaps it will someday even goad one of us to provide the promised "tome which is not pressed [as Madsen's was] for abbreviation" (p. viii)—a tome that one wishes Madsen himself could find the time to offer, all the while recognizing that his life continues to be busy enough to make that difficult.

However, for many like myself, *Eternal Man* was important not so much because of the problems with which it dealt or the positions that it took on the questions of the eternality of individuals, divine omnipotence, the materiality of the Divine, human freedom, and so on, but because of what it did. More than teaching a particular doctrine or suggesting any particular solution to a philosophical or theological problem, the book gave its readers permission to think about these kinds of problems, to read the books listed in its many footnotes, and to explore books like them. *Eternal Man* said, "It is good to think about and deal with these issues." It gave those of us in college and graduate school in the late 1960s an alternative to the two most common positions taken with regard to such things: "One position assumes that they [the ideas about premortal existence] are so remote and incomplete that a 'practical man' avoids thinking about them. The other assumes that by mere reference to pre[mortal] existence one can 'explain' all events and eventualities" (p. 14). By writing *Eternal Man*, Truman Madsen said to me—and, I believe, to many others—"Take seriously the admonition from the Prophet Joseph Smith that introduces chapter two: 'When things that are of the greatest importance are passed over by weak-minded men without even a thought, I want to see truth in all its bearings and hug it to my bosom'" (p.23). Reading *Eternal Man* made me want not to be one of the "weak-minded." The book gave me an intellectual goal and told me that my new goal was not only commensurable with my faith, but an expression of it.

In reminding us that Joseph Smith described the gospel as requiring "careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts" (p.ix), Madsen said, "A related kind of authority is needed in this realm. It is what, in the vernacular is called 'room

to talk” (p. ix). By suggesting the possibility of taking our faith seriously while also understanding the writings of scholars, and of thinking about both without being ashamed of or frightened by one or the other, Madsen opened such a room, and many entered.

Given today’s hypersensitivities of various kinds, such room to talk is as difficult to come by as it ever was. Some, recognizing that current trends of thinking are not consonant with the gospel (as if they ever were), think that we should shut our eyes and ears to such things and that, especially, we should not speak of them to the young for fear of corrupting them. Others think that it is enough merely to repeat conventional wisdom about the gospel or even, perhaps, merely to repeat the truths of the gospel. For them, repetition without investigation is enough to answer all questions. A few others, convinced that this or that seemingly newfangled notion is, at last, the answer to our problems and questions, would either ignore the gospel or twist it into a shape that better fits their new-found intellectual faith. But all these kinds of problems respond to the difficulties of the intellect with one kind of dogmatism or another. They shut the door on any room to talk.

In this paper, I address the relation of faith to reason. I doubt that I will add new insights to the discussion of that hoary subject. Rather than do so, I intend to say a few things that I hope will, in imitation of *Eternal Man*, use the topic to open, and leave open, room to talk. I argue that faith and reason are commensurable. I have heard persons whose ideas I respect suggest otherwise. Nevertheless, I think my conclusion is one with which most members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints would agree.<sup>2</sup> In making this argument, though I argue for what I believe to be true, I leave open the possibility that I am wrong. One reason that philosophers offer arguments is to make it possible for others, by following the steps of their reasoning, to show them where they went wrong.

Besides arguing for the commensurability of faith and reason, I will go further. I suggest that faith is fundamental to reason, though I do no more than sketch an argument for that suggestion.<sup>3</sup> The full argument for that claim would take at least another paper and probably a book. Neither of the positions that I outline is novel, and in some circles they may even be ordinary. But the marvel of the ordinary and wonder at that marvel is sometimes itself not so ordinary. In fact, I think it has become so *inordinate* in our day that we often need to be reminded of quite ordinary things. So I offer here some musings and reflections on the relation of faith to reason, with an argument or two, in the same spirit as that found in *Eternal Man*—namely, as points for reflection and thought more than as a philosophical treatise.

In particular, I want to suggest that faith is fundamental to reason, but let me begin my reflections on that claim with a story, for my reflections have their genesis in an experience that occurred about seven years ago. I think the story illustrates that rationality cannot be reduced to sets of propositions or beliefs related to each other by implication. Instead (and I argue that this is true of every kind of rationality), rationality must begin with something outside of such sets and relations, as I think my experience will suggest.

My oldest daughter had been an officer for one of the Utah chapters of the Future Homemakers of America, and the state organization held its end-of-the-school-year banquet in Salt Lake City. I was going through all the usual hoopla politely but condescendingly. I was there to do my duty as a father, although I would have much preferred to be elsewhere. Chicken dinner for 750 accompanied by speeches and awards for a large group of fourteen-through seventeen-year-olds was not my idea of a great way to spend my Saturday afternoon. Sitting next to me at the table for parents was a couple about my age, both of whom were obviously enjoying what I was merely tolerating, from the food to the entertainment. When I asked where they were from, he replied, “Wayne County.”

“Where in Wayne County?”

“Just Wayne County.”

“How far away is that?”

“About a four-hour drive.”

It quickly began to be more difficult for me to condescend. Their four-hour trip made my forty-five-minute one look like a walk across the street, but I was the one who was slightly irritated about having to make the trip. On the other hand, had I stopped to reflect (although I did not), I could have explained their enjoyment of the occasion geographically: such things might look good in comparison to the pleasures of Wayne County. Our conversation continued:

“About what time will you get back tonight?”

“About 11:00.”

“Well, at least tomorrow is Sunday. Maybe you can sleep in.”

Stupid me. I had assumed that all people have five-day-a-week jobs, Monday through Friday, and that they work from eight to five.

“Well, it’s lambing season and one or the other of us has to get up every hour to check the sheep. We trade off, so we can sleep about two hours at a time.”

Condescension turned to humiliation: this man and woman loved their daughter more than I loved mine. Though, unlike me, they actually had to sacrifice to be at the banquet, they were pleased to be there, enjoying what happened not because they were so intellectually blighted that they thought that seventeen-year-olds actually have much of importance to say and certainly not because they liked the food on the menu or found the pleasures of Wayne County so abysmal. They were there because they loved their daughter and took pleasure from seeing her enjoy herself and be honored. I love my daughter, too, but what I saw as an inconvenient and mildly irritating responsibility that is consequent on loving that daughter, they saw as part of that love. That experience *persuaded* me in a moment that they were right and I was wrong. Their lives were right in a way that mine was not, and I came to that understanding by seeing a small part of their lives.

The couple next to me did not think—almost certainly would not have thought—to offer me what philosophers recognize as rational arguments, and they almost certainly did not have the training to do so in a way that I would acknowledge as philosophical. In spite of that, their behavior did allow me to come to a conclusion: the conclusion that one should enjoy such events. They did not intend to do so. I had no impression that they were trying to teach me anything—certainly not that I was wrong. Nevertheless, being in their presence did persuade me. They *were* something like evidence; they did not offer it. I would have had to have been unreasonable to deny the conclusion that their behavior persuaded me to accept. What was the nature of the experience I had in comprehending what their lives revealed? How did that experience make it possible for me to be persuaded, to come to a rational conclusion, immediately and without a chain of reasoning (deductive or inductive) from assumptions to conclusion?

How did seeing them and talking with them make possible a rational belief that I was wrong (the *conviction* that I was wrong, if I can use the word in both of its senses) without any chain of reasoning? What I saw in them was

neither an axiomatic truth nor a truth deduced from axioms. It was not a “bare empirical fact” (granting, for the argument, that there are such dubious things). It was not an objective truth.<sup>4</sup> But neither was it merely a subjective opinion. My judgment of myself was rational. Some evidence that it was a rational belief rather than a merely subjective one is that others, hearing the story, know its conclusion before I tell it; they are able to adduce the same conclusion from the story that I did from the experience. The behavior of the couple from Wayne County was like evidence for a rational conclusion, but it did not require that I begin with a belief and then come to a conclusion based on that belief in order to be persuaded.

Before trying to give an account of why the kind of knowledge I acquired that afternoon was rational, let me be clear about what I am saying: Seeing the couple next to me and listening to them talk about their daughter was sufficient to persuade me (in a sense of the term that I will leave open) of the inferiority of my love for my daughter compared to their love for theirs. That is not to say that I could not have been wrong about that belief. It is only to say that the belief to which I came was rational. It had sufficient grounds and could not be explained solely in terms of my previous beliefs. It was not just subjective. This is also not to say that persuasion cannot take other forms. It is only to suggest that this event raises important questions about rationality, particular questions that may help us think about rationality as a whole. Careful readers may worry that I neglect important distinctions in this paper: they might argue that rationality cannot be reduced to a response to relevant information, that giving reasons for a belief is not the same as being evidence for a belief, and so forth.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, recognizing the legitimacy of that worry, I will proceed. I am not arguing that response to relevant information and rationality are the same, and I do not think my argument requires that they be the same. Instead, I am looking at a particular kind of case—the case in which I find myself persuaded of something based on something that our ordinary metatalk about reason seems to exclude or at least to render problematic, as in the example of the couple from Wayne County. That kind of case is sufficient for the purposes of this paper—namely, to raise questions about our understanding of reason that will allow me to argue that reason and faith are commensurable and to sketch an argument that reason requires faith.

I will suggest that faith and reason are commensurable by arguing that reason always requires something outside the chain of reasons (such as my experience of that couple). In addition, as mentioned, I will sketch what I think may be an argument that the relation of reason to what is outside itself is a matter of faith. If that is the case, then at least one way in which faith and reason are commensurable is that the latter requires the former.

Before I make my case, however, let me briefly take up another way in which faith and reason are commensurable: not only does reason need faith, but faith needs reason. If, as it is often defined, faith is understood to be belief or even knowledge in the absence of compelling reasons, then it is obviously true by definition that faith and reason are mutually exclusive. When we talk about faith, if we are not careful, we almost always slip into our semiphilosophical or theological mode and, when we do, we are likely to say something in which faith is defined in this way.<sup>6</sup> Although this response is common, I think it is seriously mistaken. Alvin Plantinga has argued—brilliantly, I believe—that we should reject that definition: compelling experience may be sufficient, even in the absence of compelling beliefs.<sup>7</sup> Faith is best thought of, not as belief in the absence of reasons, but as fidelity to something that one has been given, such as an experience or covenant, or trust in someone, such as God. That is how it seems most often to be used in the scriptures.

Besides appealing to Plantinga’s argument, I have additional grounds (some of them related to Plantinga’s) for rejecting the common separation of faith from reason. For one thing, to think in that way confuses faith with opinion (although even opinion has its reasons and evidences—often, but not always, poor ones). If we confuse

faith and opinion, we should not be surprised when arguments showing the insufficiency of opinion and the necessity of moving from opinion to knowledge grounded in reason also work as arguments against faith. But it is a mistake to define faith as belief without reasons.

Paul is explicit about faith being a matter of evidence: “Now faith is the substance [ὑποστάσις—*hypostasis*, meaning ‘reality’ or ‘realization’] of things hoped for, the evidence [ἔλεγχος—*elenchus*, meaning ‘proof’ or ‘argument for’]<sup>8</sup> of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Nephi and Lehi, the sons of Helaman, convert hundreds to faith by offering them great evidence (see Helaman 5:50). Several years later, Nephi tells the people that their unbelief is unreasonable, a rejection of convincing evidence (see Helaman 8:24). Faith has reasons and requires them; at least part of what is wrong in the supposed confrontation between faith and reason is that a poor definition of faith is used. However, since I will assume that most of the audience of this essay consists of practicing, faithful Latter-day Saints, this argument needs little development. They already know, at least in their hearts, that there is more to faith than belief without reason; that faith is essentially trust and fidelity rather than belief, though beliefs will result from trust and fidelity; and that, when they do, they will have their reasonable ground. Thus my primary focus will be on the nature of reason and its relation to faith.

Aristotle says that to be human is to be rational.<sup>9</sup> Along with most people, I am willing to accept that assumption without further proof, but the assumption cannot mean that to be human is to offer and listen to arguments. Aristotle’s claim is not that human beings are all philosophical in the conventional sense of the term. At best, Aristotle is making the weaker claim that all human beings are capable of using reason. But what does that mean?

In its essence, the problem of reason is simple: does reason have a reason? And if it does, how do we think that reason? How do we establish certain knowledge when reason reaches its end? With some important qualifications, René Descartes—one of the most important fathers of modernism to whom we owe much of our contemporary, ordinary understanding of reason (our “common sense”)—assumes that reason has no reason: it begins from principles that are intuitively known to be true without reference to anything else and proceeds logically from step to step, establishing knowledge as certain when it reaches its end.<sup>10</sup> In contemporary philosophical jargon, he is a foundationalist: according to Descartes, there are self-certifying, rational foundations to reason.

It is true that Descartes must know that there is a God in order to know that there really is a world that can be the object of his ratiocination, but, although the existence of the world and our knowledge of that existence require God, reason does not. If it did, Descartes believes, we would never get to a knowledge of God’s existence or even of our own, for it requires reason to know either. Thus, Descartes’s methodological doubt can get us to the conclusions he reaches only because, for him, reason is self-grounding and complete. It is the only thing without reason; it is its own reason. Despite the fact that much twentieth-century philosophy on both sides of the Atlantic has devoted itself to a critique of the Enlightenment notion of reason, and even with the introduction of such things as probability theory, studies of induction, and new theories of logic, I think that many people—certainly most nonphilosophers—continue to think of reason in terms that are ultimately Cartesian: reason is self-grounding and, in principle, eventually capable of giving a complete description of the world.

But I see only two possible consequences of the claim that reason is self-grounding and complete: radical skepticism or totalitarianism. David Hume shows us the first of these: if we accept Descartes’s foundationalist position and reject the proof for God’s existence (as we most certainly can when we confine our thinking to what can be demonstrated by reason unaided), then we are reduced to the tautologies of pure logic and to reporting the

fact of immediately present experience (which may not be able to be plural without losing its immediacy). Even memory of very recent events cannot be trusted.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, if we find a rational way around Hume's argument, a way of speaking about the world rationally (or if, as many have done, we ignore Hume's argument), then we accept Descartes's assumption that reason is ultimately adequate to the world: it is, in principle, possible to make a list of the true propositions that give a complete description of the world at any given point in time and to relate those propositions to one another by logical implication alone. Emmanuel Levinas argues that such an understanding of reason is not just mistaken but eventually amounts to totalitarianism—even political totalitarianism—and, in the end, the horror of Auschwitz.<sup>12</sup>

As extreme as that claim is, I find it plausible, although I can here do no more than give a précis of an argument for it. As moderns, we assume that reason makes us masters of this world. To use Francis Bacon's phrase, "knowledge is power" (knowledge rather than virtue, as it was for Plato and other ancients). Given the modern view, the world, including other persons and ourselves, is a set of objects subject to rational investigation. If Bacon is right that knowledge is power, then the search for absolute knowledge (knowledge without limits) is the same as the search for absolute power (power without limits). In our century, that search for power in the form of knowledge, loosed from its traditional mooring in the search for the Good (as it must be loosed if we accept Bacon's identification of knowledge and power), has cost millions of lives and caused unspeakable horror and suffering.<sup>13</sup>

However, even if we reject Levinas's claim as exaggerated, the modern understanding of reason contains an irony: the attempt to fulfill our desire to give a complete description—to say "the last word"—can only result in continuing babble and never in the last, controlling word for which the search for power hungers. In *Metaphysics*,<sup>14</sup> Aristotle argues that without something outside the chain of explanations, there can be no actual explanation.<sup>15</sup> I think that is an argument whose power is often overlooked. Aristotle calls this something the *archē* (ἀρχή), the "origin." It is tempting to think that the *archē* is either the first in the series of efficient or other causes or to think of it as the first instance in a chain of rational explanations. However, to understand it in either of these ways is a mistake, for these two ways of understanding the *archē* are of a piece. Each reduces the *archē* to something with the same philosophical and perhaps ontological status as any other moment in the chain of explanation or account, the only difference being that, mysteriously, it is the first of those moments. Understood that way, Aristotle's argument makes no sense.

However, as we see in Thomas Aquinas's use of Aristotle's argument in the proofs for God's existence,<sup>16</sup> that is a misunderstanding of the argument. As I think Aquinas's use shows, Aristotle's point is that there must be something outside of or beyond or prior to any chain of reasons that grounds the chain in question, or there will be no real reasonings.<sup>17</sup> There must be what Jacques Derrida calls the *supplement*, although the name itself indicates that one speaks from within a chain of reasons rather than from any external point of view.<sup>18</sup> One speaks of what is beyond reason from within reason because there is no alternative.<sup>19</sup>

Expanded, Aristotle's point is this: potentially every chain of reasons—every reasoning or explanation—is infinitely long. No matter where I stop, in principle someone could ask, "And what explains that?" Nevertheless, our chains of reasoning do *not* go on to infinity. Something stops them; something makes any particular stopping point of an adequate chain of reasoning the appropriate place to stop. That which constitutes the adequate stopping point of a chain of reasons, however, is itself not part of that chain. The reason for the explanation is outside the chain. (It could be, and often is, something as straightforward as a state of affairs, "the way things are.") Thus, the real origin

or first cause of any chain of reasons is not the point at which we stop saying, “A because of B because of C,” but something that is not itself part of the chain, something that we do not account for in our chain of reasons or causal account. It is the ground or origin, the *archē*, that gave rise to the chain (and can, therefore, also give rise to a chain with only one link, the conclusion). That which gives rise to a chain of reasons is something that cannot itself be explained; it is an “uncaused cause,” to use the traditional terminology, and cannot be included in the chain of reasons.<sup>20</sup>

Of course, as I pointed out earlier, in principle it is always possible to give an account of whatever we can point to, and, on reflection, we can always point to the origin of a chain of reasons. However, when we do so, we remove it from its status outside the chain of reasons. It ceases to be the origin of the chain and becomes one of the things in the chain—namely, its first element. But that means that something new has taken its place as the origin of the chain of reasons as the supplement—in other words, as the ground of explanations and reasons that is not itself part of the chain of reasons. Thus, if we take the Cartesian understanding of reason seriously, if we assume that the origin of reason is not supplemental to reason, that there is nothing outside the process of reason because reason is self-grounding, then we will have no way to stop giving reasons in any particular case.<sup>21</sup> Without a supplement, an *archē*, every chain of reasons will go on to infinity and so will not do as a chain of reasons. An explanation that cannot come to an end is no explanation at all. If explanation requires a last word rather than a supplement, then the desire for the last word is implicitly the desire for garrulousness, not understanding.

This observation that the use of reason depends on something external to that use is a matter of common sense. As always, philosophers argue for what ordinary people know without having to argue it. (From the reports one sees in the news, which are not always to be trusted, one suspects that those in charge of deciding what kinds of social science research projects to fund with government money are all philosophers.) In addition, many more philosophers have known this than have not. Medieval Christians certainly knew that explanations require something beyond them and their processes. The various sorts of empiricists also knew it, as did the Romantics. Marxism maintains that reason has a supplement and, like Christianity, reminds us that ignoring that fact is seldom done in innocence. Plantinga gives us perhaps the best explanation in analytic philosophy of this truth that we all already know.<sup>22</sup> Deconstruction begins with the assumption of this need for something more and then tries to show places in texts and philosophies at which that dependence on what is beyond reason shines through the text. Feminism allies itself with Marxism, although sometimes only implicitly, in recognizing both that reason is not self-grounding and that the claim that it is, is not innocent. Every ordinary member of the church knows that something more than reason is needed. But in spite of the fact that “everyone” knows, at least implicitly, that reason requires a supplement, I think it is also true that few people recognize that fact when they think about reason or faith and that fewer still recognize its implications or the questions it raises.

Having argued that reason requires a supplement, let me now turn to that supplement: what can we say about its character, if anything? and what is its relation to reason? For our purposes, these are the same as the question of how we can reasonably talk about what falls outside reason, so I will treat them as one question. On the face of it, we seem to be faced with a dilemma:

In order to speak reasonably about something, it seems that it must be within reason. The supplement of reason is outside reason. So, we cannot speak reasonably about it.

That conclusion at least raises doubts as to the tenability of the second premise, the premise for which I have argued. The argument seems self-contradictory.

To deal with this problem, we need to begin by considering ways in which I think we cannot talk about the supplement of reason. When we hear people talk about faith and reason in church talks or classes or serious conversations about serious matters, they often use the language of Romanticism: there are things to be known and things to be felt; things to be explained rationally and things that defy rational explanation but are known by means of some other faculty. We sometimes use the word that the Romantics gave us for that other faculty, *intuition*; sometimes, instead, we speak of feeling; sometimes we associate the promptings of the Holy Ghost with the Romantic faculty for knowing. Those who take this approach see the problem of reason as we usually understand it, and they try to solve that problem by supplementing reason's realm with another—that of feeling—a realm that goes beyond our ability to conceive and that gives unity to the whole of experience.

However, there are philosophical problems with Romanticism.<sup>23</sup> Having created two realms of knowledge, those who think in this way find that they have doubled their problems. The problem with reason is that it cannot answer the question of how we can know things like the supplement of reason. It is not clear how creating an additional realm of knowledge—the realm of feeling—solves the problems of the first, the realm of reason. In fact, it is unclear how having two realms of knowledge and two faculties for knowing solves the problems that follow from relying on reason alone. If I know by intuition or feeling in one realm, why can I not know that way in the realm of reason? If I cannot know by intuition in the realm of reason, how am I able to know that way in the other realm? Additionally, if reason and intuition are separate realms, why doesn't one of the two realms end up encompassing the other? And if one does not encompass the other, how can I speak of knowledge in both realms? What do the two have in common that allows me to speak of knowledge in both without there being some way of bringing them together, something in common to them? If reason and intuition are distinct ways of knowing, what holds them together so that I, an individual, can make sense of each? With Romanticism, not only are human minds caught in the clutches of Enlightenment, foundationalist reason, we are also hopelessly and essentially schizophrenic.

My final objection to the Romantic solution to the problem of reason is that, by moving everything that could not be understood by Cartesian reason, such as religion and art, to the realm of feeling, Romanticism deprecates those things. Without intending to, certainly, Romantics make *any* talk of knowing the objects of religion metaphorical at best, thereby robbing important parts of our lives, such as religious and aesthetic experience, of their ability to give us genuine knowledge.<sup>24</sup> Their approach to knowledge creates a dilemma: I cannot know the truth about the most important things rationally, and I cannot know what the other way of knowing them is unless I have already experienced it.

Given these problems with Romanticism, though religious people and artists often use the language of Romanticism to talk about the relation of their concerns to reason and to explain their experiences and knowledge, Romanticism will not do. Whatever the relation between reason and its supplement, that relation must be understood from within reason or it will fall into the abyss of irrationalism or, at best, be subordinated to the whim of subjective sentiment (which is where Romanticism ends up, in spite of itself, by cutting itself off from reason). Whatever the relation of reason and its ground, we must understand reason in a way that will allow us to do so without dropping beauty, art, religion, love, feeling, the good, and so on into the abyss of the irrational or nonrational.

It will perhaps be surprising to some that I think Kierkegaard understood that point quite well. In his work, because he understood that we can understand the relation of reason to its supplement only from within reason, he used pseudonyms and irony in his philosophical texts (at the same time that he was writing quite straightforward religious sermons). He wanted to pay appropriate due to reason without falling into the trap of making it independent of faith. As I understand Kierkegaard's best-known treatise on faith, *Fear and Trembling*,



Abraham is faced with a paradox when he is asked to sacrifice his son Isaac. He must obey God, who commands him to kill his son, but he knows that it is unholy to kill another person. Revelation contradicts ethical obligation. It is not uncommon to understand this paradox as a contradiction between reason and revelation: revelation and reason are incommensurable and revelation trumps reason.

However, instead, I think that the paradox of Abraham is not that revelation must contradict reason, but that Abraham cannot make himself understood to foundationalist philosophers and those of Kierkegaard's countrymen who think they have gone beyond Descartes's methodological doubt to Hegel's rational certainty. Abraham cannot speak, says Johannes de Silentio,<sup>25</sup> and yet he does speak. What Abraham says, however, is "absurd"—meaning that it cannot be heard by the foundationalist philosopher, *not* that it has no meaning. I take it that Kierkegaard is relying on the root meaning of the word *absurd*, "what cannot be said, what is voiceless," and so, also, "what cannot be heard."

The absurdity<sup>26</sup> to which the story of Abraham points is the voicelessness of what lies outside the strict economy of Cartesian doubt and certainty. As a result, the absurdity that Silentio discovers is *only* meaningless or irrational if we insist that meaning and rationality are products of "the system" only, of Cartesian rationality only. To be sure, what is outside the system is paradoxical—in other words, strange and marvelous rather than self-contradictory (again, I take Kierkegaard to be relying on the root meaning of the word *paradox*: "what is other than our expectations")<sup>27</sup>—but it is not unreasonable or contrary to reason, except from the point of view of a reason that has been artificially and narrowly defined. As I understand Kierkegaard, Abraham cannot be understood *if, and only if*, one rejects the origin of his knowledge, which modern philosophers (in other words, philosophers from Descartes through at least Hegel) and those who accept their views reject.

To use Aristotle's word again, what is outside reason is, in fact, the *archē* of reason, its origin. However, it is an *archē* that we can hear only from within reason (since we take account of things always from within reason), so we tend to hear it as if it were also within reason. It is as if we are listening to someone calling from outside the house, but we assume that they are inside—or, perhaps more accurately, it is like hearing someone quietly whisper something to us and believing that we are hearing ourselves think.

Within reason, its *archē* can be said and, in fact, is always said. Reason can and does give an account of itself. However, the account is always ironic, in a way that I will try to explain. There is no straightforward, non-question-begging, rational account of reason. One can be deaf to reason's supplemental *archē*. One can refuse it recognition. One can refuse to hear what is said by means of, rather than merely within, reason. For the foundation or origin of reason does not show itself unambiguously—clearly and distinctly or, in other words, theoretically. It cannot give itself clearly and distinctly, or it would be one more thing *within* the realm of reason, rather than its supplement. But the fact that something cannot be said clearly and distinctly does not mean that it cannot be said well, or that it cannot be heard, or that it cannot be understood without difficulty.

The profundity of the origin of reason is not necessarily the profundity of complexity and obscurity. Martin Heidegger (who himself sometimes, but not always, confused profundity with complexity) writes in *The Principle of Reason* of "the second tonality" of the principle of sufficient reason. This tonality does not deny that everything has an explanation but alerts us to the fact of the *archē*, of what can always be heard from beyond reason as well as always ignored.<sup>28</sup> Kierkegaard helps us see the necessity of such an *archē* by showing the impossibility of giving a merely theoretical explanation of Abraham—along with the impossibility of simply writing Abraham off as a madman, as one who acts without, or outside of, reason. Narratives and deconstructions of texts can help us catch

a glimpse of the *archē*, the unavoidable but always indirectly seen “supplement” of reason. So can carefully listening to the “tones” of propositions in otherwise logical discourse, hearing what those propositions also say. But nothing can *guarantee* that we will hear what comes to us from the *arch*, from that which reason must call its supplement but which is really its origin. One must learn to read and hear with Kierkegaardian irony, which is not to say one thing and to mean another but to know that one always says more than is apparent on the surface, and it is to take account of that “more than.” To read and hear ironically is, thus, always to say something about one’s extrarational foundations, though one speaks of them, nally, only implicitly.

Since we must assume that we speak ironically whenever we speak reasonably, we must also be suspicious of taking up irony as a posture. In the first place, if Kierkegaard, Heidegger, the Medievals, and other important thinkers—such as Nephi, the son of Lehi—are right, then ordinary language, even the “clear and distinct” and often not-so-ordinary language of rational philosophy, is already ironic.<sup>29</sup> I need not add anything to it for it to be ironic. In the second place, only the character of the speaker can give a guarantee that what he or she says is said with the proper irony, and no speaker can guarantee his or her own character except by being of good character.

Thus, the answer to the question of how we are to understand the *archē* of reason from within reason is related to that of Plato: we understand the origin of reason as we understand the sun, not by looking at it directly with philosophical and theoretical eyes, but by the light it sheds on the things in the world, by the fact that we can see at all, by the fact that reason is possible. We see reasonably—or, in other words, we see by the origin of reason—without ever seeing the supplemental origin directly.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, the *archē*, like the sun, is never far from us; it is everywhere to be seen and never to be pointed out directly, even though when we point at anything we point by means of it.

But why is that *archē* to be thought of in terms of faith rather than, as for Marxists, in terms of material history or, as for feminists, in terms of the history of oppression? That question is the hardest one I brook, but I think I can say something about it. I can at least make what I think is a reasonable suggestion.

The first, quick answer is deceptively simple: for something to be the ground for a knowledge claim, I must trust it and be faithful to it. However, as I said, the simplicity of this answer is deceptive. Hidden in it are a host of questions and philosophical problems, such as what it means to be faithful to an experience.

With an eye toward beginning to say something about the profundity of that simplicity, let me explore one way of talking about the relation of reason to its supplemental, archaic origin. It takes very little to notice that reason and explanation often involve our obligation to others. One can, of course, point out that not all reason begins with obligation. It is not difficult to think of cases of reasoning that have not been initiated by an obligation. That response, however, can perhaps be overcome by arguing that other uses of reason are parasitic on reason as a response to obligation. Or it may be overcome by arguing that the word *obligation* must be understood more broadly. In any case, for now, grant the Levinasian thesis that reason begins in obligation to another.<sup>31</sup> Why reason except to explain? Why explain if there is no one to whom we owe an explanation? In a solipsistic universe, reason and explanation make no sense (if only because language makes no sense). The solipsist who argues for his solipsism contradicts that solipsism in making his argument. If this is true, then what is outside of reason, making it possible, is essentially not a thing or principle, but another person. The principle of noncontradiction is necessary to all reasoning, but its necessity comes not from itself but from the demand that I give an acceptable explanation to another.<sup>32</sup> In Levinas’s terms, the principles of reason have their origin in the apologetic character of reason, which is the very basis for my existence as a unique individual.<sup>33</sup> He says, “[The singularity of my existence] is at

the very level of its reason; it is apology, that is, personal discourse, from me to the others.”<sup>34</sup> With an argument that I can only allude to here, Levinas argues that the other person is, ultimately, God.<sup>35</sup>

Although she does not deal directly with Levinas, Marlene Zarader helps us understand Levinas’s recourse to God by pointing out that, in the Jewish tradition (she points explicitly to the medieval commentator Nachmanides), language, and therefore reason, is, in its essence, a response to God.<sup>36</sup> The Bible understands language to be a matter of experience, the experience of hearing a call and responding. When God speaks, he does not reveal himself in the hurricane or the fire, but in a voice that addresses us (recall 1Kings 19:11–13). Zarader takes prophetic speech to be paradigmatic of all speech and says: “The prophet speaks to the people and can be understood by them because his speaking remains ordained by a call that preceded it.”<sup>37</sup>

To Levinas’s argument that obligation to God and fidelity to him is the *archē* of reason, I would add at least one thing, also at least partly a matter of faith. However, adding this additional point will return at least some of what I suggested could be taken away when I suggested that nonobligational reason may be parasitic on obligational reason. In addition, what I say will question whether God is the only origin, or supplement, of reason.

I am interested in what has sometimes been called Heidegger’s paganism, a description used to denote the fact that Heidegger does not consider the world simply as something created *ex nihilo*, but as something that has its own existence and, therefore, its own power to appear to us and to demand our attention, a power that cannot be completely attributed to God’s creative act. For Heidegger, the power of the world to reveal itself not only cannot be reduced to divine fiat,<sup>38</sup> but it also cannot be reduced either to our subjective wills or to the objects of rational research.<sup>39</sup> The world itself has the power to ground our conclusions.

Levinas’s understanding of matters is more in line with traditional theology and its supposition of the creation of the world from nothing.<sup>40</sup> The consequence of such an understanding is that the world itself and things in the world do not have their own existence, so they do not have their own power to show themselves to us, to reveal something. If the world is created *ex nihilo*, then revelation comes from God *in toto*, and, ultimately, he is the only supplement of reason. However, Latter-day Saint belief rejects the notion of *ex nihilo* creation and so implicitly includes the idea that the things of the world have power of their own to reveal themselves. Though all things are dependent on God for their existence in the world and thus all things point to his existence (Alma 30:44), each thing also has an aspect of independent existence and thus the power to show itself. The appearing of the world is not reducible to will, neither to that of the Divine nor to that of human beings. Heidegger’s so-called pagan understanding of the world as existing, in some sense, in itself is more useful to Latter-day Saint thinkers than is Levinas’s, though the latter does much to help us understand reason as response.

Heidegger also speaks of our relation to and understanding of the world in terms of two registers or orders of thinking.<sup>41</sup> Though Heidegger uses the word *reason* for only one of those registers, I think that is a mistake; there is no reason not to speak of each as reason. One of the registers of thought is what we usually think of when we think of reason, a thinking determined by logic. That is a register that we cannot do without. If thinking is to be at all useful, it must include logic.

Nevertheless, the logical register of thought requires another, the register of faithfulness, memory, and recognition. In other words, it requires the relation to a supplement that makes it possible and meaningful. Without the relation to a supplement, the first register remains free-floating and, therefore, pointless. But unlike Levinas, Heidegger believes that it is as possible to be faithful to the things in the world that come to us, to be

called by the things we encounter and to hearken to that call, as it is to be called by another person and to hearken to her. For Heidegger, faithfulness to the world is as possible as is faithfulness to another person, and I believe that Heidegger has much for Latter-day Saints to think about in this regard.

Reason in the primary sense is the welcoming, remembering, recognizing response to a call from someone or something, a response that makes possible reason in the narrower sense.<sup>42</sup> As Otto Pggeler points out, for Heidegger the essence of thought is not questioning, though the thinker must question. The essence of thought is not questioning because questioning relies on already finding oneself called by something and submitting oneself to it.<sup>43</sup> One cannot question unless one is already in a world that reveals itself and makes demands. In other words, the essence of thinking—of reason—is response, and very like the response of religious faith, even when it is a response to something other than God.<sup>44</sup>

As Zarader explains, this idea that reason is a matter of response is not new. In fact, in discussions of how knowledge is understood in the Bible, it is almost a commonplace that Hebrew thought takes knowledge to be a matter of hearing, acquaintance, and obedience, while Greek thought (which gave us philosophy and thus the primary way in which we think about thinking and reason) takes it to be a matter of sight, possession, and control. Too simply put (but perhaps good enough for our purposes here), for the biblical prophet, to know the truth is to be called and to obey that which calls one. For the Greek philosopher, to know the truth is to see something and to grasp what one sees.<sup>45</sup> We ask someone, for example, “Did you get it? Did you grasp it?” However, as David Banon says, for biblical writers the basic structure of knowledge is not that of “‘possession,’ but that of ‘fidelity.’”<sup>46</sup> Heidegger’s view has much in common with the biblical view, though he not only seems to have been unaware of that fact but took pains to insist that faith and “thinking” (his term for philosophy from this broader perspective) were separate matters.<sup>47</sup>

Given the similarity between Heidegger’s understanding of knowledge and the biblical understanding, it may seem strange when Levinas worries that Heidegger’s paganism opens the door to idolatry. Nevertheless, it is well that he should worry. In the first place, idolatry succeeds best when it imitates the truth.<sup>48</sup> In the second place, Heidegger’s biography shows why we should worry.<sup>49</sup> But the door that opens to idolatry also opens to God. Because false worship is an imitation of true, what leads to one can also lead to the other.<sup>50</sup> Although Levinas is unwilling to allow the irony of Heidegger’s understanding of the world, we ought to welcome it. Even knowing the dangers that Heidegger’s understanding courts (and nothing essential can avoid danger), we ought to welcome Heidegger’s “pagan” understanding of the world as a world that gives itself to us and demands our response, our reason.

There are several reasons why the risk involved is ultimately worth running. The first is that to call Heidegger a pagan, as Levinas does, is really only to say that he accepts the world itself as a thing of value and does not assume that its only value comes from the fact that it was created by God. In other words, he is a pagan because he implicitly rejects the idea of *ex nihilo* creation. Latter-day Saints should not find that particularly troubling. The second, more substantial, reason for accepting this risk is that faith requires it. Without risk, there is no faith. Of course, that is not to say that we ought to seek out risks or that the riskier a faith claim the more likely it is to be true. It is only to say that risk-free knowledge is not the kind of knowledge we can have of these matters.

Thus, using Heidegger’s thought as a corrective to Levinas’s, I am willing to say that not only are other persons—ultimately the divine Person—the *archē* or supplement that makes reason possible, but so is the appearing of the

world.<sup>51</sup> Contrary to the philosophical as well as the theological tradition, the *archē* is not singular. The unity of the *archē* is in us, in our lives, acts, and everyday understanding, rather than in our wills and theoretical speculations, for the latter are but a representation or manifestation of the former. That is why, on a daily basis as well as ultimately, practice must take precedence over theology and speculation. The ultimate unity and, therefore, the ultimate rationality of our lives is to be found in our acts (including what we say and think) rather than only in our reflections and theories. The impetus and unity of our lives is practical rather than merely cognitive.

Thus my understanding of the relation of faith and reason is simple: We find ourselves in the world, surrounded by things and people, both of which lay claim on us, call us, making demands that we respond, that we account for ourselves, that we act. Of course, we know from latter-day revelation that we initially found ourselves before God, to whom we responded. He is, after all, our Creator, even if that creation did not happen *ex nihilo*. He called us into existence and continues to call us: "Hear, O Israel."<sup>52</sup> However, once we were in relation with him, we also found ourselves in the presence of others and of things, both of whom call to us, demanding our response by posing problems and questions, whether explicitly or not. If we take those calls seriously, being sufficiently faithful to those making demands on us, whether people or things, that we make an adequate response to their calls, we act rationally. In its multiplicity, the call is sufficient as an origin of reason. It is basic; it cannot be reduced to one of my beliefs. It stands outside of beliefs as their origin, initiating chains of reasons.

Because we exist, we account for ourselves before God, in relation to others, and in the world. We cannot avoid giving those accounts; we cannot avoid reason. Reason begins in an act of faith (trust and fidelity), in faithful response to those beings who surround us and precede us, whose very existence calls to us, making demands on us that interrupt our being: first God, then persons, then things. But not only does reason require faith; faith also requires reason. Although their relation is asymmetrical, with more area covered by faith than reason, either without the other is lame or blind or both. Faith makes space for us to talk and to reason with God, with each other, and with the world. By creating the space for reason, faith makes it possible for us to live responsibly, responsively. That space for response created by faith and carried out with reason, the room to talk, is the room into which Truman Madsen invited so many of us to enter, an invitation for which we thank him with these essays.

## Notes

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

2. Of course, arguing for a conclusion with which most already agree may be a problem: we often overlook the deficiencies in the arguments of those with whom we agree.

3. A sketch can create room for discussion by suggesting a topic and outlining an approach to that topic that is worth considering, while allowing the details and even the decision about the ultimate value of the approach to be worked out in further discussion.

4. The phrase *objective truth* gets used in many ways. In common usage it means little more than something like "real truth." However, the strict, philosophical sense of *object* is "that which stands at the other end of a perceptual or mental directedness or of a possible directedness." On this understanding, there are objects that are not physical objects (such as mathematical and other ideas), and there can be things that are not objects (such as things to which no one is presently directing any awareness). In the strict sense, to be objective is to consider things simply as standing at the other end of a perceptual or epistemic directedness and, therefore, to ignore other

possible relations to that which one considers. I here use the phrase *objective truth* in this more strict sense: the truth as it pertains to objects of that sort.

5. My thanks to Mark Wrathall for helping me see the importance of this problem.

6. Although most people would not think of themselves as philosophers or theologians or even think of themselves as ever engaging in philosophy or theology, most still use the methods and concepts given to them by philosophy to talk about various matters, including the nature of reason. It is natural to use that kind of thinking when we talk about certain subjects. The problem is that, when we do so, we almost always unconsciously use the ideas, concepts, and methods of reasoning that we have inherited, without reflection, in our common language and culture. Since these are “natural” to us as part of our “common sense,” it is not surprising that we use them to discuss philosophical and theological problems, whether or not we recognize that we are doing so. However, since these ideas and concepts are also unexamined, we often make mistakes when we use them, including the mistake of introducing ideas that are incompatible with other ideas that we hold. (This natural and understandable reversion to common sense is my understanding of the phrase that speaks of mingling the philosophies of men—in other words, their common sense—with scripture.)

7. For the details of Plantinga’s views, see Alvin Plantinga, “Reason and Belief in God,” in *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader*, ed. James F. Sennett (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 102–61; Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford, 1993); and Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford, 1993). Plantinga argues for a number of conclusions regarding reason. For my purposes, the only one that is relevant is that it is possible to have grounds for belief that are not themselves beliefs.

Also, notice that the word *reason* is ambiguous. Sometimes it means only “a sufficient basis or ground for beliefs.” At other times it means “a belief upon which it is possible to ground other beliefs.” At still at other times it means “the process of moving from grounds (of either sort) to conclusions.” Plantinga shows that it is possible to have reasons in the first sense that are not reasons in the second two senses. In keeping with ordinary usage, throughout this essay I will use the word *reason* for each of its meanings, assuming that the context will make clear which meaning I intend. (For an additional take on a Plantingian view, see Merold Westphal, “Whose Philosophy? Which Religion? Reflections on Reason as Faith,” in *Transcendence in Philosophy and Religion*, ed. James E. Faulconer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002). Because this book has not yet been published, references to its pages will be preceded by “MS” for *manuscript*, referring to the page in the manuscript where the citation can be found.

8. I am grateful to James Siebach for first pointing this out to me, as well as for making me think about its importance to our understanding of the relation between faith and reason.

9. *Nichomachean Ethics* 1097b24–1098a3.

10. For perhaps the best place to see Descartes’s discussion of reason, see his *Discourse on Method*. Of course, Descartes’s view is not created out of whole cloth. It has everything to do with the tradition from which he comes, and it remained the dominant way of understanding science—knowledge—for a long time. See Barry Gower, *Scientific Method: An Historical and Philosophical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1997), 1–108, for a good overview of both the importance of this view of science and how it changed.

11. See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*. I believe that Hume gives this argument, not because he is a radical skeptic, but because he is radically skeptical about rationalism. I take his argument to be a *reductio ad*

*absurdem* of the rationalist position. But that does not change the point I am making here.

12. See, for example, Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University, 1969), 21–25; and Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being: Or, Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague, Netherlands: Nijhoff, 1981), 4–5, 118–19, 159–60, and 1. Though perhaps shocking, this conclusion is shared by other contemporary European thinkers. See, for example, Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the Jews,"* trans. Andreas Michel and Mark S. Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

13. This is not to deny that previous eras have also been guilty of horrors and holocausts. It is only to point out the connection between modern philosophy and the modern versions of such horror.

14. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 994a1–20

15. Of course, not all rationality consists in creating chains of reasons. However, that is irrelevant to this argument. Aristotle's point, that chains of reasons require a ground, applies equally to any other form of rationality. So the point I make here with regard to chains of reasons applies equally well to other forms of reasoning. For the purposes of this paper, I do not believe that the difference between chains of reasons and chains of explanation is important.

16. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Latin Text and English Translation* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964–76), Q.2, A.3.

17. I have sometimes also argued, though not in print, that the belief in the *archē* is at the root of the problem of the common understanding of reason. Here I may seem to contradict that claim. I think that my claim that the *archē* is behind the standard view of reason is true, although there is not space enough here to lay out the difference in the two conceptions of *archē*, both philosophically derived from Aristotle, that are at work. Suffice it to say that the problematic view of the *archē* is a view that takes it to be the first in the causal or logical chain, a reified originary point for explanation—precisely the position I here argue against.

18. For an interesting and relevant discussion of Derrida's work, see Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology, and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

19. The claim that there is no alternative may seem too strong, but it will do for the purposes of this paper. However, I am willing to take quite seriously the idea that there is a kind of speaking that is an alternative to the narrow, Cartesian understanding of reason, though not an alternative that is really external to reason—something Martin Heidegger sometimes called *poetry*. See my later discussion of Kierkegaard and irony for a first suggestion of how we might understand this alternative; see pp. 101–4.

20. As used here, "uncaused cause" is not the contradiction that it appears to be. It is a way of pointing to that which initiates the chain of reasoning—in other words, brings it about or causes it—but is not itself part of that chain and so is not named as a cause in the chain. Much use of this phrase and of this argument confuses reasoning and explanation, in which there must always be an "an uncaused cause," with what is, where it is not obvious that there must be such a cause. Such thinking moves from epistemology to ontology without the resources for doing so. Being outside the chain of reasons, the "uncaused cause" is not a cause in the same sense as any of the items in the chain. That is the substance of Aristotle's point.

21. Descartes tells us that first principles are things that we see to be true without further reflection. It is possible to read that this declaration itself recognizes the need for a supplement. In fact, his recourse to the proofs of God's existence (see *Meditations*) can be read as just such a recognition. (For a reading of Descartes along these lines, see Levinas's interpretation of Descartes in *Totality and Infinity*, 210–11 and 48–) Nevertheless, the standard way of reading Descartes, and so of understanding reason, has been much as I describe it in the body of the text, and that standard reading is what I find fault with.

Note, too, that I equivocate here on *reason* and *explanation*, but recall note Every explanation is an exercise of reason and prototypical for what it means to exercise reason. I do not think that the equivocation damages my argument.

22. See the works referenced in note 7.

23. Though I am not a Romantic, the position for which I argue has a number of parallels with philosophical Romanticism. That should not be surprising since both are attempts to respond to the problem posed by Kant's metaphysics: how are we to think transcendence in an immanent world? Given these parallels, my objection here is not so much an objection to philosophical Romanticism as it is an objection to the popular form it often takes. That is what I am describing here. An objection to philosophical Romanticism would require a separate paper. However, to avoid clumsiness, I will refer to popular Romanticism as Romanticism, without the qualifier.

24. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1993), for an important exposition of both the history of this mistake and an alternative to it.

25. Cited in Sren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling: Repetition*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University, 1983), 115– Notice that the name of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author, Johannes de Silentio, suggests that it is really the author rather than Abraham who is unable to speak.

26. I hyphenate the word to remind us that I am using it in the special sense just explained.

27. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "paradox," and Henry G. Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry S. Jones, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 6th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), s.v. "παραδοξία."

28. Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 39–

29. Nephi tells us of the importance of plain language but quotes extensively from Isaiah (compare 2 Nephi 25:4 and 26:33). His idea of plain language is not the same as ours, and he makes the point ironically, though seemingly unconscious of his irony.

30. Wrathall has reminded me that Plato says the philosopher does eventually see the sun straight on (*Republic* 516b). That is true, but the allegory of the cave does not have the philosopher see the sun in this world, and I part company with Plato at exactly the point where he proposes another world in which to see it. In other words, Plato is wrong about that.

31. See, for example, Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 2



32. It is important to realize that this demand is not necessarily either explicit or conscious. The point is not that a person says, “I demand this of you,” but that the person’s existence before me requires me to do and say things, regardless of what the person says. The demands of a person’s existence before us may even contradict his or her spoken demands, as they often do when our young children demand things of us—things that we know we ought not to give them, things that their being-before-us not only does not demand, but demands that we refuse.

33. Besides the quotation that follows, see Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 252–53; see also 40, 219, 240–46, 284, 293, and 301.

34. *Ibid.*, 253. I have spoken of the origin that is outside of any chain of reasons. Levinas speaks of the idea that overflows the one who thinks it (e.g., *ibid.*, 20–21). These are two ways of making the same point.

35. See, for example, *ibid.*, 77–79. Whether Levinas speaks of God is a complicated matter. As Westphal points out, Levinas says, “It is our relations with men ... that give to the theological concepts the sole signification they admit of.... Everything that cannot be reduced to an interhuman relation represents not the superior form but the forever primitive form of religion” (*ibid.*, 79; cited in Westphal, “Whose Philosophy? Which Religion?” MS 19). Levinas also speaks of the necessity of atheism (*Totality and Infinity*, 77), but (quite surprisingly) in the same place he speaks of atheism as necessary to a relation with God. His point is that a true relation with God requires that we separate ourselves from the god of superstitious worship. See also Paul Ricoeur on this theme: “Reason, Atheism, and Faith,” in Alisdair C. MacIntyre and Paul Ricoeur, *The Religious Significance of Atheism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 58–98. Although I have doubts about the clarity of the dichotomy between proper worship and superstition, I think it is clear that Levinas does believe that what we could call his “fundamental ethics,” the relation to others that grounds reason, points us toward God.

36. Marlène Zarader, *La dette impensée: Heidegger et l'héritage hébraïque* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1990), 62.

37. *Ibid.* This paragraph summarizes the discussion on pages 61–64. In criticizing Heidegger, Zarader argues that, as the Bible has been read in the Jewish tradition, it offers an alternative to our usual understanding of language and philosophy—an alternative that has many things in common with the alternative we find in Heidegger’s work but that does not insist on only the Greek origins of that alternative and that escapes some of the problems that Heidegger’s thinking encounters.

38. Interestingly, Heidegger argues that to mistake God for being is to forget that God must be a being and so cannot be being itself. See, for example, Martin Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” trans. Frank M. Capuzzi and J. Glenn Gray, in Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, ed. David F. Krell, 2nd rev. and expanded ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 251–53, esp. 253; and Heidegger, “Phenomenology and Theology,” in *The Piety of Thinking*, trans. James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 5–21.

Works such as Jean-Luc Marion’s *God without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1991), look for a way around that argument, but I find it compelling: God cannot be being itself and still be a god; he must be a being. See Michel Henry, *Incarnation: Une philosophie de la chair* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), esp. 7–32, for another argument that for Christianity God is necessarily a being, in fact, a being of flesh. Of course, Marion does not argue that God is being itself, but he wishes to avoid the conclusion that God is a being within being. Putting God outside of being also makes him no longer a god. Perhaps, however, Marion would argue that this is his point and the point of monotheism: God is not a god; he is *the* God. But that is a discussion for another paper.

39. One reason that the world and its power to reveal itself cannot be reduced to the objects of rational research is that the object of rational or scientific research is not the thing that we encounter but a conceptual relative of that thing, a relative created by adumbrating a set of conditions and assumptions that define the ways in which we will take up and examine the thing in question. In other words, the scientific object is not the thing itself but an object created by the methods of science and the background assumptions of those methods. As a result, strictly speaking, the object of research is a product of the subject, not an independent thing that demands our attention. This does not, as many may worry, imply that Heidegger is arguing that scientific conclusions are merely subjective. Quite the contrary. His point is that the very possibility of doing science requires that we deal with things as objects and that objects are, by definition, one end of an intentional ray that has a subject at the other end and a particular context that makes it possible as the object that it is (in the case of science, its methods and background assumptions). For more on this point, see Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper Colophon, 1977), 115–54. See also Edwin A. Burt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science* (1932; reprint, Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities, 1980), esp. 298–99.

40. It is important to point out that Levinas explicitly gives another meaning to the term *ex nihilo* than that which we find in the theological tradition. He says that creation *ex nihilo* means that the created being is completely different from and separate from the Creator, that he or she is not reducible to a part or affect of the Creator. See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*. Given this understanding, there *might be* a sense in which a Latter-day Saint could subscribe to the idea of creation *ex nihilo*. Nevertheless, because the term is almost always used in accordance with the standard meaning, I use that standard meaning even when talking about Levinas.

41. See Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), for one of the central locations of this discussion. See also Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, 39–40.

42. Of course, to designate one as primary and the other as secondary, or narrower, is not to demean the second. The primary tonality of reason is the relation to the *archē* that makes the secondary possible, but the primary without the secondary is incomplete.

43. Otto Pöggeler, *Der Denkweg Martin Heideggers* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1963), 268–80. See also Jacques Derrida's discussion of this in *De l'Esprit: Heidegger et la question* (Paris: Galilee, 1987), e.g., 36–37, 69–70, 132, 145–47. Both Pöggeler and Derrida refer specifically to Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1961), 174. (I am grateful to Marlène Zarader for pointing out this shared reference. See *Dette impensée*, 223 n.)

44. Zarader gives an excellent overview of Heidegger's understanding of thought. See *Dette impensée*, esp. 92–100 and 112–23.

45. Fuller discussions of this notion are available in any number of places. For a detailed linguistic discussion of the Old Testament understanding and its relation to the Greek and New Testament understandings, see Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromily (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964–76), s.v. **γινώσκω, γνῶσις, ἐπιγινώσκω, ἐπίγνωσις, καταγινώσκω, ἀκατάγνωστος, προγινώσκω, πρόγνωσις, συγγνώμη, γνῶμη, γνωρίζω, γνωστός** (Rudolf Bultmann). For broader discussions, see Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (New York: Norton, 1960); my "Hebrew versus Greek Thinking," in *Scripture Study: Tools and Suggestions* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999), 135–53, which relies heavily on Boman; or David Banon, *La lecture infinie: Les voies de l'interprétation midrachique* (Paris: Seuil, 1987).

46. Banon, *Lecture infinie*, 173. As does Banon's, many discussions of this difference note that in Genesis 4:1, "And Adam knew Eve his wife," the use of the Hebrew word for knowledge (*da'at*) as a term for sexual relations is not a euphemism. From an Old Testament point of view, knowledge is a matter of intimacy rather than possession.

47. Zarader, *Dette impensée*, convincingly demonstrates both the similarity of Heidegger's thought to biblical thought and his denial of that similarity. Of course, the traditional interpretation of the Old Testament would have it, as Levinas does, that knowledge as it is understood in the Old Testament comes ultimately from the demands of God and would not leave room for the demands of things. It remains a fact, however, that Heidegger's understanding of knowledge has a great deal in common with that in the Bible; and I suspect that Latter-day Saints in general will have no trouble with the idea that things have some kind of existence above and beyond the existence that God gives them, although no thing exists completely independent of God.

48. Jean-Luc Marion's *L'idol et la distance* (Paris: Grasset, 1977) says a great deal about why this is the case.

49. In a part of his life that remains wrapped in difficulty as well as confusion, Heidegger joined the Nazi party in the early 1930s and supported the Nazi takeover of the universities, although they later refused to acknowledge his support. Heidegger's relation to Nazism remains, most unfortunately, ambiguous at best. There are a good many books on the issue, from those that smack of yellow journalism to the apologetic. For those looking for a readable discussion of Heidegger's thought that includes a discussion of his Nazism, see either George Steiner, *Martin Heidegger* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989); or Richard F. H. Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1999).

50. This has always been the case. See the aforementioned piece by Ricoeur, "Atheism." See also Marion's discussion of the relation between worship and idolatry in both *L'idol et la distance* and *God without Being*. Although I do not believe in the absolutely transcendent god whom Marion discusses, much of his discussion, particularly that of the difference between an idol and an icon, is illuminating. It can help us think about our own God-talk even if, in the end, we find Marion's analysis insufficient.

51. Although I now would side with Heidegger's position more strongly than I did at that time, for more on this "conflict" between Levinas and Heidegger, see my essay, "The Uncanny Interruption of Ethics: Gift, Interruption, or ...," *The Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 20/2 and 21/1 (1998): 47.

52. This call to Israel is frequent in the Old Testament—sufficiently frequent that we may think of it as the essence of the Lord's demand of Israel. For example, see Deuteronomy 5:1; 6:3–4; 9:1; 20:3; Psalms 50:7; 81:8; Isaiah 44:1; 48:1; Jeremiah 2:4; 10:1; 42:15; Ezekiel 18:25; Hosea 4:1; 5:1; Amos 3:1; 5:1; and Micah 3:1, 9. It is also the way in which the Savior introduces the first great commandment in Mark 12:29, quoting not only the commandment to love God, but the command to hear. Neither Judaism nor Christianity can conceive of religion without doing so in terms of response to God's call.