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THE MORMON ETHICAL SUBJECT:

REASSESSING ANTHROPOLOGICAL DISCOURSE IN LATTER-DAY SAINT THEOLOGY

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For Rod

Table of Contents

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Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

This project is an examination of the teachings regarding theological anthropology in discourses based in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), commonly known as Mormonism. Theological anthropology is a branch of theology having to do with the human. Standard topics for discussion often include the status of sin within the human soul, the uniqueness of humans in comparison to other creatures, the composition of the soul, and the connection humans have to God in terms of the *imago dei*. While the latter two topics make a showing in this project, the former two do not. While sin and human uniqueness are valid topics for study in Mormonism, my attention is focused on two different, perhaps more pressing, concerns. The first is metaphysical teachings about the human that have led to unsettled debates. The second is the implications regarding subjectivity that seem to follow from Mormonism's practice-centric orientation, a topic that has received scant attention in Mormon studies so far.

Any examination of the human in LDS terms must begin with the metaphysical teaching that the human spirit, called an "intelligence," originates in a pre-existent realm as a self-existent entity that has no beginning and no end. But another avenue for examination of the human in LDS discourse must also be grounded in the tradition's commitment to a metaphysics of material monism, which then establishes even an "intelligent" pre-existent spirit as being, at base, a material entity. Such a constellation of features for the human creates a complex interpretative situation for LDS theologians, for the basic reason that such terms as "intelligence" and "pre-existence" have been traditionally cast as dichotomous entities to the

material. A major aspect of this project is to engage in the debates that have inevitably

followed from these interpretative challenges.

In addition to the metaphysical aspect of an LDS theological anthropology, however, I

also see a need to examine the human from the perspective of the practice-centric orientation

of Mormonism. By virtue of the fact that devout Latter-day Saints live a life immersed in a

community which promotes and even expects certain embodied practices and rituals, the

question of subject formation becomes an important topic of inquiry for an LDS anthropology.

From modes of dress and language to time commitments for volunteer lay work, to rituals that

require bodily enactments, Latter-day Saints can readily be seen to engage in the work of

habitus formation. And while individual Latter-day Saints engage in self-fashioning activity in

private contexts, even there such practices are inflected by institutional programs and norms

that might lend any habitus formation a distinctly social character. These considerations have

led me to see that a fuller understanding of a Mormon anthropology must include, in addition

to the speculative theological teachings, a move to highlight the existence of a communally

made quality to the LDS subject. Such an understanding of the human is not contrary to the

metaphysical materialism that the tradition claims but is indeed a salient and appropriate

extension of it.

Such a made subject can be termed an *ethical* subject, in the sense that such an ethical

subject carries within it certain constitutive layers of communal, familial, and social modes of

thought, practices, norms, and situatedness in the world. That is, an ethical subject is

constituted by a certain communal ethos. The basis for understanding the concept of a made

subject has been developed within more secular fields of study, such as philosophy and

sociology, but some scholars in the fields of theology and religious studies have seen how these theories help illuminate the self-formation processes that many religious practitioners undergo as they live out their lives in religious communities. This chapter is devoted to laying out the theoretical framework of what can be termed a made, ethical, or non-foundationalist subjectivity, partly to show some of the work that has been done so far in Mormonism on this topic, and partly with the intent to establish a theoretical grounding as I think further about Latter-day Saint subjectivity in later chapters.

For theories of habitus, I draw from Pierre Bourdieu and Saba Mahmood, as well as from Douglas Davies and Amy Hoyt, the latter two being scholars of religion who have theorized about this category in the context of Mormonism. Since Mahmood extends her theory of habitus to an understanding of a certain type of subjectivity that underwrites it, I also draw from her theorization of subjectivity. But her theory of subjectivity is largely derived from Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, whose work on subjectivity has been influential in philosophy, sociology, and gender studies. I too draw from certain aspects of their theories that I find helpful in order to lay out a theoretical framework for a made LDS subjectivity.

Overall, this dissertation has a two-prong approach. On one hand, it relates the history of LDS discourse regarding doctrines of anthropology. In this sense, I am engaging in a kind of genealogical work of the Mormon subject to probe interpretations that have brought the tradition to its current instantiation of the human. On the other hand, it offers arguments that are intended to be constructive in purpose, to move the tradition in the direction of understanding certain implications for the subject that follow from its material metaphysics. These implications have further repercussions, I believe, for the doing of theology as such, in

that an ethical subjectivity is that which exists at the intersection of ecclesiology and theological anthropology. If I am right about such a characterization of the human for the LDS tradition, then the doing of Mormon theology can be seen as an ethical enterprise in which the mechanisms of formation need to be assessed, such that any kind of malformation that theological discourse might be responsible for can be mitigated.

Practice, Habitus, and Subjectivity

One of the most central features of the LDS tradition is its commitment to a practice-based devotion. Such theological commitment to *practice* suggests that the concept of *habitus*, as that which signifies a durable religious character made through practice, is a salient one for any careful rendering of a Mormon anthropology. It is further a small step from habitus to the nature and faculties of the person who is subjected to such habitus-forming practices. Thus, any analytical gaze that begins from practice and leads to habitus must then further reach to the category of *subjectivity*, as that which signifies the processes and product of self-making that result from practice. Practice, habitus, and subjectivity all form an interconnected complex of elements that make up a theological picture of the human. In what follows, I will lay out the theoretical and analytical parameters of these categories, that of practice, habitus, and subjectivity respectively, in order to establish the theoretical framework for this project's larger aim to construct a particular rendering of Mormon anthropology, that of a made, ethical subject.

Practice

The category of practice has become important for the field of Mormon theology, as certain theologians have debated whether Mormonism actually possesses a systematic

theology at all since it is such a practice-heavy tradition. James Faulconer has taken this claim

the farthest by ascribing to the LDS Church an "atheological character." In making this claim,

Faulconer privileges the category of practice in the LDS religion over rational and intellectual

belief. According to his telling, the LDS experience is fundamentally grounded in testimony,

repentance, and new birth, all of which are manifested through participation in church

ordinances. He compares Mormonism to Buddhism and Judaism, both religious systems that

have been characterized as lacking a theology and focusing heavily on practice.[1]

 While Faulconer's claim that Mormonism does not have a theology has been met with

some skepticism, participants in LDS theological discourse do seem to see at some level where

Faulconer is coming from in making this claim. For example, while Terryl Givens counters a

supposed Mormon atheological character by stating that it is "obvious that a body of teachings,

propositions, and beliefs *have* arisen in the Mormon faith tradition,"[2] he also grants that the

character of Mormon theology is informal and that the "essential core" of the tradition has

always been "faith, repentance, and baptism," all practice-centric aspects of a religious way of

life.[3]

 Religious scholar Douglas Davies makes basically the same interpretative move. He

acknowledges that at one level Mormonism may be categorized within Ernst Troeltsch's

category of a "sect-type" religious group. In volume two of *The Social Teaching of the Christian

Churches*, Troeltsch describes "the sect" as one who "has no theology at all" and possesses

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[1] Faulconer, "Atheological Character," 21.
[2] Givens, *Wrestling the Angel,* 17 (original emphasis).
[3] Givens, 6, 10. In characterizing LDS theology as informal, Givens quotes from Stephen Webb who notes the "informality of much Mormon theology" in *Jesus Christ, Eternal God*, 6.

instead a "strict ethic, living Mythos, and passionate hope for the future."[4] While Davies is quick

to follow up this comparison with the observation that "realistically, of course, Mormonism

does possess an extensive theology,"[5] his analysis of the tradition relies heavily on the category

of "activity" as a salient one for the Latter-day Saint doctrine of salvation. He astutely points out

that Latter-day Saints define themselves and others in terms of being "active" or "not active" in

the Church. One important implication of the use of such terminology is that the LDS religion

has created a type of holiness ethic in which the doctrine of salvation is closely tethered to

activity in the guise not only of rituals but of a very way of life.[6]

Davies distinguishes the activity of "gaining a testimony" in Mormonism from a more

ostensibly passive understanding of being saved by grace in mainstream Protestantism.[7] The

activity of developing a testimony of the truthfulness of LDS historical and theological claims, as

well as the activity of sharing that testimony with others, is the "essence" of Mormonism.[8] Such

a quest to develop a testimony is closely linked to formal and informal ritual activity. For

example, Davies points out that in order to fully participate in the salvific rituals only offered in

the temple, Latter-day Saints must undergo a recommend interview with their local bishop. A

successful interview is based in large part on the bishop's assessment of the quality of the

member's activity in the ethical life of the community.[9]

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[4] Troeltsch, *Social Teaching*, 2:996; Davies, *Culture of Salvation*, 11.
[5] Davies, 11.
[6] Davies, 33.
[7] Davies, 56.
[8] Davies, 128.
[9] Davies, 82. Although a portion of the temple recommend questions do address some doctrinal issues of belief, these questions tend more towards an assessment of loyalty and commitment to the community rather than a catechetical mode of assessing correct doctrinal understanding.

Davies also points out that the category of activity extends to LDS Christology. For

Mormons, the bulk of the atoning work undergone by Jesus Christ occurred in Gethsemane.

While Latter-day Saints still accept the cross as an important moment in the Christological

salvation story, Gethsemane was the location were Christ suffered for the sins of the world,

bleeding from every pore as he experienced the sins of the world in their fullest expression.[10]

But Davies also points out that Latter-day Saints believe that Christ underwent such suffering as

a result of making a clear choice to do so. In this sense, Christ is volitional as he enacts his

agency to choose to be the savior of the world. In comparing this Mormon doctrine of salvation

to mainstream Protestant teachings, Davies characterizes Gethsemane as fundamentally an

active event, while Calvary can be seen to be a fundamentally passive one.[11] In sum, he

characterizes the LDS faith as one which is invested in "the idea that salvation involves

activity."[12]

Indeed, to fully live out the LDS religion is to adhere to an entire scheme of practice.

Such a scheme is made up of lifestyle standards which go to the very heart of some of the most

intimate aspects of life. For example, these lifestyle standards range from modest dress,

prohibitions against certain beverages and other substances, limits on language usage involving

profanity and God's name, and Sabbath practices (such as not working or shopping on Sunday),

to sexual practices and family role performance. In addition, LDS religious life is filled with

formal ritual performance, from rites of passage, such as the blessing of babies, baptism of

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[10] The idea that Christ bled at every pore is taken from the Mormon scripture, Doctrine and Covenants 19:18: ". . . suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit."
[11] Davies, *Culture of Salvation*, 48-52.
[12] Davies, 77.

children, and priesthood ordination of eleven-year-old boys, to weekly partaking of the Sacrament (i.e., the Lord's Supper) and regular participation in temple rituals in which salvific work for Mormon individuals and their ancestors is performed. As touched on by Davies, all of these rituals are to be done only in a state of worthiness measured by adherence to such lifestyle standards.

In addition, the practice of accepting and faithfully carrying out Church assignments can be seen as one ingredient of an active LDS life. Not only is such activity attached to conceptions of worthiness and piety, since certain Church positions are only open to members who can demonstrate adherence to the above lifestyle practices that are deemed evidence of worthiness, but the very practice of lesson and sermon preparation by lay members involves ritualistic activity such as prayer, scripture study, and in some cases temple attendance. Hence, although LDS theology does offer a robust set of beliefs, lived Mormonism is fundamentally a practice-centric religion, one that expects a close alignment between belief in truth claims and performance of activities that are deemed to be proper signifiers of that belief.

Habitus

The concept of habitus is a salient category for understanding LDS thought and belief, since habitus is a category that is tethered to a full scheme of embodied practice such as what I just described in the previous section. In its most basic definition, habitus refers to a set of qualitative character traits that, in their consolidated form, make up any given human disposition. It may be analyzed at two levels. First, habitus may refer to an unconscious level inherent in practice in which acts seem to originate from some "natural" part of an individual's disposition and desire. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus analyzes practice and practical

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knowledge at this level. Habitus may also be understood in terms of a deliberate intent to nurture particular habits, practices, and dispositional qualities. In this case, an individual is consciously aware of some end or telos that such nurturance is working toward. Analysis of habitus at this level is often understood to derive from Aristotle. I will draw from Saba Mahmood's Aristotelian model of habitus since it bears directly on religious experience.

The unconscious, structural dimension of habitus gained traction in the fields of anthropology and sociology with Bourdieu's ethnographic work in northern Algeria. Bourdieu offered what he dubbed a scientific theory of practice which tries to account for the conditions of possibility for certain types of primary experience. In this theory of practice, he posits a dialectical relationship between objective structures and what he describes as structured dispositions possessed by the subjects he observed. He creates a model of habitus in which the material conditions of life, particularly those material conditions related to social class, serve as the basis for durable dispositions from which perceptions, inclinations, and logical schemes are generated, and, in turn, from which actions that are consistent with such schemes are produced. Habitus, then, is a system of such dispositions, operating in each individual and in groups as a communal ethos. It is the organizing principle that informs all thought and action, a "socially constituted system of cognition and motivating structures."[13]

According to Bourdieu, an individual internalizes a communal habitus by the processes of social conditioning within a particular group of people who themselves carry a like disposition. Both the giving of and the receiving of this habitus operate under conditions in which certain features and schemes go beyond what is deliberately and consciously passed on.

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[13] Bourdieu, *Theory of Practice*, 76.

As Bourdieu describes it, habitus is something that is "collectively orchestrated" but not by any agentive orchestrating action on the part of a conductor.[14] It is a case of "genesis amnesia" in which a forgetting of history is involved to the extent that history is denied and the category of "nature" takes its place.[15] The result is the production of a "commonsense world endowed with objectivity."[16] This body of wisdom then operates for individuals at the level of the "doxic mode," in which the world and its mechanisms take on a self-evident and taken-for-granted quality.[17] This is again where the concepts of "nature" and "natural" become operative and informative as an imbued sense regarding the objectivity that the world possesses. As Bourdieu states it, doxa represents the presence of a habitus obtained by socialized individuals in which "the world of tradition is experienced as the 'natural world,'" something that goes without saying.[18]

For Bourdieu, the doxic mode occurs when there is a "quasi-perfect fit" between the objective structures that arise out of material conditions and the internalization of those structures.[19] Such a fit lends a certain homogeneity to the community. A particular aggregate of people who share in homogenous material conditions share also a homogenous habitus, with a unity of disposition, tastes, and ethos.[20] In this sense, habitus is both subjective and objective. It is subjective in the sense that it is individuals who carry such dispositions and do the action necessary to reproduce such dispositions. But these dispositions are precisely structured

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[14] Bourdieu, 72.
[15] Bourdieu, 78-9.
[16] Bourdieu, 80.
[17] Bourdieu, 164-6.
[18] Bourdieu, 166. According to one pithy remark that Bourdieu offers, "What is essential goes without saying because it comes without saying" (167).
[19] Bourdieu, 166.
[20] Bourdieu, 80-2.

dispositions, meaning that they possess qualities that lend a certain statistical predictability to the behavior of any given individual.[21]

Saba Mahmood sees Bourdieu's emphasis on the unconscious quality of a communal habitus as ultimately too deterministic. Bourdieu does acknowledge that perfect statistical predictability of behavior is never possible since every opportunity to put a certain communally shared scheme into action is also an opportunity for individuals to inscribe their own "personal style" onto whatever strategies they employ.[22] Still, Mahmood rightly points out that Bourdieu does not engage with the Aristotelian branch of thought, which casts habitus within a pedagogical context of conscious and deliberate nurturance of a desired disposition and which links it even more closely with deliberate bodily practices. Mahmood designates this pedagogical branch as one that offers an especially useful framework for understanding the kind of labor-on-the-self that goes on in certain iterations of pious religion.[23]

The idea of a habitus that is made through conscious pedagogical practice is described in *Nicomachean Ethics* in which Aristotle speaks of virtue as something that is acquired through repetition of action. The effect of this repetition is that certain states or dispositions will become durable features of an individual's character. For example, a virtue such as generosity will be developed by repeating generous actions. This repetition will thereby habituate a person to behave in a generous way, so that eventually that person will act generously in such a way that the person simply *is* generous. Generosity has been imprinted on that person's character:

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[21] Bourdieu, 85-6.
[22] Bourdieu, 86.
[23] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 135-9.

it will flow from the depths of that person's now-formed disposition and articulate a state of being. A certain habitus is thus established.[24]

To the extent that Aristotle understands the course of action that results in habituation of character as occurring within the polis, that is, within a particular community, such a habituated character is not entirely different from Bourdieu's concept of habitus. However, Bourdieu emphasizes the unconscious aspect of the acquisition of character, on the part of both those who give it and those who receive it, while Aristotle emphasizes the voluntary nature of habituation. For Aristotle, acquisition of virtue and habitus resides within the same realm as deliberation and decision.[25] Because humans have a conscious end for which they are striving—Aristotle argues that this end is *eudaimonia*, happiness or flourishing—and because the acquisition of virtuous character is an important means to that ultimate end, and because humans, by virtue of their basic function as humans, are rational beings, then the repetitive action that makes up the process of habituation must be done with reasoned deliberation and decision. It is not a necessary outcome that a character will be virtuous; action can lead to a vicious disposition just as it can lead to a virtuous one. Aristotle thus locates the responsibility for a state of character or disposition within each individual's will to be virtuous. And while he also clearly attributes some responsibility for the processes of habituation to those who enact and enforce laws within the polis, any corrective action taken for the purpose of inculcating virtuous behavior in its citizens is also done voluntarily and consciously by those legislators.[26]

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[24] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 18-21.

[25] Aristotle, 33-36.

[26] Aristotle states that the aim of a systematic examination of the polis, that is, of "political science," is to give "attention to the character of the citizens, to make them good people who do fine actions" (12). See also the end of Book 10 of *Nicomachean Ethics*, in which Aristotle returns to his formulations regarding political science and the role of community in the processes of habituation.

Mahmood claims that the conscious, pedagogical aspect of Aristotle's framework for habitus is a necessary addition to Bourdieu's more structuralist version in that Aristotelian habitus offers explanatory power for practitioners of religious piety specifically. As she observed women who were involved in an Islamic mosque movement in Cairo, she saw them engaging in conscious self-training in order to inculcate certain virtues into their very dispositions. For example, Mahmood notes that one complex of virtue the Islamic women sought to develop involved a combination of humility, sincerity, and fear before God, practiced during the daily ritual of prayer (*salat*). Because many of the women acknowledged they lacked the will to perform this ritual with diligence, they were taught during mosque lessons, through sermons, as well as through repeating the actual performance of prayer, to cultivate techniques in which this complex of virtues could be worked on throughout the day. The process of nurturing the desire to pray was done with the intent that such practice would create the desire the women lacked.[27]

For instance, they were taught to see the simple use of an alarm clock as not merely a tool to ensure they would arise out of bed in the early hours before sunrise but as part of a multifaceted approach to diligence that the women sought to hone and practice with the express intent of cultivating pious desire.[28] As the women repeated such actions, a certain sedimentation of qualities of character were meant to take root in their very disposition, with the aim that such qualities of character would eventually issue forth "naturally" and spontaneously. That is, the mosque women's intent was to establish certain virtues so reliably

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[27] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 123-4.
[28] Mahmood, 126.

into their disposition that the enactment of them would no longer take effort. They would

naturally flow from the kind of person these women had become through diligent practice of

the virtues.[29] Repeated practice of virtues through bodily forms was meant to create a

character that was sedimented through the cumulative acquisition of internal imprints. Within

this context, Mahmood notes that these women were constantly vigilant in monitoring how

their bodily practices enact their inner dispositions.

The inward disposition is the site of a durable habitus that is made from repeating

certain practices that are consciously linked by the practitioner with certain dispositional

attitudes. When habitus is thus made, these dispositional attitudes leave a "permanent mark"

on the character of the person who undertakes this program of practice.[30] Mahmood's

rendering of habitus, then, posits a pedagogical process in which the bodily performance of

acts, such as prayer, are the very force that constitutes a particular kind of pious self.[31] An

important feature of Mahmood's argument is that such practice on the part of the mosque

women did more than merely enact inner disposition. Such practice did the work to *create*

those inner qualities. Rather than some kind of "natural" feeling issuing forth first and action

merely enacting that primal feeling, Mahmood is clear to assert that the action comes first, and

it then creates the desires, emotions, and dispositions sought for.

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[29] Mahmood, 139. In an interesting comment on the role of unconscious action for these women, Mahmood observes: "Conscious training in the habituation of virtues itself was undertaken, paradoxically, with the goal of making consciousness redundant to the practice of these virtues."

[30] Mahmood, 136.

[31] Bourdieu also emphasizes the body's role as a mnemonic device for the fundamental conceptual and perceptual principles salient to a given culture.[31] But in observing that the "body is memory" and as such is a materialization of habitus, Bourdieu emphasizes the unconscious quality of the embodied features of habitus: "The principles embodied in this way [through "details of dress, bearing, and physical and verbal manners"] are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary and deliberate transformation" (94). In contrast, Mahmood emphasizes conscious and deliberative choice regarding some of these same embodied principles within the context of piety as the striven-for telos of such choices.

Despite their different emphases regarding the level of consciousness involved in habitus, I do not mean to suggest that Bourdieu's and Mahmood's renderings of habitus are entirely mutually exclusive. It is clear that Bourdieu's theory of habitus influenced Mahmood, for she states that one aspect of her argument is to assert that the activities of the mosque participants are caught up in a discursive tradition that "far exceeds the consciousness of the subjects they enable."[32] As such, she acknowledges the presence of an unconscious, structured disposition such as Bourdieu describes.

Both renderings of habitus, one that acts as an unsaid within a particular culture (Bourdieu) and one that is the focus of a pedagogical nurturance (Mahmood), constitute a useful dialectic for understanding a Mormon self. The features of Mormonism that go to the very heart of not only dress, food, and other religious gestures but to theological and institutional attitudes that organize the world into intelligible frameworks, can and do take on an objective, taken-for-granted aspect. On the other hand, because Mormonism is a religion of piety, one in which a religious disposition can readily be linked with certain practices, Mahmood's theory of religious habitus is useful to understand the conscious pedagogical practices that Latter-day Saints engage in. Latter-day Saints do indeed undertake programs of practice for the express purpose of developing certain dispositional attitudes.[33] One of the tasks

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[32] Mahmood, 32.

[33] A list of the kind of programs Latter-day Saint leaders create and promote with the intent of developing habits and dispositions would be lengthy because the tradition of creating formal programs, for the youth of the church especially, is a long-standing one. For example, one church-wide program was *Personal Progress* for teenage girls (now defunct), which included a booklet with themed lists of tasks to complete in order to earn awards and public recognition for their efforts. Each themed list contained scripture passages and questions to encourage each girl to think through how she would accomplish developing certain spiritual traits. At one point a journal supplement was included to provide space for each girl to write down her thoughts as she worked through each task. A 2009 version of the booklet can be found on the LDS Church's website: https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/young-women-personal-progress?lang=eng

of this study will be to think with both Bourdieuian and Mahmoodian approaches to habitus

formation in assessing the implications of both conceptualizations for a Mormon doctrine of

anthropology.

Mormon Habitus

Two scholars have attempted to track the habitus theories of Bourdieu and Mahmood

within Mormon practice. First, Douglas Davies, in *The Mormon Culture of Salvation*, has taken

Bourdieu's rendering of habitus and applied it directly to Mormonism. Davies draws from

Bourdieu's definition of habitus to render it as a '"generative principle' which underlies diverse

aspects of cultural practice."[34] As such, habitus, according to Davies, is a certain "molding" of

dispositions, dispositions which individuals share with the populations they are members of,

and which are inculcated especially through the rearing of children.[35] In addition, Davies

borrows from theoretical conceptions of "gestures" in order to theorize how a particular

habitus comes to be seen as an embodied phenomenon.[36] While Davies suggests that Talal

Asad's *gestus* and Bourdieu's *habitus* are close approximations to each other, he does clarify a

distinction between the two: bodily gestures are that which express a dispositional habitus. In

other words, the habitus as an inward disposition is externalized through discrete bodily acts or

gestures.[37]

Davies draws from such conceptions in order to create a tableau of LDS characteristics

that make up a dispositional habitus, as well as the bodily gestures that Latter-day Saints

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[34] Davies, *Culture of Salvation*, 119.

[35] Davies, 108.

[36] The theoretical frameworks Davies borrows from for the conception of gestures is Talal Asad, "Genealogy of the Concept of Ritual" and R. W. Tyson, J. L. Peacock, and D. W. Patterson, *Diversities of Gifts: Field Studies in Southern Religion* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

[37] Davies, *Culture of Salvation*, 109.

characteristically perform. Mormon *habitus* is described by Davies as incorporating four

principles: (1) a belief that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the one and only

true church of God; (2) commitment to the idea that the Church from the beginning has been

led by prophets who have received and who even now receive genuine revelation from God; (3)

commitment to and immersion in the life of the community as a framework for family life,

which includes a more expansive view of family to include ancestral generations linked through

temple sealing rituals; and (4) commitment to the idea that because divinity and humanity exist

on a spectrum of progression relative to each other, the concept of divinity is always present in

an LDS consciousness precisely because it represents the fullness of potentiality for each

individual.[38] These principles are meant to point to a communal belief structure that is

internalized by individual Latter-day Saints as qualities firmly implanted in their dispositional

outlook. As such, this belief structure serves as the "generative principle" for further thought

and action.

Davies then links a range of bodily acts as *gestures* that externalize these dispositional

qualities of the Mormon habitus. These gestures include the daily wearing of underclothes

called "garments" associated with temple rituals and covenants, as well as the performance of

the temple rituals themselves; the practices that lead to gaining a "testimony" of the veracity of

the Church, along with the act of sharing this testimony with others; the practice of raising the

right hand to the square to "sustain" Church leaders; attitudes and practices surrounding

laughter[39]; and finally interactions with local leaders such as bishops and patriarchs who

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[38] Davies, 109, 119.
[39] At the time of Davies analysis, LDS temple rituals warned participants against "loud laughter" and
"lightmindedness," which echoes language from a passage in the Doctrine and Covenants: "Therefore, cease from

represent the dual modalities of, on one hand, institutional authority and, on the other, mystical or charismatic power.[40]

Davies also mentions certain practices that represent care for the body as outlined in the Word of Wisdom, a nineteenth-century canonical text that provides explicit do's and don'ts regarding mostly dietary concerns,[41] as well as LDS approaches to art that reflect an aesthetic habitus.[42] In addition, he describes LDS gestures as that which articulate a certain communal mood.[43] He notes that Mormon gestures and their underlying habitus are usually expressed in an "emotion-laden yet calmly controlled fashion."[44] Such a mood is meant to convey the depth and authenticity of the religious experience. It is also conveyed in the context of value placed on rational reflection and a commitment to obedience to the Church's teachings.[45]

Davies emphasizes that for practitioners, the power of gestures is in the actual performance of the gesture itself, in the very moment of that performance, and not simply in its interpretation after the fact. The act of a gesture expresses at once both individual feeling and communal sentiment; it holds meaning that cuts across both public and private dimensions of identity. As such, gestures are meant to capture Bourdieu's dialectic between objective

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all your light speeches, from all laughter, from all your lustful desires, from all your pride and light-mindedness, and from all your wicked doings" (D&C 88:121). Such warnings were often given in regular Sunday worship services as well for many years. Recently, however, the Church has stepped back from these warnings. In February 2023, they began using a revised temple ceremony that removed the language about laughter and lightmindedness.

[40] Davies, *Culture of Salvation*, 109.

[41] Davies, 111-12.

[42] Davies, 116-17.

[43] Davies, 18. Davies draws on both Max Weber and Clifford Geertz to theorize the concept of mood. For Davies, the concept of mood refers to the emotions that accompany formal doctrine and which help to "animate" that doctrine for individuals. It also refers to a communal project of cultivating such feelings in group settings in which a mood nurtures certain religious attitudes and motivations that individuals carry with them and then can experience when they are no longer in a group setting.

[44] Davies, 109, 119.

[45] Davies, 175.

structures and subjective dispositions. They are meant to offer richer valences of meaning than

any single explicit declaration of belief might hold.[46]

Davies' study is a worthwhile attempt to capture the life of activity, of embodied

religious practice, and of immersion in community that the LDS tradition commits practitioners

to, although his actual list of habitus and gestures might be open to critique and amendment.

As Davies notes, Mormonism represents a case in which the theoretical constructs used in the

academy resemble the inherent views and practices of the group being studied.[47] He is

specifically referring to Mormonism's high valuation of embodiment that shows up not only in

its bodily rituals and lifestyle practices, but in the underlying doctrines that God the Father has

a body and that even "spirit" is matter, doctrines that I will explore in more detail in later

chapters. Such doctrines result in an attunement to the body as a particular aspect of mortality

to embrace and celebrate. As such, the theoretical categories of habitus and gestures become

powerful tools in understanding the dynamics at play for those committed to an LDS way of life.

However, Davies' study is solidly a Bourdieuian approach to habitus and not a Mahmoodian

view of the pedagogical dimension of the concept of habitus. Because he does at times analyze

LDS practices loosely in terms of education or instruction, one could construe some element of

a conscious self-making in the picture he creates of Mormonism.[48] However, such a dimension

of habitus is certainly not emphasized or even explicitly approached by him.

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[46] Davies, 110.

[47] Davies, 111.

[48] For example, Davies in *Culture of Salvation* describes temples as a site for "spiritual education," an environment in which "teaching by action and educating through ritual" occurs (78). The way he describes the manner in which temple attendees consciously perform temple actions has some parallels with the kind of conscious nurturance of virtues that Mahmood describes in her study of the mosque women. Latter-day Saints, Davies relates, "have left the ordinary world behind them, adopted different dress, prepared themselves by tests of merit, and now engage in acts related to a knowledge of the other world of eternal dimensions." All of these actions are done with the

Conversely, Amy Hoyt, the second scholar to theorize what might be called a Mormon habitus, tries to capture a conscious, agentive dimension for the processes that form habitus. She actually does not employ the concept of habitus for her own analysis; instead, she uses the terminology of "training one's interior," "internal transformation," or "pedagogies."[49] But what she describes is a process of habituation through religious practice that tracks well with Mahmood's pedagogical rendering of habitus.

In fact, Hoyt analyzes maternal practices of LDS women from a Mahmoodian perspective. For example, Hoyt argues that maternity and parental practices within Mormonism can be categorized as religious practices that are done with the express purpose of nurturing pious dispositions.[50] The basis for her argument is the theological significance of bearing and raising children for Latter-day Saints.[51] She emphasizes the point that exterior bodily acts train a subject's interior to comport with the Mormon view that fulfillment of the parental role is one important path to a righteous disposition. She lists such practices as "feeding, dressing, transporting, disciplining, teaching, praying [over], and loving" children as "daily rituals" that are meant to transform a parent into a more pious self.[52] The hard work of parenting is cast as a learning, thus pedagogical, exercise which is embedded within the larger communal ethos of a

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motivation to "engender a mood that underlies the sense of spirituality which LDS religion seeks to create and foster amongst temple-attending Saints" (78). Since Davies' study was published five years before Mahmood's *Politics of Piety*, he was of course unable to engage with her specific theorization of habitus as pedagogy. One might speculate he would have seen it as helpful to his own work.

[49] Hoyt, "Maternal Practices," 317. Hoyt mentions the term habitus only briefly when referencing Aristotle in the context of summarizing Mahmood's work.

[50] Hoyt distinguishes between maternal and parental practices. *Maternal* refers to the actual act of giving birth, while *parental* refers to the work of rearing children after they are born. She notes that both categories of practice affect the formation of the subject but in different ways.

[51] See Hoyt, "Maternal Practices," 307-11 for her description of LDS cosmology that underwrites the link between piety and parenting.

[52] Hoyt, 322.

particular theology of the family. In addition, Hoyt notes the consciously pious nature of not only daily rituals of parenting, but the decision itself to have a child. When many Mormon women and men decide to have a child, such a decision is made within the context of LDS cosmological beliefs that inflect it with eternal and salvific consequences.

Although Hoyt's analysis does not engage in the virtue ethics dimension of Mahmood's Aristotelian habitus—that is, she does not draw out a certain constellation of specific virtues that her research subjects were consciously trying to develop—her project illuminates one area of LDS practice in which the repetition of pious acts can illustrate aptly the formation of a particular religious disposition. Hoyt also does not explicitly employ a distinction between habitus and gestures, as Davies does, but her efforts to outline the theological beliefs first that then inform particular bodily actions might implicitly track well with such an analytical construct.

Subjectivity

Davies and Hoyt represent initial steps toward the theorization of a made Mormon self as they examine how specific practices contribute to the formation of a certain habitus. However, neither wade very far into deeper analysis regarding the nature of the human subject as such, that is, the kind of human subject that is assumed behind the structural and pedagogical forces of habitus formation. Along these lines, one area of critique for Davies' handling of Talal Asad's arguments regarding *gestus* is that he seems to ignore one of Asad's main concerns: the type of self that is assumed by medieval monks when invoking the concept of *gestus*. As Asad relates it, *gestus* is best understood in this historical context as that which points to a religious program intended to develop a certain type of Christian self through

disciplining the body in areas such as dress, speech, posture, and table manners.[53] While

Davies' analysis seems to hover around such implications that habitus and gestures have for a

theory of subjectivity, he does not enter into an examination of subjectivity as such, that is, the

relationship between these two theoretical conceptions and the underlying version of human

nature that makes it possible for a subject to be that which is created by bodily techniques.

This lack of attention to subjectivity is not unrelated to his differences with Mahmood

regarding habitus. Mahmood's theorizing of habitus as the result of conscious pedagogical

programs was only one step in her overall project. What she is most concerned to think through

is how particular thought-worlds and versions of personhood are *made* through bodily

practices.[54] She examines how certain consciously undertaken schemes of pedagogical practice

take an individual down different paths of certain attachments and imaginaries, depending on

which practices and which hoped-for dispositions serve as the end goal. Such attachments and

imaginaries, however, are not necessarily agentively constructed ends. Rather, they are

constituted through a complex interaction between volitional cultivation and taken-for-granted

authoritative discourses. Asad's discussion of *gestus* has similar motivations.

Hoyt does address the issue of subjectivity in her work, but her concern to affirm the

agency of traditional religious women overshadows any deeper examination of the factors

involved in the processes of subject formation. She defines subjectivity as "self-reference,"

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[53] Asad, "Concept of Ritual," 84.

[54] See Mahmood's preface to the 2012 edition of *Politics of Piety*, in which she states that her primary theoretical concern is how practices make subjects, that is, to examine the "disciplines of subjectivity" that constitute a "program of ethical self-cultivation" (xi-xiii). She expresses disappointment that the element of her book that readers most engaged with was the political question of agency regarding religiously conservative women rather than subjectivity. For her, agency was a secondary concern that was meant to support her inquiry into human nature. It was liberal assumptions about human nature that she was most concerned to speak back to, not so much the politics involved in the politically liberal stance of many feminists concerning conservative women.

which I take to mean how one refers to oneself in terms of a self-aware identity. For her, volitional action becomes the central formative factor of subjectivity: it is that which forms self-reference; it is the vehicle for a conscious cultivation of identity. She does acknowledge the "pressures" of social and cultural norms that LDS women face as a result of theological and communal ties, but these pressures seem to represent a boundary beyond which agentive action does not reach. Within those boundaries, however, subjectivity seems to be formed almost exclusively through agentive action. She does not explicitly render theological doctrines in terms of a structural basis within a communal context from which dispositions are unconsciously generated, but instead as teachings that each individual woman uses her agency to strive to conform to.

While it is true that the LDS women Hoyt studied did conscientiously and agentively engage in parental practices for the aim of developing righteousness, she seems to cast the desire for such aims as something that exists entirely outside of the subject-making process, not as something that is constituted by the very bodily acts that make a certain habitus. Take, for example, a passage in which her dualistic approach to body and mind comes to the surface.[55] In this passage, she voices skepticism regarding the idea that transformative processes only move in the direction from the exterior acts of the body to interior transformation of the interior spirit/mind, as she rightly sees that Mahmood suggests. Instead, Hoyt argues, the interior works on the exterior as well. In this context she references the "interior desire to be a mother" as something that originates from within a subject that then

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[55] Hoyt, "Maternal Practices," 317-318.

informs choices having to do with bodily practice. But where does this interior desire come from? How is such an attachment to an imaginary of motherhood formed in the first place?

It appears that Hoyt assumes desire somehow originates in the depth of a subject's interior first and then acts as that which drives agentive choice to perform bodily acts. Such a view is contrary to Mahmood's contention that desires cannot be distinguished from the social norms that inform the performance of pious acts.[56] For Hoyt, body, on one hand, and mind/spirit, on the other, seem to be seen as separate entities that merely influence each other, rather than entities that are distributed into each other. Such dualism that informs agency seems to lead Hoyt to promote a philosophically liberal subject, one in which a certain core of being drives volitional action. I see such a move as ultimately ironic because Mahmood intends her framework to be a corrective to the view of the subject and subject-making as liberally volitional. Indeed, Mahmood bases much of her own critique of a liberal subject on the analytics of power and discourses of authority undertaken by Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, who themselves express skepticism of a liberal understanding of the subject. Hoyt's analysis of subjectivity lacks any real engagement with this aspect of Mahmood's work.[57]

The theoretical interactions I have touched on so far—between Hoyt and Mahmood, Davies and Bourdieu, Davies and Asad, Mahmood and Butler, Mahmood and Foucault, as well as the lingering question of philosophical liberalism in the background of them all—are

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[56] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 31.

[57] I must note that a key part of Hoyt's critique is targeted at "liberal feminists" who impose certain political assumptions on traditional religious women, such as Mormon women. As such, her framework is one in which the term "liberal" seems to be understood strictly in political terms. In contrast, I am using the term "liberal" to designate a branch of thought that reaches back into the history of modern Western philosophical anthropology, that is, philosophical liberalism. The framework of American politics in which "liberal" is understood as a foil to "conservative" (or "traditional") plays little part in my own analysis.

representative of the analytical complex involved in how I approach the task of thinking through a Mormon anthropology. In what follows, I will present, first, a historically inflected analytical narrative of what is at stake when different versions of the subject are assumed. I will then lay out the theoretical basis for the version of the ethical subject that I believe has most explanatory power for Mormonism.

The Liberal Subject and Its Discontents

Asad states in his study of ritual that conceptualizations surrounding the self in Western thought underwent a shift from an early medieval period structure of self-fashioning according to virtues to an early modern structure of representational subjectivity.[58] Another shift seems to be occurring in recent years: from this representational approach to the subject, which is usually linked to a rendering of the self as liberal and foundationalist, into a contemporary construal of the subject as radically constituted by social networks and structures—that is, as non-foundationalist and postliberal. Much of the contemporary discussion regarding the subject has been set against a version of this liberal subject who is ostensibly capable of some level of transparency of the self and its epistemological functions.[59] Polemics are at times

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[58] Asad, "Concept of Ritual," 74, where he states, "My general conclusion will be that something has happened to institutional structures and organizations of the self to make possible the concept of ritual as a special category of behavior."

[59] Anthony Giddens in *Central Problems* locates the origins of such a critique of a transparent self in Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, each of whom, he claims, were "radical critics of the claims of the Cartesian *cogito*" and as such questioned, "in a profound way, the reliability of consciousness as 'transparent to itself'" (38). Giddens labels as "humanism" the philosophical thought that accepts the notion of such transparency as a feature of the self, and he encourages those working in social theory to "escape" from such a view of subjectivity (47). Giddens' historical contextualization of the critique of Cartesianism is a helpful backdrop to the work of the theorists I draw on below for a theory of subjectivity, including Saba Mahmood, Judith Butler, and Michel Foucault. Scattered across the work of each thinker is found both explicit and implicit critical stances toward liberalism, foundationalism, and Cartesian dualism, which echo Giddens' warning against "humanism." For a sampling of instances, see Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 5, and "Docile Agent," 206; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 4, 28-9, and *Psychic Life of Power*, 17; Foucault, *Ethics*, 59, 166, 261-2. Both Butler and Giddens draw on further critics of a liberal/Cartesian subjectivity for their

deployed by contemporary thinkers to discount the possibility of seeing into some "real" or "true" self that liberalism seems to posit.

The notion of a "liberal" subject, as these critics describe it, is a view of the subject which has for its primary consideration the individual. The individual becomes *the* unit of consideration. Individual desire, specifically, becomes for liberalism the basis for social and political structures, which seek to facilitate such individual desire and choice. So, for example, certain legal structures and institutional programs are constructed to facilitate the fulfillment of the individual in terms of legal *rights* specifically. The capacity to live out a life in which voluntaristic free will is a basic driving force for individuals, and as such is an inherent right, is protected and encouraged.[60]

For those who offer up a critique of the liberal subject, a couple of considerations follow from such an individualistic starting point. First, they claim that some kind of original essence is often assumed, with certain innate features of the self that follow. This original essence offers some form of "true self" or "true will" that merely needs to be discovered, awaked to, and then listened to. When such a subject asserts its will, then its innate autonomous impulses and capacities are lived to their fullest. This autonomous will, so the critique goes, has the capacity, even if only slight in some liberalist configurations, to side-step social influences and to tap into the trueness of an individual's will and desire.

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analysis. For example, they both engage with Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, and Jacques Derrida in their analyses of Cartesianism. Giddens further includes Ludwig Wittgenstein.

[60] Foucault, *Ethics*, 73: liberalism is a "system anxious to have the respect of legal subjects and to ensure the free enterprise of individuals."

A second implication follows from this first consideration: the self is described by these critics as being unlocated in time and discourse. A certain pre-cultural, pre-linguistic, and pre-social space is imagined, so the critique goes, in which the self exists as its own independent ontological entity. The critique posits that liberal renderings of the self often recognize that individuals live within societies and communities and that such influences as childhood rearing and popular culture are recognized to have an effect on an individual's mindset and approach to life. But the assumption that some true innate features of the self exist and can be accessed by the individual assumes that some modicum aspect of the self, if it is to fulfill the criterion of being "true," somehow sidesteps all of the cultural, familial, and social influences. In fact, the critique goes, liberals see the latter as mere *influences* on a self, which itself exists prior to them. They are not seen to be radically constitutive features that make the self what it is.

One consequence that has been seen to follow from this assumption of a non-historical and pre-cultural self is that power structures in any given society are seen as that which cover over and conceal some true self, rather than being forces that help to make the self. As a result, projects that involve the concept of "liberation" seek to remove the weight and burden of power structures in order to release some natural or original self from the imprisonment of such power manacles. Power is thus categorically understood to be an alienating force on the ontologically independent individual, rather than recognized as any constitutive feature upon which individuals are dependent for their very being as subjects who are in fact subjected to power. As poststructuralist theologian Mary McClintock Fulkerson describes it, the pushback

against a liberal theology includes a dawning recognition that we have "no access to the real outside of our power-laden constructions."[61]

The critique of a liberal self is often built on what has been seen to be the errors of Descartes and Kant. Descartes endowed Western philosophy with the idea that thought contains more reality than anything material or corporeal. Such Cartesian dualism is a standard, stock component for those who offer a critique of a liberal subject because it implies a fundamental bifurcation between the mind and body, while such critics posit a fundamental, intertwining relationship between the mental and the corporeal. For them, the mental precisely is the material. Descartes, however, saw the bodily as part of the world of matter and thus subject to the mechanistic laws of nature. As such body is inert matter. Mind for him, on the other hand, is entirely separate from all of the mechanisms related to material bodies. Mind is the locus of thinking, and as such, is the domain that ensures one's existence as a perceiving and willing being. It is this dualistic aspect of Descartes' model that posits a world in which the mind has more reality than the body. In the *Discourse* he thus states,

> Then, examining with attention what I was, and seeing that I could pretend that I had no body and that there was no world nor any place where I was, I could not pretend, on that account, that I did not exist at all. . . ; whereas, on the other hand, had I simply stopped thinking, . . . I would have had no reason to believe that I had existed. From this I knew that I was a substance the whole essence or nature of which is simply to think, and which, in order to exist, has no need of any place nor depends on any material thing. Thus this "I," that is to say, the soul through which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body and is even easier to know than the body, and even if there were no body at all, it would not cease to be all that it is.[62]

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[61] McClintock-Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject*, 7. McClintock-Fulkerson offers one of the more strident criticisms of liberalism and Cartesianism.

[62] Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, 18-19. Ever since Descartes posited such a dualistic model of mind and body, philosophers have queried how such a mind and body with such distinct ontologies could ever interact with each other. To be fair, Descartes himself seems to have recognized that mind and body do interact, for in his Sixth Meditation, for example, he describes the mind and body as being in interaction and even union with each other.

It is this dualism, specifically the way that Descartes posits the idea that the very basis of existence resides alone with the mind while the body ontologically seems to be expendable, that becomes the basis for the critique of the idea that subjects and subjectivity are best understood as disembodied consciousness. Such a subject is taken, so the critique goes, to exist at root as a pre-social and self-transparent self that exists "nowhere" and is capable of arriving at some kind of "true" underlying mental identity. If the mind is separate from all material and bodily mechanisms and processes, then that mind, at some level, will not be subject to cultural and social dependencies. What is left is a mind that is ultimately free from any kind of constitutive cultural and social dimensions, including any signifying and discursive processes. As Richard Popkin describes Descartes' project, Descartes came to conclude that the foundations for human knowledge are found in the mind but buried under the debris of prejudice and opinions. Descartes believed it was possible, Popkin tells us, to clear away this debris so that truth could shine out clearly.[63] The implication is that for a Cartesian model of the subject, such prejudices and opinions formed through social and cultural processes are mere refuse that cover over a more genuine reality that can only be arrived at through mental processes. Only when such refuse is cleared away can we discover the "real" that exists outside of the various individual opinions and feelings.[64] Descartes' project was to show that it is indeed possible for the human mind to arrive at a certainty of such objective truth.

But, of course, his eventual explanation that the pineal gland acts as a mediator between the two has never been accepted as an adequate answer to the problem that his model itself raised.

[63] Popkin, *History of Scepticism*, 151.

[64] Popkin, 168.

Despite the frequent invocation of Descartes as the author of a subjectivity based in finding some "real self," it is fair to point out that the objective truth that Descartes was trying to arrive at cannot in its totality be summed up as truth about who we are as individualistic subjects, in the way that might be implied by such a dominant critique of his version of the subject in our current theoretical environment. The cogito that he arrived at seems to have been less about finding some true self in a purely personalistic sense than about finding the ground of all human knowledge in a more general sense. For Descartes, a creator God, who bestows epistemological faculties on humans and additionally who is a being that does not deceive and who is thus absolutely trustworthy, is the warrant for the thinking faculties that Descartes valorizes. Without God, no clear and distinct ideas about anything, including that one is a thinking being, could presumably be possible because humans could not trust that such ideas were in fact reliable without the knowledge that the faculties God endowed humans with are sound because God is not a deceiver.[65]

Descartes' cogito, then, is ultimately less about discovering and holding onto some individualistic and personalistic version of the self, and more about using certainty about one's existence as the jumping off point to discover God as the warrant of all knowledge as such. As Popkin has further shown, Descartes' project was deeply informed by his desire to counter skeptical arguments that go back to Greek Pyrrhonist thought and that had seen a resurgence in Descartes' day as a result of writings from men like Montaigne. Descartes may have been less concerned to find his "true self" than to find a means for humans to feel they can rely on data,

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[65] Descartes, *Meditations*, especially Three through Six.

both mental and empirical, and to provide a means to have recourse against skeptical claims that put the ability for humans to know anything at all at risk.

But, still, the implications for subjectivity that follow from Descartes' dualism lend credibility to some of the worries his critics put forth. Descartes clearly valorizes interiority as the means to truth. Such valorization of human mental and rational capacities, at the expense of the bodily, provides a tableau in which subjectivity simply *is* interiority, separate and distinct from the material.[66] A subject that is ontologically devoid of a body seems to be located nowhere and is ahistorical and pre-social—that is, a subject that, as Descartes puts it, "has no need of any place nor depends on any material thing." As a contrast to this Cartesian subject, such critics see subjectivity as something that is entirely *made* through cultural and social interactions, institutions, and networks. Dualism of mind and body is simply wrongheaded, they would say, for any experience an individual may have with a personal interiority is precisely located, historical, and entirely constructed through the material and the bodily forces at work in that human life. Interiority does not exist as some pristine separate and distinct entity. In fact, one critical answer to Descartes' epistemological model is that when he looked within and found certainty, what he actually stumbled upon was social discourse that had constituted him as a subject who desires certainty.

Another aspect of Descartes' thinking that comes under fire from the critics of liberalism is his seeming commitment to some form of epistemological autonomy. Notwithstanding

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[66] For example, see Butler, *Psychic Life of Power* in which she offers the following critique of Mladen Dolar, whose ideas regarding subjectivity carry a "strong Cartesian resonance": "Dolar defines subjectivity through the notion of interiority and identifies as material the domain of exteriority (i.e., exterior to the subject). He presupposed that subjectivity consists in both interiority and ideality, whereas materiality belongs to its opposite, the countervailing exterior world" (121).

Descartes' claimed dependency on God as the warrant for his certainty, he seems to have valued an ability to arrive at some level of epistemological independence, that is, to be a specifically *autonomous* thinking subject. He states in the *Discourse* that he resolved to "search for no knowledge other than what could be found within myself"[67] and further "My plan has never gone beyond trying to reform my own thoughts and building upon a foundation which is completely my own."[68]

Similar sentiments were echoed over a century later by Immanuel Kant. And, in fact, what Charles Taylor describes as Descartes' "hegemony of reason" can be equally applied to Kant, especially as associated with Kant's conception of autonomy.[69] As with Descartes, Kant locates freedom of thought within the faculty of a reasoning mind. But Kant developed his epistemology further by arguing that the reasoning mind is equipped with categories that structure the way the mind processes empirical data that come to it through sense experience.[70] For Kant, the issue was not just what grounds belief (which, for him, are the categories with which we make judgments) but what specifically grounds personal *free* belief, that is, how one may believe freely and thus govern oneself freely without having to be subjected to authority figures or institutions who unnecessarily impose external law onto human beings. Human minds, he suggests, are entirely equipped to autonomously govern individual thought and actions.

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[67] Descartes, *Meditations*, 5.
[68] Descartes, 9.
[69] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 147-55.
[70] See Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.

An important aspect of Kant's arguments for human autonomy is his system for how humans might be able to adhere to moral law without heteronomous law being imposed on them.[71] He posits the existence of universal moral law along similar lines as that of natural mechanistic laws—that is, laws that have an objective character such that they remain unchanged across time, space, and circumstance. As with nature, moral aspects of the world operate with a certain lawlikeness accessible by human reason. In the realm of pure reason, the *a priori* realm separate from sensory experience, the mind can formally arrive at universal categorical principles that are free from the contaminations of self-interest or personal inclinations. Kant believed that in this system, all rational beings would arrive at the exact same moral law, simply because this law is universal. As such, subjects would be capable of acting as both independent legislators of moral law and at the same time as persons who are subjected to a duty to observe moral law. His kingdom of ends is a kingdom of autonomous rational individuals all arriving at the same moral conclusions independently of each other but also all feeling the weight of duty to strictly follow through with actions based on those shared moral conclusions. No external authoritative forces are needed for such a moral system to operate. Autonomy for Kant is thus possible as individuals come to feel the power of responsibility to the moral law take hold of their desire to live up to universal law. For Kant human reason has limits; for example, reason cannot penetrate into the realm of things-in-themselves. But when operating within the limits of what can be known, such as moral law, it is a powerful mechanism for coming to know how one may live a life of autonomous self-rule.

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[71] See Kant's *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*.

As noted, such a concept of autonomy has become another major point of critique for those who are skeptical of modern liberal thought. For Kant, a subject is immersed in a world of autonomous self-rule based on rational capacity to access an *a priori* realm of universals, but critics of subjectivity point to such a concept of autonomy as just another means of arriving at a subject who is somehow separate and distinct from social discourse—and, more importantly, as another means to cast what is actually socially constructed norms of behavior as objective law. For them, the Kantian universal law would be just another version of the intra-human networks of power and discourse in extra-human disguise. Such critics would see Kant's version of the mind, as that which has the power to reach into a pure *a priori* conceptual realm, as a fiction because it posits the idea that an individual is capable of independently (that is, separately from social or authoritative constructs) arriving at such pure formal principles. For many of these critics, the very notion of autonomy is *the* symbol of the problematic features that make up a non-located, self-founding, ante-social liberal subject.[72]

I am sympathetic to the critique of a liberal self and to the general analytical shift toward understanding subjectivity through the constitutive forces of social networks and structures. But I am further interested in this narrative of the parameters of a liberal, foundationalist subject particularly for how it bears on Mormon theology. This narrative of

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[72] For example, Mahmood in *Politics of Piety* states that her goal for the book is to make her ethnographic material regarding the women's mosque movement "speak back to the normative liberal assumptions about human nature against which such a movement is held accountable." One such assumption that she wants to contest is that "we all somehow seek to assert our autonomy when allowed to do so" (5). In *Changing the Subject,* McClintock-Fulkerson lists as one feature of classic liberalism "the value of individual autonomy and choice." She further proclaims, "we must resist the notion of the free, autonomous individual, in whatever guise it may appear" (5-6). Elizabeth Pritchard in "Agency without Transcendence" states that the ideas that "we did not make ourselves; we do not have radical autonomy" have become "familiar truisms" (267). In fact, the contestation against the idea of human autonomy has been sharp enough that an entire section of feminist thought has arisen to recuperate the concept, something I will address in chapter 4.

what constitutes a liberal subject is relevant to a Mormon theology of the subject because, as I will show in chapter two, one important doctrine for the tradition can very easily be interpreted along liberal lines. That doctrine is the idea that human spirits existed in a pre-existent realm first before being born into mortality. Joseph Smith taught that such human spirits are called "intelligences" and are self-existent entities of the cosmos. As we will see, one particular branch of interpretation of this teaching arrives at a conception of self-existent personhood adhering within each human individual. Such a rendering of the subject casts it as radically autonomous, self-directed, and foundational precisely because such a pre-mortal self precedes and thus transcends the experience of an embodied self of mortality. Granted, LDS theologians who interpret the Mormon pre-existent self along the most liberal lines do not seem to draw from Descartes and Kant specifically for this foundational self but from Plato's conception of the pre-existent self. Still, Plato, Descartes, and Kant can all be seen as speaking from within the same domain that posits similar elements of a liberal self, whose constitutive origin is envisioned as occurring outside of bodily and communal processes.

What is interesting about such a Platonic understanding of LDS intelligence, though, is that it metaphysically clashes with another prominent teaching, that of Mormon materialism. When speaking within the mode of Mormon material monism, some of the same LDS theologians who promote a Platonic-inflected self also claim that the tradition has overcome Cartesian dualism as a result of its doctrine of materialism that supposedly dissolves any ontological divide between body and mind. In chapter three I address the debates surrounding these seeming incoherencies regarding how to understand the nature of human beings. What is at stake in these interpretations and debates is a push and pull between, on one hand,

attributing radical, cosmological autonomy to the human spirit and, on the other hand, celebrating a certain communal embeddedness of human persons that comes with materiality. It is ultimately a push and pull between conceiving human beings as possessing a static, true self versus conceiving humans as participating in the dynamic processes of material existence, in which the subject is a hub by which societal, environmental, historical, theological, and communal aspects constitute its very being. My stance is that if LDS theologians begin from the valorization of embodiment and practice-centrism made possible by a theology of materialism, the latter dynamic rendering of the subject offers the greatest explanatory power for understanding a Mormon subject. In order to better understand the theoretical parameters of a communally made, ethical subject, I now turn to Mahmood, Butler, and Foucault as helpful interlocutors.

The Ethical Subject

Mahmood offers a critique of Kant in which she highlights his lack of attention to the morphology that moral actions take.[73] Such a critique is targeted at the predominance of disembodied rationality valorized in Kantian, as well as Cartesian, subjectivity. For Mahmood's Aristotelian model, actions shape the inner character of a subject; in fact, actions entirely make that subject in constitutive ways. Such actions are distinctly material as subjects work on their bodies in morally inflected ways. Subjectivity is that which begins with external practices that then form and structure the internal world of the subject. Her critique is that a Kantian subject who engages with the moral world in a primarily rational way disregards the all-important external and material processes that shape moral subjects.

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[73] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 25-26.

This version of the morphology of subjects is a theoretical concern that Mahmood

shares with Judith Butler, and both offer similar descriptions of the mechanisms of subjectivity.

Their idea of a subject is that which is constituted as such through actions, disciplines, bodily

techniques, and regimes of truth. Thus, the various elements that constitute a self are shaped

according to the communal and authoritative structures that obtain within any given discursive

formation.[74] For them, it is not the case that an already constituted subject pre-exists modes of

self-making as some kind of ontological foundation of personhood; it is not the case that such

actions and practices merely add a top dressing to an already existing, already made self.

Rather, subjectivity is the very product of such modes of activity.

Mahmood's and Butler's method of inquiry, then, is to begin from bodily practices to

see how these external practices shape and create an internal thought-world from which

commitments, capacities, and desires usher forth. For Mahmood and Butler, what one is and

what one wants is a direct result of the kind of work performed on the self. This work of the self

actualizes a particular modality of being and personhood.[75] I have already discussed

Mahmood's concept of habitus, as the dispositional product of the repetition of action, as that

which allows her to think more deeply about how a human subject is made through embodied

practices. Butler also sees the repetition of acts, or "performativity," as an important aspect of

the subject-making process.[76] Performativity is not mere performance of acts but repeated acts

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[74] Mahmood, 120.

[75] Mahmood, 120-122.

[76] Mahmood, however, explains a notable difference between her concept of habitus and Butler's theory of performativity. She understands Butler's performativity to designate discrete acts in which any iteration is at some level disconnected to other iterations, and this disconnection allows for the possibility that the meaning of the acts may end up resignified. Mahmood contrasts this type of repetition to the type of pious acts she observed in the mosque women, in which each act is not discrete but built upon previous acts, thereby creating a "sedimented and cumulative character of reiterated performatives" (163-64).

of norms that are constitutive of identities.[77] The iterability of the acts is the mechanism

through which norms take hold of a subject such that repetition of acts spawn belief in

particular identities, not the other way around. As Butler notes, the acts and rituals come first,

then belief is developed, then that belief is "incorporated into the performance of subsequent

operations."[78]

Butler associates constraint with the concept of performativity, through the feeling that

one must necessarily repeat certain acts, rituals, and gestures while other acts are explicitly

avoided. Such constraint is born from the internalization of norms, and as such it "impels and

sustains" performativity.[79] The concept of normativity looms large in Butler's thought. A

"subject" is well named because it is that which is constituted through *subjection* to

authoritative cultural sources that institute norms into the very psyche of persons. Such norms

are instigated through social discourse and then become internalized in the psyche. When

combined with the reflexivity of an individual consciousness, such norms become part of the

very institution of conscience.[80] It is in this way that Butler can point to the voice of social

regulation as that which a subject is constitutively passionately attached to, such that desire as

conscience then becomes a pursuit of identity. Along those lines, an "exclusionary matrix" is an

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[77] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv, 34, 183-86. Butler's theory of performativity in *Gender Trouble* relates specifically to gender and sex. However, since gender and sex are laden with norms, it seems that many norm-laden behaviors beyond gender could be construed as performative. The important feature of performativity, whether of gender/sex or other norms, is that the very act of repetition has a constitutive effect on subjectivity. See also the introduction to *Bodies That Matter* in which Butler summarizes her previous theory of performativity but then extends it with the concept of "citationality."

[78] Butler, *Psychic Life of Power,* 119.

[79] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 59-60.

[80] For Butler's theorization of the role of conscience in the process of the psychic internalization of norms, see *Psychic Life of Power,* 19-22, 63-64, 114-15, 179-97, in which she draws from Nietzsche, Freud, and Althusser.

important dimension to the internalization of norms because a subject comes to passionately claim what it is by psychologically rejecting what is not socially legible, allowed, or desirable.[81]

Butler suggests the very language we use to speak about a subject is itself ambivalent, even fictitious. Taking from Nietzsche, Butler states that there is no "being" behind the doing of action; the "deed is everything" while the "doer" is merely a "fiction added to the deed."[82] The term "subject," according to Butler, is a mere linguistic category that allows us to speak of something that is always undergoing processes of constitution and identifications and does not signify something that is always already there. In this sense, the concept of "subject" is a nominalism used as a convenient grammatical marker to point to something that does not "persist through time as the same, unified, and internally coherent" being.[83] The constitutive processes of subject-making create a "subject" or an "I" who never fully arrives at a totalized identification and who is made up of an "imbrication of identifications" that shift and move and come to establish varying constellations of personhood as a permanent tension of contradictions within one body.[84]

But even as the processes of subject-making result in such fluidity and malleability of the self, Butler reiterates an important point: we cannot just merely throw off the shackles of the norms that constitute the self. Because they are what actually constitute a subject at a bedrock level, no subject can do without them; the legibility of the subject within its known

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[81] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xii-xiii. Later in this book, Butler attempts to reformulate such exclusionary logic toward a more fluid practice that can constitute and reconstitute subjects in various contexts (73-80).
[82] The Nietzsche source is *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1969), 45. Butler quotes this passage in *Gender Trouble*, 34.
[83] The quoted language regarding a definition of "self-identical" is from Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 22. To see a discussion about the "grammatical fiction" of the concept of "I," which I here call nominalistic, see Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 63.
[84] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 90.

world is at stake. Subjectivity is not experienced as ephemeral, disposable, or optional. Rather,

one feature of performativity is that it fabricates a sense that ritual acts originate from some

internal essence or core of being.[85] Thus, a subject is shot through with social discourses that

are not only regulated through authoritative structures and norms but that make up the very

substratum of a subject's own social and psychological intelligibility.[86]

Butler's theory of subjectivity offers a depth and substance to the actual mechanisms

that are involved in the project of subject-making. Butler attempts to take the reader into the

very psychic processes that go into the internalization of norms as subjects perform the

ritualized acts that constitute identity. Mahmood's own approach to subjectivity is deeply

informed by Butler's, notwithstanding the fact that Mahmood contrasts certain aspects of her

approach to Butler's, especially regarding agency.[87]

Together Mahmood and Butler draw extensively from the tableaux of subjectivity that

has its basis in the thought of Michel Foucault. For Foucault, as also with Butler and Mahmood,

the concept of subjectivity primarily points to *processes* of individuation that give form to a self.

Any given individual is made up of multiple subjectivities that intersect, just as the different

prisms of any given life reflect different personas that have been formed by different discursive

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[85] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xiv.

[86] To make this point, in *Bodies That Matter* Butler rejects the commonly held idea that a thing constructed is somehow artificial or dispensable. To the contrary, without constructions, "we would not be able to think, to live, to make sense at all" of that which becomes of necessity for us. Butler defines here the meaning of the word "constitutive" as that "'without which' we could not think at all" (x). Later in the same book, Butler clarifies that a constructed subject does not possess an identity that can merely be "denied, overcome, erased," and further states that it would be a "form of violence" to demand that a subject "overcome radically" any "constitutive constraints by which cultural viability is achieved" (79).

[87] The greatest difference Mahmood claims to exist between her and Butler's view of agency is that Butler adheres to a model that only sees agency as resistance, while Mahmood seeks to expand an understanding of agency to include acts that uphold and reproduce norms in addition to acts that resist such norms. See Mahmood, "Docile Agent," 210-11.

contexts. These various forms of subjectivity represent different types of relationships one has with oneself and with others.

Foucault claims that he did not begin with one explicit theory of the subject but that his approach was to explore as a problematic the relationships that constitute any given individual or group of people in terms of their characteristics, dispositions, and discursive qualities. Through an examination of this problematic, he was interested to understand how subjects are constituted in one form or another through various strategies and practices employed within certain relationships. The assumption he began with is that there is no universal, a priori aspect of human nature untouched by the discursive formations that every human being is subjected to. There is no essential or core personality that one discovers through processes of self-discovery; there is no true self just waiting for that discovery.[88] Instead, the self is fundamentally a relational being with its constituent characteristics open to the absorptions that come from relational and discursive contexts.

Since relationships are shot through with power dynamics, Foucault's work on subjectivity came to be developed out of his examinations regarding the characteristics of power and power relations. He came to examine subjectivity through three stages. He first offered what he called the "archeological" work of exposing discursive formations within discrete historical periods, best exemplified by *The Order of Things*. His analysis of discursive formations then led him to an awareness of the mechanisms of power that such formations

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[88] In an interview, Foucault states that in order to show how subjects come to be constituted, he had to reject "a priori theories of the subject" (*Ethics* 290). Such a rejection could feasibly include what he elsewhere describes, and implicitly criticizes, as the "California cult of the self," which looks like the liberal self: this type of subject is "supposed to discover one's true self, to separate it from that which might obscure or alienate it, to decipher its truth" (*Ethics* 271).

come to be emulsified with. Such analyses of power are best exemplified by *Discipline and Punish* as well as *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1. The form that power took within his thought further pushed him more and more to bring the subject to the forefront of his studies, such that the concept of subjectivity, and particularly the subject as a self-fashioning being, came to be the dominant analytical category especially for his last three volumes of *The History of Sexuality*.[89] As this outline of work illustrates, Foucault approached the concept of subjectivity through two lenses, not mutually exclusive to one another. The first is through the lens of power relations, and the second is through the lens of practices that one performs on oneself.

Foucault grounds both lenses in the category of "technology" or "techniques"—the former lens described by Foucault as "techniques of domination" and the latter lens as "techniques of the self." The concept of "techniques" for him denotes the idea of procedures, practices, and exercises. Techniques or technologies are modes of strategy employed to regulate behavior; they refer to work done upon bodies, work that has the effect of subjecting both bodies and minds toward a certain telos, whether that end be directed by oneself or by others.[90] Foucault uses the term *governmentality* to refer to such techniques and procedures

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[89] Although *Discipline and Punish* is probably still the most appropriate methodological starting point for his views on subjectivity. Foucault himself lays out these three stages of his work in *The History of Sexuality,* 2:6.

[90] Although Foucault attributes the regulation of techniques of domination aimed at others in a rather chilling way in *Discipline and Punish*, in the volumes of *History of Sexuality* he illustrates how a person who is engaged in techniques of the self may very well look to a mentor for guidance in both the techniques themselves and in the end for which they are done, such as was done anciently by Seneca, for example, in his letters to Lucilius. Thus, Foucault explains in *Ethics*, "technologies of the self . . . permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (225). It would thus be a mistake to assume that the involvement of a third party in the regulation of technologies of the self necessarily suggests that some form of oppression is at play.

that direct human behavior through the use of strategic instrumentalization of certain

practices.

When speaking about *techniques of domination*, Foucault illustrates methods employed

by persons in positions of power and authority that seek to control the behavior and thought of

others. Such techniques of domination are designed to discipline the conduct of individuals, to

have the effect of strategically constituting docile bodies. But Foucault is careful to present such

domination in a nuanced way. It is not the case that power is centralized in one dominant

personality, such that a person in authority "has" or "doesn't have" power. Rather, power is

"exercised rather than possessed" in the context of relationships.[91] As such, Foucault prefers

the phrase "relations of power" over the simplistic term "power" to describe such strategies or

technologies of coercion.[92] Those who come to have docile bodies do so with increasing

cooperation because their very thoughts and desires are trained, through exercises, correction,

and supervision. They are thus manufactured, through relation, to be a certain type of docile

subject.

Foucault's entire micro-universe of power relations and subject-manufacture rests on a

non-foundationalist paradigm. Such a model of power takes as its starting point a subject that is

malleable to the effects of training in a constitutive way—constitutive precisely because desires

and mindsets, in addition to bodily practices, are involved. What's more, an important

implication that follows from the addition of the term *relation* to the concept of power is that

power now becomes something that shifts; it is inherently unstable as the dynamics of

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[91] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 26-7.
[92] Foucault, *Ethics*, 291-2.

relationships change. Accordingly, Foucault at one point describes power, in terms that echo his understanding of the subject, as "nominalistic,"[93] meaning that the term *power* is merely a name or label that describes a "complex strategical situation in a particular society."[94] As such, relations of power are "nonsubjective" in the sense that the aims involved are not invented by any one person but operate as "almost unspoken strategies" that are collectively taken as a given.[95]

When Foucault turns his attention to *techniques of the self*, he examines specifically practices that were employed anciently by Greeks and Romans for the explicit end of transforming the self toward a state of greater happiness, inner purity, and wisdom.[96] To effect this particular way of being, operations were intentionally performed on one's own body, on one's own thoughts, and on one's own conduct. In terms of who initiates the fabrication of the self, then, what could be construed as a more passive stance for the techniques of domination has now, with the technologies of the self, become a more active and self-aware process of what is to be done to and with the self for a personal end. It is what Foucault calls an "intensification of subjectivity."[97]

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[93] As with my earlier assessment of Butler's approach to subjectivity, Foucault's philosophical anthropology has been described by Paul Robinow as "nominalistic" (*Ethics* xxxiv). Such a description can best be explained by Foucault's view of the subject as being understood, not in terms of a substance, but as a form (*Ethics* 290-91). He has explained that he does not offer a theory of the subject because he does not see the subject as a self-existing ontological entity. However, having no substance does not mean that the self is to be viewed as ephemeral and lacking in solidity, for Foucault also insists, like Butler, that there is a certain permanence to a subject. See, for example, *Discipline and Punish*, 29, in which, after introducing the initial sketch of what he calls a "micro-physics" of punitive power, that is, a theory of how power relations form a subject, Foucault is quick to assert that it is an error to then assume that the soul that is formed in such processes is a mere illusion or "ideological effect." On the contrary, he asserts, "it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body."

[94] Foucault, *History of Sexuality,* 1:93.

[95] Foucault, 1:94-95.

[96] See particularly volumes two and three of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*.

[97] Foucault, *Ethics*, 238-9.

In what was before subjectivation as a method to coerce others to do what one wants, we now have subjectivation as a method to transform oneself morally and ethically. It is a work of ascesis, which Foucault describes as work done specifically to "make the self appear."[98] The self will appear to others in the guise of visible physical attributes, such as how one holds one's body, how one dresses, how one approaches and reacts to events.[99] But with ascesis, the self will also appear to oneself as a concrete creative project. The self will work towards the capability of detachment of self, to see oneself as an object to study and to reflect upon. The self becomes a sort of artistic masterpiece, an oeuvre with a particular aesthetic and style.[100]

In this sense, technologies of the self are a means to constitute oneself as a knowing subject. But as Foucault describes it, such knowledge is not just about knowing oneself more intimately through self-awareness. It is about being committed to an entire set of "truth obligations,"[101] which themselves are not invented solely by any one person, including the knowing subject. Such truth obligations are absorbed through the larger culture, even at times imposed by the larger social group, such that the exercises and training performed on oneself constitutes an ethical subject in its broadest sense: training oneself towards a certain way of being that is itself socially derived. Foucault, thus, describes the "art of self-knowledge" in its ancient iteration as being made up of "precise recipes" and "codified exercises," all performed

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[98] Foucault, 137.

[99] Foucault, 286. Foucault makes these comments in the context of explaining what the term *ēthos* meant to the ancient Greeks: *ēthos* was "a mode of being for the subject, along with a certain way of acting, a way visible to others." He goes on to explain, "A man possessed of a splendid *ēthos* . . . could be admired and put forward as an example." A passage such as this provides helpful context for the concept of an *ethical subject*, a term which is scattered throughout Foucault's writings. At the heart of the idea of an ethical subject is the tableau of a subject profoundly rooted in a community and its values.

[100] Foucault, *History of Sexuality,* 2:10-11.

[101] Foucault, *Ethics*, 177-8.

for the intent of discovering and subsequently being enlightened by social truth.[102] Although

this labor on the self is a deeply personal work, it is set within the larger framework of

communal norms and judgments, just as was the case with the technologies of domination.[103]

The technologies of domination and technologies of the self together make up a

spectrum within which the government of human behavior can be examined. As such, they

illustrate certain processes that constitute and manufacture specific types of subjects, subjects

who are assumed to be radically nonfoundational and thus imbricated with social processes

and norms. As such, this dual aspect of governmentality—techniques we impose on each other

and techniques we impose on ourselves—tracks well with the processes associated with the

dual aspect of habitus addressed above: on the one hand, with the Bourdieuian technologies

associated with a conception of "unsaid" norms and communally driven creation of the subject,

and, on the other hand, with a Mahmoodian "conscious" nurturance of dispositions on the part

of individuals (which itself is employed in the context of communal and authoritative

discourse).

This duality of governmentality also offers a productive theoretical framework for

examining the dynamics of religious techniques within institutional structures, as Mahmood's

project so aptly shows. In terms of Mormonism, such an examination of the twofold aspects of

governmentality is also apt, for practitioners of Mormonism are deeply committed to the

training and direction provided by the institution as well as to personal, even intimate practices

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[102] Foucault, *History of Sexuality,* 3:58.
[103] In the chapter titled "Technologies of the Self," in Foucault's *Ethics*, he calls these self-practices "technologies of individual domination," a phrase that further helps to illustrate some level of parallelism between the two types of technologies as laid out in his work (225).

that are understood to be the path toward developing themselves as spiritually in-tune

subjects. These two aspects are not mutually exclusive, and it is important to understand not

only the ways that Latter-day Saints approach the religious labor of the self as agentive

individuals but also how religiously authoritative discourses have a role, often a direct role, in

the technologies employed by self-laboring individuals and their results, especially in terms of

the desires that are nurtured through authoritative theological discourses. Judgments of

normativity and the constitutive processes of performativity are active theological forces in the

making of Mormon subjects. A Mormon self is a social self, as the nurturance of certain

dispositions toward a certain habitus suggests within a religion that is so communal- and

practice-centric. One important task of theology as a field of inquiry should be to examine the

theologically derived qualities of subjectivity that are implied and promoted by the dual aspect

of the governance of minds, spirits, and bodies.

Conclusion

Employing a Foucauldian framework of governmentality in its dual aspects might be a

productive tool when embarking on a theological examination of the processes involved in the

creation and nurturance of a certain type of Mormon habitus within the context of specific

discourses and practices. In order to do so, however, any underlying assumptions within LDS

theological discourse regarding the fundamental qualities of subjects still need to be grappled

with. As mentioned above, Foucault, Butler, and Mahmood all take as a beginning point a made

and constructed subjectivity as a warrant for their depictions of the processes that manufacture

subjects. But in LDS theological discourse, such a warrant cannot be taken for granted. More

recently, LDS theological and historical discourse has seen some thinkers who do promote,

either explicitly or implicitly, some version of a made subjectivity,[104] but such promotions must be seen against the backdrop of more longstanding anthropological depictions that can only be described as liberal and foundationalist. If Mormon theologians are going to take seriously the forces at play in the governance of bodies and minds within the LDS community, questions regarding the metaphysics of the subject, including the origin of such aspects as agency, desire, and identity, must be addressed.

Indeed, because the speculative doctrine of self-existent intelligences has been presented in ways that are contrary to the postliberal subject presented by Mahmood, Butler, and Foucault, within certain LDS contexts, the idea of a made, ethical subject might seem to be foreign to Mormon sensibilities. One major task of this project, then, is to examine the doctrinal conditions that constitute predominant understandings of a pre-existent self and to see if there are areas where rethinking might be warranted. I follow loosely the method of Stephen Webb in this project of rethinking. Webb attempts to rethink how creedal Christianity approaches matter by going back in time to discover times when interpretations of theological doctrines had the opportunity to go in various directions. He tries to locate doctrinal paths not taken but could have been in order to envision what might have been. He points out that some doctrinal conditions are permanent and unrevisable, while others might not be so permanent.[105] This approach hinges on careful scrutiny of the characteristics of certain interpretations in terms of their logical and doctrinal necessity.

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[104] For an example of a somewhat implicit Foucauldian understanding of subjectivity as that which is made through bodily media practices, see Allred, *Seeing Things*. Adam Miller's network theology is the best example of an LDS scholar who explicitly promotes a made subjectivity, something I will address in detail in chapter three.
[105] Webb, *Jesus Christ, Eternal Father*, 20-21.

The interpretative work that I am trying to do is actually made easier by the nature of the doctrines I am examining, in the sense that when they were first pronounced by Joseph Smith they were not cast in any kind of systematic form. He did not himself engage in careful constructions of logical arguments; instead, he made revelatory pronouncements that were often religiously powerful but often ambiguous in terms of their logical import. Some of LDS theology has been attempts by Smith's successors to interpret his revelatory statements into more systematically understandable teachings, but many interpretations have been done more with a devotional premise as a way to help build the faith of members. In short, there is enough in the material I have to work with that I believe is revisable in nature, not permanent or logically necessary.

The structure of this project, then, follows a similar (although much simplified) trajectory as Webb's in that I present historical narratives of the origin and successive interpretations of, in chapter two, the doctrine of intelligence, in chapter three, the doctrine of materialism, and in chapter four, the doctrine of agency. My intent is to locate areas where certain reinterpretations of the nature of the human might be possible. In the case of the first two doctrines, much of the legwork has actually been done for me because debates have arisen, both historically and contemporaneously, regarding how best to understand not just the wording of Smith's revelatory statements but the implications that follow from them. In both cases these implications have to do with an understanding of what these theological constructs commit Mormonism to in terms of metaphysics, and particularly in terms of the metaphysics of the human subject. Much of my work is to intervene in these debates with my own constructive take.

The last case, the doctrine of agency, presents a discourse within Mormonism in which less debate exists regarding its theological meaning, which can be described as predominantly falling along the lines of a liberal conception of radical free agency. The type of made subjectivity that I argue for necessarily moderates radically liberal views of agency and instead leads to a dialectic between autonomy and dependency. In chapter four, I seek to illustrate how substantive agency and autonomy still operate for a socially made subject within such a dialectic, and I further discuss how to understand the nature of power-informed agency for the subject who is enmeshed in the authoritative discourses that saturate its communal ethos.

Overall, I argue that when the context is a view of Mormonism as a practice-centric tradition that recognizes both the importance of the body and the role of community, it remains feasible to begin to think about a subject who is constituted by bodily practices and through social and communal relations. Indeed, certain features of the Mormon doctrine of material monism have the potential to be entirely consistent with it. Thus, this dissertation will work through such issues of legibility and doctrinal consistency that an ethical subject might raise. In the end, I also gesture toward what I see as a needed shift in theological consciousness within Mormonism: to be more acutely aware that the very ethos of the community shapes its people in constitutive ways.

Chapter 2: The Doctrine of Intelligence

This chapter aims to establish the historical parameters of a Latter-day Saint theological anthropology. I will look at the historical texts, figures, and concepts that have served to establish the points of analysis and debate regarding such doctrine. By examining such narratives and teachings, I hope to illustrate the dominant lines of thought that Latter-day Saints have historically taken regarding the human. I will show that the tradition's teachings regarding the nature, attributes, and destiny of humankind have a historical character that can be described as foundationalist, although LDS theologians have rarely, if ever, characterized their views of the human with explicit use of such a category. But if foundationalist subjectivity is an understanding of the self as that which has its grounding in a stable, knowable, authentic inner core of personhood, one that exists deeply at an ontological level, then, I argue, LDS thought has been predominantly foundationalist. As we will see in chapter three, at least one contemporary LDS theologian, Adam Miller, is currently attempting to shift LDS theological anthropology away from such a model of the self and toward that of what might be called a fundamentally conditioned self. But any constructions of a theology of the subject for Mormonism must be made with attention to the well-entrenched foundationalist paradigm of the self that has historically obtained in LDS thought.

The foundationalist subject in LDS thought derives from the doctrine of pre-existent intelligences—that is, a narrative of human origins that casts the human spirit as a self-existent, intelligent being or substance. This human spirit is believed to have, albeit in an ambiguous form not entirely agreed upon by LDS theologians, a cosmological past with no beginning,

contrary to Christianity's *ex nihilo* doctrine of creation, and will have no end in the future, as a result of the soul's transformation from mortality to immortality upon resurrection. One of the implications of such a narrative that has been emphasized within the faith's discourse is a strident hold on the doctrine of free agency, with an almost inevitable characterization of how such agency has been baked into, as it were, the primordial human spirit as an inherent attribute of intelligence. Consequently, at the center of the concept of a morally free, yet morally responsible, intelligence is an idea of an essential core of individuality that each human soul possesses, a self that can be described as the "real" self which has always existed in the same sense that God has always existed. This "real" self has the capacity not only for self-conscious agentive action as such, but agentive action that places the human soul on a track of eternal progression toward potential godhood.

Joseph Smith's Theological Anthropology

The canonical texts produced by Joseph Smith, the founder of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, are the authoritative basis for anthropological discussions within Latter-day Saint discourse. Although later LDS thinkers have inevitably expanded or subtly tweaked Smith's original theological statements, they usually do so with a self-understanding that they are being true to the theological pronouncements of the founder of their faith tradition. This section will examine three such canonical texts with an eye to how Smith constructed an LDS human anthropology through the doctrine of intelligence.

Joseph Smith was thoroughly immersed in a Christian and specifically biblical milieu in frontier New England. Notwithstanding his own theologically creative impulses, he brought with him to Mormonism some traditional Christian concepts and teachings that he seems to

have taken for granted, including certain aspects related to the concept of intelligence. The

Christian thought-world of his time and place, in turn, had inherited a number of interrelated

meanings of the concept of intelligence stemming from Greek influence on early Christianity,

where intelligence came to describe God in terms of pure thought, the absolute Intellect. As

such, it was used to describe God as immaterial, impassive, and simple divine substance and to

designate God as One, the cosmologically simple Intellect. Such meanings are resonant with

Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy, which privileged mind over body, spirit over matter. The

mind or *nous* is pure intelligence.

The concept of intelligence also played a role in Christianity's formulations of the order

of the created world. The presence of angels within this world is a biblical data point, and early

theologians assumed that since angels are placed in contradistinction to humans in biblical

passages, they deserve their own ontological category. The term intelligence came to be

associated with angels who inhabit the heavenly spheres, and who were assumed to be, like

God, purely spiritual, incorporeal beings. Thus, "angels" were often referred to as

"intelligences."

Such a view is illustrated in the early medieval text *The Celestial Hierarchy*, attributed to

Pseudo-Dionysius, which describes the heavenly realm where angels reside as servants to God.

This realm is described as "intelligent" and the angelic creatures who inhabit it as "godlike

intelligences" because such immaterial creatures share with God the attribute of pure mind.[1]

Intelligence thus equates to "purely incorporeal" and "transcendent beings" who operate

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[1] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy*, 147-53.

entirely on intellect.[2] Thomas Aquinas concurred with this description. In *Summa Theologica* he cites Pseudo-Dionysius as his authority for the idea that angels as intelligences are immaterial and incorporeal creatures.[3] He explains that "intelligence cannot be the action of a body, nor of any corporeal faculty."[4] When describing humans, Aquinas attributes to them similar godlike intelligence—godlike in its incorporeality, something distinct from the body: the "intellectual principle" of created human beings is that which is called "mind or intellect," which has, he says, "an operation per se apart from the body."[5]

As these passages illustrate, the intellections of the human mind came to be associated in Christian thought with participation in the divine Intellect, a recognition of some kind of categorical kinship between the intelligence of incorporeal beings and the incorporeal aspect of the human mind, with this incorporeality signifying intellectual capabilities free from the limitations that the body and its senses might bring. Certain early humanist texts of the Renaissance continued to emphasize this connection, in which intellectual capacities of the human mind are valorized as godlike in their ability to transcend the limitations of matter.[6] By the time Descartes formulated his own version of a mind/body dualism, he worked within a

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[2] Pseudo-Dionysius, 148.

[3] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q. 50, A. 2. Aquinas here cites from another of Pseudo-Dionysius's texts, *The Divine Names*, which describes angels in the same manner as what is found in *The Celestial Hierarchy*.

[4] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q. 50, A. 1.

[5] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. Q. 75, A. 2.

[6] For example, in *Five Questions Concerning the Mind*, Marsilio Ficino repeatedly proclaims that the mind and intellect are superior to the senses for the purpose of attaining the human ends of truth and goodness, ends that are themselves depicted as part and parcel of "the boundless God" (201). Pietro Pomponazzi's humanist refutation of Averroistic collectivism in *On the Immortality of the Soul* promotes the human intellect as a "mean" between, on one hand, the highest degree of separation from matter represented by heavenly intelligence and the lowest degree of separation from matter found with sensory powers of the body, an argument which actually represents a shift away from a simple dichotomy between mind and body. Nevertheless, Pomponazzi still takes as a given that "Intelligence," when isolated as a concept, "knows without body" (290): "For Intelligences [i.e., angels] are not the acts of bodies as Intelligences, since in their knowing and desiring they in no wise need a body" (315). See both texts in Cassirer, Kristeller, and Randall, *Renaissance Philosophy of Man*.

Christian theological tradition that privileged the mind over the body as that which was akin to and participated in divine metaphysical realities.

On one hand, the Christian thought-world of nineteenth-century frontier America, with its influences coming from Calvinist theology and internecine Reformed theological debates, might seem to exist at a distance from such medieval and early modern texts, especially those of Pseudo-Dionysius and Renaissance humanism. In terms of the Calvinist inheritances that drove much of the theological discussions of Smith's times, Calvin's low theological anthropology is well-known. He certainly avoided any terminology of "intelligence" in the *Institutes* when describing the human mind and human understanding. While Calvin retains for humans rational capacities as "natural gifts" that were bestowed as part of the creation of humankind, he is clear that such gifts have been corrupted through the Fall of Adam. As for any understanding of "heavenly things," such as a "pure knowledge of God" and "the nature of true righteousness," the human intellect is entirely dependent on God to provide such knowledge.[7] "Human reason," he says, "neither approaches, nor strives toward, nor even takes a straight aim, at this truth."[8] The celebration of the human mind as being akin to God's intelligence has thus disappeared in the strain of Reformed theology that we can attribute as one line of influence on Smith's historical time and place. Smith, for his part, however, readily accepted doctrines that were contrary to Calvinist and Reformed theology when the nature and capabilities of humankind is concerned.

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[7] Calvin, *Institutes*, II.2.12-13.
[8] Calvin, II.2.18

On the other hand, scholars of American religion have noted the prevalence of occult and magical practices, which have strong ties to Neoplatonic and mystical texts, in frontier American communities in general and have specifically traced such practices directly to Joseph Smith and his family.[9] One scholar of Mormonism suggests Pseudo-Dionysius as a potential source for such occult practices as well as other Neoplatonic texts that had also earlier led some of the Renaissance humanists to engage in theurgical practices.[10] There is no direct evidence to conclude that Joseph Smith read and was directly influenced by the texts of medieval and Renaissance theology and mysticism. However, the very presence of the concept of intelligence in his own texts and sermons suggests at least that theological ideas regarding intelligence were circulating in American popular religion.[11] Occult sources may not be necessary to explain this. Mainstream theological lines of thought had held onto the idea that angels are intelligences or, at least, incorporeal creatures,[12] which is, of course, just as likely a theological inheritance for Smith as occult texts.

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[9] For a study of folk magical practices in American religion in general, see David Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Knopf, 1989). For a study of the Smith family's folk magical practices in early Mormonism, see D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998).

[10] Fleming, "Joseph Smith as the Philosopher-King," 109-14.

[11] In *Wrestling the Angel*, Terryl Givens locates a few nineteenth-century sources contemporary to Smith that employ the terminology of "organized intelligences," a term that Smith himself picks up to refer to uncreated human spirits. These sources include a periodical published by a British congregationalist, two Spiritualist periodicals, and a treatise written in defense of Shaker beliefs (160, notes 90-93). The idea of an "organized intelligence" in sources such as these seems to signify the idea of a human spirit that is made up of compound elements, as opposed to the simple Intellect of God's intelligence. For example, in *The New Age, Concordium Gazette, and Temperance Advocate*, a Spiritualist periodical of 1844, the writer depicts the soul in Aristotelian terms as a compound of parts: "Magnetical Science asserts that the will is the moral part of the soul, the mind is the intellectual part, and the energies, or motive power, the third part of the soul; and that these three, as an organized intelligence, are always a triune" (204). Smith's use of the term "organized intelligences" takes on a very different meaning, as it is used as a polemic device against the *ex nihilo* doctrine of creation.

[12] For example, Calvin adheres in the *Institutes* to traditional views regarding the spiritual nature of angels, although he drops the medieval language of intelligence. He takes issue with Pseudo-Dionysius's *Celestial Hierarchy* as a purely speculative work, as well as with others like Aquinas who adhere to such speculations, but he does insist that angels are real creations of God based on their indisputable presence in scriptural narratives

Whatever the source of inheritance, Smith seems to have deployed a long-standing

Christian concept to construct new meanings for his own theological narratives. In terms of

Smith's particular approach to the concept of intelligence, at one level, his use of intelligence as

a doctrinal concept has similarities to how that concept shows up in the earliest Christian

formulations. Early on, Smith links intelligence to the order of the divine realm in which it acts

as a subset of attributes of that realm that together make up divine glory. And even in one of

his more mature theological statements, as we will see shortly, he retains the idea that

intelligence is a form of nonbodily communication with God. But Smith's understanding of

intelligence undergoes development and expansion during his ministry.[13] He comes to

transform the doctrine to refer not only to humans who possess the capacity to participate in

the divine attribute of mind and intellect and who, as such, possess capacities to commune

purely with God. He comes to associate the concept of intelligence as one basis for the idea

that humans are gods-in-embryo, divine beings in their own right, not merely "godlike."

We can trace the development of the doctrine of human intelligences in Smith's

theology through three landmark texts. The first is a revelation recorded in May 1833; the

second is the publication of his "translation" of an ancient Egyptian papyrus, a document titled

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(I.14.4-12). Although he uses the terminology of "ministering spirits" rather than "intelligences" to describe angels, he retains the substance of what it means to be an intelligent creature: "it is certain that spirits," he says, "lack bodily form" (I.14.8). He further describes the angelic host as godlike in the sense that through them the glory of God shines forth (I.14.5). The existence of angels as purely spiritual beings seems not to have been a contentious idea for the Reformers, such that it appears to have gone untouched as a specifically reformed Christian doctrine. Joseph Smith came to reform the idea of angels, however: he defined them as simply resurrected humans, not as an entire order of incorporeal beings different in species from humans, but he did retain a Calvinist use of the term "ministering angels."

[13] This development of the doctrine of intelligence is perhaps related to a shift in Smith's metaphysical thought generally, which LDS scholars have noted taking place about five years after he organized the Church. In "Idea of Pre-Existence," Ostler sees this shift in terms of Smith's changing metaphysics regarding his understanding of the nature of God and humankind. In "Reconstruction," Alexander also notes this shift Smith's thought.

in LDS publications as the Book of Abraham; and the third is a funeral sermon given just weeks before his death. This development and expansion of Smith's theological anthropology has roots in his scriptural hermeneutics, through which he eventually arrives as a method of analogy between God the Father and humanity to show a parallelism in life trajectory between human souls and God the Father, with Christ serving as the middle hinge between the two. As we will see with his use of the Bible as warrant for his teachings, Smith did not create his unique doctrine of human nature whole cloth entirely from his imagination. He seems to draw almost exclusively from his own interpretations of Biblical passages.

May 1833 Revelation

The revelation given in May 1833 explicitly establishes a pre-mortal existence for the human spirit.[14] But it does not unambiguously establish the human spirit as a self-existent, necessary substance known as intelligence, notwithstanding how common such an interpretation is for LDS theologians. Rather, the revelation provides an early window into what the concept of intelligence meant for Smith as such, not yet definitively linked to humans. The revelation comes at a time in Smith's theological development in which we see him working out a narrative of the pre-existence based in part on the biblical passages that told a historical story of how Lucifer, before the creation of the earth, rebelled against God in an effort to usurp God's power and glory, and was consequently cast out of heaven and became the devil, tempter of humankind.[15] In its later rendition, Smith's version of this narrative depicts a large

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[14] *Doctrine and Covenants* (1835), 210-213. In the 1835 edition, this revelation was numbered as section 82. It is numbered as section 93 in current edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants*. All further citations of this text in this section will be taken from the 1835 edition and will be cited as D&C.

[15] For this narrative, Smith seems to draw, like most of his Christian contemporaries, on the King James Version of Isaiah 14:12-15: "How are thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the

gathering designated as a heavenly council where God the Father presents to human spirits a plan for mortal life on earth which will enable them, through their wise use of agency, to work toward their own exaltation. At this council, the Father seeks to have a representative for him on earth where the drama of his plan will be played out, and we see two prominent beings among the spirits, presumably the Son and Satan, battling out who is going to be the Father's representative.[16]

The revelation of May 1833 does not describe war in the pre-existence, as other revelations of this time depict; instead, it emphasizes the qualities of the glory that obtained in the presence of the Father and Son. However, many of the same narrative elements are still here: the setting of pre-earth life; an offer to humans to obtain salvation and glory; the agency of man invoked as a choice between options, with the devil as a being who seeks to threaten the good use of such agency.

The May 1833 revelation also echoes the language of the first chapter of the Gospel of John as it describes, first, who was there "in the beginning" and, second, the light and glory that permeate this pre-mortal realm. Like the Johannine passage, the Son is there "in the beginning" with the Father; but unlike that biblical passage, humans are there as well. Because humans are there in the beginning, they are exposed to the light, truth, and glory of both the Father and the

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ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou has said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit." The war in heaven described in the Book of Revelation 12:7-9 is another obvious reference. All biblical references in this chapter are to the King James Version (KJV) because that was the version that Smith was using, and, thus, its particular wording is important to Smith's interpretations. For other early Smithian texts that touch on the theme of a war in heaven, see *The Book of Mormon*, 2 Nephi 2:17; Moses 4:1-4; D&C 29:36-39 and D&C 76:25-29.
[16] A somewhat cryptic version of this same narrative of a council in heaven that led to Satan's rebellion is found in Abraham 3:22-28, a somewhat later Smithian text.

Son.[17] The main drama of the revelation is the preaching of the gospel of Christ in this pre-existent realm to human spirits, with the glorified Son promising his human interlocutors that as he has become eligible to receive the fulness of glory from the Father through his own effort and progression of merit as the man Jesus, so they can progress through the same "grace for grace" with the same result, to receive a fulness of glory.[18] This promise is what constitutes the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus is named the Word in the beginning because he preached this gospel to all those who were present and eligible for such advancement.[19]

The setting for such preaching is a glory-filled realm, alive with light, truth, and intelligence. It's as if light, truth, and intelligence are original, self-existent elements that make up the compound glory—glory's atomic particles, as it were, part of the very structure of cosmological being. Truth and intelligence specifically are cast as twin attributes, both uncreated entities with some kind of agency. As such, they are personified: "All truth is

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[17] In a revelation recorded six months earlier, Smith groups similar attributes together: "All beings who abide not in these conditions, are not justified; for intelligence cleaveth unto intelligence; wisdom receiveth wisdom; truth embraceth truth; virtue loveth virtue; light cleaveth to light" (D&C, 102). This December 1832 revelation contains the earliest use of the word "intelligence," and like the revelation of May 1833, it does not designate intelligence as a feature of human ontology but as part of the broader constellation of conditions or attributes that obtain in a kingdom of the highest order, where such attributes are subject to a law of like-with-like attraction.

[18] D&C, 211. The chronology might be confusing in terms of the Son's state of glory. The revelation is set in a pre-existent realm with the Son described as a glorified being, yet it describes a *later* instance when the Son as incarnated Jesus earns his glory, marked by the event of his baptism. So in effect the Son is describing the event of his incarnate self receiving the fulness of glory before it actually happens, all while existing as a fully glorified being. The main point for the text, however, seems to be that as Jesus earned his glory, so may humans once they too are incarnate on the earth. B.H. Roberts tries to offer some clarification of how Smith might have thought about the chronology of Jesus Christ's glory by citing further passages of the Gospel of John, for instance John 17:5 in which Jesus in Gethsemane says to the Father, "glorify Thou me with Thine own self, with that same glory that I had with Thee before the world was." See Roberts, *Truth, Way, Life,* 276-78.

[19] Smith's "translation" of the Gospel of John changes that Gospel's first verse to read, "In the beginning was the gospel preached through the Son. And the gospel was the word, and the word was with the Son, and the Son was with God, and the Son was of God." See an early manuscript on the Joseph Smith Papers website: New Testament Revision 2 (second numbering), p. 105 (second numbering), The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 25, 2024, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/new-testament-revision-2/164#full-transcript

independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also, otherwise there is no existence."[20]

Truth, intelligence, and light are also presented as correlates to a certain type of divine knowing: that which illuminates the truth of reality. We see this conceptual relationship through a series of definitions. First, intelligence is defined as the "light of truth."[21] Second, the glory of God is defined as intelligence, which is then further defined as "light *and* truth."[22] Thus, intelligence and truth are conceptually intertwined as images of enlightenment. The definition of truth provided by the Son, then, helps to further elucidate the meaning of intelligence: truth is "knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come," a sort of knowledge of metaphysical reality that encompasses all of time (i.e., the present, past, and future).[23] This knowledge of reality is a divine-like intellection as inner illumination regarding the most fundamental aspects of existence. Although the light of truth is presented as something sensorily palpable in this glory-filled setting, the kind of truth and intelligence depicted here correlate most closely to modes of the mind, a cosmic thinking that sees into the very structure of being.

Human spirits, by virtue of being present in this pre-existent realm, witness and experience this glory, along with all of its attribute elements. They are called by the Son to accept the challenge to receive such glory for themselves through obedience to God's commandments. The human spirits as agentive beings are responsible for their own reception

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[20] D&C, 211-12.
[21] D&C, 211.
[22] D&C, 212 (my emphasis).
[23] D&C, 211.

of such truth, light, and intelligence and are condemned if they use their agency to reject such things.[24] But if they are indeed obedient, they are presented with the possibility of partaking of divine glory as epistemological power, the kind of knowledge and intelligence God possesses. John is depicted as providing the formula for how a human might be glorified: "He that keepeth his [God's] commandments, receiveth truth and light, until he is *glorified in truth, and knoweth all things*."[25]

Thus, the attainment of the ultimate kind of knowledge, that is, insight into reality, is specifically tethered to an obedient religious life, with the implication that human agentive action is a means to expand the epistemological capacities and power of the human spirit as it makes its way along a course of action parallel to the divine Son. This epistemological meaning of intelligence is something that Smith retains even as he later more explicitly equates intelligence as a precise descriptor of the pre-existent human spirit. It is in this sense that his later "intelligences" are named such because they are, ontologically, such epistemological beings. Thus, a certain spiritual light, truth, and glory, along with a divine-like capacity to see into reality, is what encompasses the concept of intelligence for Smith at this early stage.

In this conception of intelligence, Smith exhibits a few traces of the theological inheritances of the concept within Christianity, as well as some significant departures. Pseudo-Dionysius draws from the Gospel of John, as does Smith, to picture a pre-existent world, and both employ light imagery to describe both the setting of heaven and the Word of God. Since

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[24] The revelation states, "Behold here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the light" (212).
[25] D&C, 211 (my emphasis).

this is a heavenly realm where God resides, in both texts it is pulsing with divine glory, which

such light imagery is meant to convey. Like Pseudo-Dionysius, intellection plays an important

role in Smith's idea of pre-existent glory, although for Smith not in terms of God being depicted

as some kind of simple Intellect entirely free of material elements.[26] Still, the correlate

epistemological attributes to glory, intelligence and truth, are located in heaven in Smith's

version, as with Pseudo-Dionysius. However, rather than that which signifies mere qualities of

creatures who are pure mind, Smith personifies intelligence and truth as agentive elements in

their own right, with the ability to act independently in their proper sphere. Smith describes

these heavenly attributes as uncreated, a characteristic of the divine realm that Christianity

traditionally takes for granted. But, significantly, while a heavenly host is present with God in

both Pseudo-Dionysius' and Smith's heavenly realm, it is human spirits that make up Smith's

host, not the angelic intelligences found in *The Celestial Hierarchy*, who are of an entirely

different order from humans.

Smith's later narratives of the pre-existence seem to swap out *angelic* intelligences for

specifically *human* intelligences as the heavenly host. However, as of May 1833, Smith's text

does not entirely support such a swap in terms of categorizing humans specifically as

intelligences. Indeed, a common interpretation of the revelation in current LDS thought is that

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[26] The revelation makes somewhat obscure comments regarding God as a spiritual versus a material being. God the Father and the Son are named as the "Spirit of truth" (the Son is so named repeatedly), with the capitalization of "Spirit" designating persons rather than the idea of spirit as just a mood. It is unclear if Smith at this time understands spirit as he later does, as fine matter, but this May 1833 revelation does suggest that God's body is of a material elemental sort: "The elements are eternal . . . The elements are the tabernacle of God; yea, man is the tabernacle of God" (212). In any case, the revelation is devoid of any language that suggests God is nothing but pure mind.

it does designate intelligence as an attribute assigned to humans. The main interpretive sticking

point is the following ambiguous passage:

> Man was also in the beginning with God. 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. Behold here is the agency of man . . .[27]

Although this passage does not specifically state that man is precisely *an* intelligence in the way

that Pseudo-Dionysius clearly designates angels as intelligences, some LDS scholars have made

that connection through the syntactical relationship of the words in this passage. They link the

terms "intelligence" and "light of truth" back to "man" as an indication of human attributes,

since the subject "man" is directly followed by the subject "intelligence" in the progression of

the first two sentences. In this reading, intelligence describes some feature, although still

ambiguous, of the human spirit: the human spirit as intelligence is an uncreated entity that is in

some fashion an independent and agentive being who acts where God has placed it. However,

it seems the most we can say about the passage is that "intelligence" and "light of truth" are

uncreated aspects of the world that are personified as agentive, and that God has power to

place them in appropriate spheres.[28]

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[27] D&C, 211-2.

[28] For a sampling of LDS scholars who interpret the passage as designating intelligence as an attribute of humans and thus as humans themselves in terms of an uncreated, self-existent entity, see Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 52-3, 154; McMurrin, *Theological Foundations*, 50; Roberts, *Truth, Way, Life*, 279, 281-284; Madsen, *Eternal Man*, 11, 49; Hale, "Origin of the Human Spirit," 117; and Godfrey, "History of Intelligence," 3. Some scholars recognize the ambiguity in this passage. For example, Harrell does not see this revelation conclusively describing a self-existent human entity through the concept of intelligence but states that intelligence is primarily linked to the glory of God. However, he claims that many early Saints came to understand intelligence as the "spirit in man," a "conscious, quickening principle in man" and thus did not distinguish between God's glory as intelligence and intelligence as man's spirit. See Harrell, "Doctrine of Pre-Existence, 82-3.

On the other hand, Alexander believes the tendency in contemporary LDS thought to interpret "intelligence" in this passage to mean "essential uncreated essence of each person" is not justified. Like Harrell, he claims that LDS readers in Smith's time would have understood this revelation in more traditionally Protestant terms, which would connect the concept of intelligence with God's truth and glory ("Reconstruction," 27, note 23).

Most LDS interpreters of the passage end the quote as I have above, with the sentence: "Behold here is the agency of man," suggesting that "here" refers back to the concept of intelligence. But "the agency of man" is actually part of a compound structure of the following sentence: "Behold here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man because that which was from the beginning I plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the light."[29] The "agency of man" thus actually seems to refer to the capacity of humans to accept or reject the light, truth, and intelligence they were exposed to in the very beginnings of time, not to some uncreated human spiritual being on par with God the Father. My interpretation best explains why this passage emphasizes the potential for human condemnation, and for the exhortations to obedience to God's commands. It has a strong conceptual connection to the idea that humans follow the same "grace for grace" progression that the incarnated Son followed, with the end for both being to obtain the glory of the Father. The Son has already achieved this glory, as witnessed in John's vision, and humans may achieve it as well if they accept the light, truth, and intelligence offered to them—even experienced by them—in the pre-mortal world by remaining obedient to divine commandments.

According to my reading, this revelation in itself does not definitively establish the content of what could be called a classically liberal, foundationalist subject. But considering LDS theologians have interpreted its concept of intelligence, in conjunction with the later texts, as

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Ostler also denies that the term "intelligence" in this revelation implies a "self-existing entity" but instead is a word to denote knowledge. However, Ostler offers an even further nuanced view. He argues that this revelation describes an "ideal pre-existence" that is located in God's mind through the mechanism of foreknowledge and is thus an existence that is "ontologically mind-dependent" and as such is not for Smith a "real" pre-existence. See Ostler, "Idea of Pre-Existence," 60-1. Ostler borrows the distinction between "ideal" and "real" pre-existence from Adolph Harnack, "Conception of Pre-existence," 318-19. Alexander suggests a similar interpretation, that the revelation describes an intellectual or conceptual creation in God's mind ("Reconstruction," 27, note 23).
[29] D&C, 212.

designating human spirits, this text has become an historically important warrant for

Mormonism's foundationalist theological anthropology. It establishes at least three

anthropological points. First, it establishes a pre-existent origin for the human spirit, an origin

that will come to be linked in LDS thought to an idea of a permanent selfhood from which one

might decipher a "real" or "authentic" sense of self. Second, this text also establishes

intelligence as a cosmological entity associated with mind and knowledge. Third, it provides a

dim view of the idea that humans and divine beings exist on a spectrum within the same

speciality, that the human is not an Other to the glorified Father and Son but possesses in some

capacity the same propensity for glory as divine beings. The revelation thus illustrates Smith's

basic hermeneutic impulse to establish parallelism between the human story and the divine

story as grounded in scripture narratives, although the parallelism of speciality that Smith later

draws between humans and God the Father is not quite explicit yet.

It seems that at this point in Smith's thought, he merely had the seeds in mind for what

became his later more definitive anthropological teachings, and he was merely dropping those

seeds here in their ungerminated state. The nature of revelatory statements is that they are

understood to be pronouncements from God—and in this case specifically, a pronouncement

on deep cosmological mysteries. They are not logical propositions meant to be consistent with

a systematized body of thought. Smith never engaged in the latter; he was prone to merely sow

seeds. The next "seed" Smith drops in terms of his still-developing theological anthropology will

be to explicitly link the concept of intelligence with human spirits by designating such spirits as

"intelligences." The "s" on the end of the word is a significant theological development for his

anthropology.

The Book of Abraham

In the summer of 1835, while the Saints lived in Kirtland, Ohio, Joseph Smith and his associates purchased a collection of ancient Egyptian artifacts from a Michael Chandler, who was exhibiting the artifacts with the intent of selling them.[30] The papyri that were included in these artifacts acted as a sort of revelatory catalyst for Smith to produce what he claimed to be a fragment from the writings of the Hebrew patriarch Abraham.[31] The text that Smith produced was not published immediately but nevertheless seems to have been important for his developing theology during the late 1830s and early 1840s. The text was eventually published in March 1842 in the *Times and Seasons*, the Church's newspaper during the Nauvoo, Illinois period.[32] It is the first published instance of the use of "intelligence*s*" to designate human spirits, although Smith used the plural "intelligences" in a sermon a year earlier.[33]

The Book of Abraham takes as its jumping off point the narrative of Abraham as told in Genesis 11 and 12, where he leaves his homeland Ur in order to settle in the lands of Canaan.[34]

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[30] For historical context to the papyri and other artifacts, see a historical introduction at the Joseph Smith Papers project: https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/introduction-to-egyptian-papyri-circa-300-100-bc/1

[31] The Book of Abraham is a controversial text within Mormon Studies. Contrary to Smith's claims, the papyri fragments have been deemed by Egyptologists to be common funerary texts dating to 300-100 BCE. However, the texts are still considered to be canonical "translations" within the LDS Church. Some devotional scholars invoke a "catalyst theory" to describe the papyri as material artifacts that serve as a sort of jumping off point for revelations into the visionary experiences of Abraham. For those who promote this theory, the issue of whether the Book of Abraham text matches up with the content of the existing papyri fragments is less important than the religious content of Smith's text. The most recent LDS apology of the Book Abraham is Gee, *Introduction to the Book of Abraham*. For an academic appraisal from a non-LDS Egyptologist, see Ritner, *Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri*, as well as Ritner's essay "Historicity of the Book of Abraham," a document in the University of Chicago's Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures online archives, at https://isac.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/shared/docs/Research_Archives/Translation%20and%20Historicity%20of%20the%20Book%20of%20Abraham%20final-2.pdf

[32] These excerpts from the papyri translation later came to be canonized in LDS scripture as the Book of Abraham in *The Pearl of Great Price*, a compilation of various doctrinally rich texts that Smith produced during his short life.

[33] The sermon was given on March 28, 1841. See Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 111.

[34] The March 1842 version of the text conforms to the Genesis usage of the name "Abram" in the portion published in the March 1 issue of the *Times and Seasons*, but switches to "Abraham" in the portions published in

Because of famine in Canaan, Abraham travels to Egypt. In Smith's narrative, just as Abraham

and his wife Sarai approach Egypt, Abraham has a visionary encounter with God through the

Urim and Thummim, which, Abraham tells us, was given to him by God before he left Ur.[35] In

this vision, God opens up a view of the expanse of the universe in which the "works which

[God's] hand had made" are on display.[36] Abraham sees these many works, which are

multiplied before his eyes such that he could not see the end of God's creations. God promises

Abraham that his progeny will likewise be multiplied, "thy seed after thee, like unto these," the

number of his "seeds" will be like the number of sands.[37] But the main thrust of the vision is

less about such echoes of the Abrahamic covenant per se than about illustrating how the

multitudinous works of God's hands are ordered in the universe. The Abrahamic covenant is

made sense of by being placed in the context of such an ordering of the universe.

In the vision, Abraham sees many stars as planets aligned in the heavens, which are

ordered according to their nearness to the throne of God. The "great ones" and thus "the

governing ones" are nearest to the throne of God.[38] The star planet Kolob is the nearest to

God's throne and is thereby set to govern all the others that are of the same order as itself,

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the March 15 issue. Sarai's name is retained throughout. The most current edition of the Book of Abraham uses the name "Abraham" throughout.

[35] Urim and Thummim are mentioned in Exodus 28 in connection with Aaron's breastplate. Seer objects, most notably stones, that facilitate visions and revelations from God are invoked repeatedly by Smith throughout the early years of his ministry, variously called Urim and Thummim, interpreters, peep stones, spectacles, and such other terms. Smith claimed to have personally received two stones which he called the Urim and Thummim from an angel as a tool to help him translate the *Book of Mormon*. See an account, written between 1839-1841 and told through Smith's first-person voice, of his visions and experiences in writing the *Book of Mormon* at https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-june-1839-circa-1841-draft-2/2. A canonized version of this narrative is found in the most recent edition of *The Pearl of Great Price*. For an examination of the relationship between Smith's use of seer stones and his early involvement in folk magical practices, see Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 48-52, 131.

[36] "Book of Abraham," 719.

[37] "Book of Abraham," 720.

[38] "Book of Abraham," 719.

including the earth. The image of time reckoning, in terms of the revolutions of the planets, is

used to further illustrate how the "great ones" that govern are in sync with the Lord: one

revolution or day of the Lord's time is one thousand years of the earth's reckoning.[39] The star

planets associated with God, such as Kolob, revolve more slowly, while those further away,

such as the earth, revolve comparatively faster.

These planets are also visibly stacked according to their status to the throne of God. For

example, the Lord tells Abraham that the moon, which is a "lesser light" than the sun, is still a

greater light than the earth in terms of reckoning (i.e., the moon moves more slowly than the

earth). That the moon is a greater planet than the earth is appropriate, Abraham is told,

because it stands "above" the earth.[40] The alignment of these planets as greater or lesser

according to their proximity to the throne of God illustrates an important fact of the universe: it

is ordered in a hierarchical structure, with certain entities that exist "above" certain others

whose attributes align more closely with the throne of God the closer they are to that throne.

Those that are in closer proximity to God's throne are also those that govern over the others

that are of the same order.

In this setting of a star-filled cosmos of hierarchical worlds, Abraham is further shown

the pre-existent realm in which human spirits reside in the midst of God. As star planets are

ordered one above the other, so too spirits are ordered according to their intelligence: "These

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[39] This time reckoning is an obvious reference to 2 Peter 3:8 (KJV): "Be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." It is one more illustration of, first, how deeply immersed Smith was in a biblical mental world and, second, how literally he read the biblical text. Note that this time reckoning in the Book of Abraham is associated with a pre-existent realm rather than with a millennial eschaton; however, the early Saints were immersed in a pre-millennialist worldview. See Grant Underwood, *Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 1993).
[40] "Book of Abraham," 719.

two facts do exist, that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other." But in this universe there will always be a supreme great one that stands above all spirits, regardless of their relative positions to each other based on their level of intelligence. They are ultimately ruled over by the one with the highest intelligence of them all: "there shall be another more intelligent than they: I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all."[41] That spirits are ranked according to intelligence seems to be a feature of the vision in order to make two points: first, to show that a certain ranking among spirits is a given within a universe that operates fundamentally according to hierarchy; second, and primarily, to illustrate God's supremacy over all that is. The relative ranking of spirits according to intelligence is subordinated to God's highest position over them all. The vision is thereby concerned to reveal the greatness and power of God.

Yet the vision does reveal something of the drama of human souls. First, the text refers to pre-existent spirits specifically as "intelligences," in the sense of persons rather than intelligence understood as an attribute of glory that characterizes the divine realm. The concept "intelligence" is used here as a sort of personified synecdoche to designate pre-existent beings who possess the attribute of intelligence. Against the backdrop of traditional Christian stories of heavenly realms, human *intelligences*, not just human spirits as in May 1833, entirely replace angel intelligences.

Second, the text makes clear that all intelligences are equally eternal in the sense that they have no beginning and no end, they all "existed before" and they "shall exist after,"

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[41] "Book of Abraham," 720.

regardless of their quantitative status of intelligence.[42] Such a statement regarding the nature

of human spirits allows us to connect some conceptual dots from May 1833. According to that

earlier revelation, intelligence is characterized as that which is "not created or made, neither

indeed can be." Humans themselves, now as intelligences, with no beginning and no end, can

thus be conceptualized as uncreated beings.[43] Accordingly, humans possess the same

everlasting quality as all elements, as the May 1833 revelation had established by claiming that

"the elements are eternal."[44] While in May 1833, human spirits are not explicitly categorized

along with eternal elements and uncreated intelligence, now in Abraham's vision, human spirits

are as everlasting in their ontological existence as the material elements that God organizes to

create the world. They exist in as necessary a state as those material elements.

In terms of the distinction of the terminology here, *intelligence* is still primarily an

epistemological attribute that obtains in the divine realm, while *intelligences* points to the pre-

existent human spirits who possess this attribute.[45] *Intelligence* further designates the attribute

that hierarchically ranks human *intelligences*: Abraham is shown "the intelligences that were

organized before the world was," among which are "many . . . noble and great [souls]."[46] God

stands among these intelligent souls, himself the highest and greatest intelligence of them all.

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[42] "Book of Abraham," 720.

[43] Even angels as intelligences have traditionally been taken to be created beings. Uncreated and everlasting human intelligences who serve as the host of heaven is a unique theological idea in the context of Christianity.

[44] D&C, 212.

[45] The term *intelligences* is actually used somewhat ambiguously in Abraham's vision. It is used as a synonym to spirits, such that intelligences and spirits are designating the same thing: pre-existent human souls. But the planets and worlds Abraham is shown may possibly be included when God refers to "all the intelligences thine eyes have seen" (720), especially since the planets are described as capable of ruling and governing and thus as agentive entities for whom the characterization of intelligence from May 1833 is not out of place.

[46] "Book of Abraham," 720.

To support such a hierarchical view of human spirits, Abraham's vision makes similar connections as that found in 1833 between agency, obedience, intelligence, and glory. "Man's agency" in 1833 is described as that which might land humans in a precarious situation, with the possibility that human spirits won't be obedient, that they will be led away by the "evil one." When in Abraham's vision the pre-existent Christ speaks about proving all spirits "to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them," he invokes the same narrative of human spirits found in 1833, but this time introducing the idea of glory as multitiered. Those who "keep their first estate," that is, those who are obedient in the pre-existent realm, "shall be added upon" with a certain degree of glory as they move into the "second estate," which is mortality. Those who "keep their second estate" will have "glory added upon their heads forever and ever" in the realm of post-mortality. On the flip side, Christ warns, those who do not keep their first estate will not receive "glory in the same kingdom" as those who do.[47]

What the intelligences in Abraham's vision do with their agency thus determines their ranking in terms of possessing either more or less of the attribute intelligence. Greater intelligence is achieved through greater obedience. The greater the intelligence, the higher the degree of glorified existence an intelligence can attain. Abraham is the paradigm example of this formulation. He is described as a spirit who is "more intelligent" than other spirits specifically because he holds the status as a "noble and great" one, and his status as a "noble and great" one is presumably the result of his greater ability to "keep his first estate," for which he is rewarded in mortality with a measure of glory. By virtue of this initial reward of glory,

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[47] "Book of Abraham," 720.

Abraham brings to mortality certain qualities that make him worthy of the covenant God makes with him there. His great faith and obedience to God in mortality is thereby linked to his pre-mortal righteousness; his position as a great patriarch in mortality is made sense of through his greater intelligence in the pre-existence. Through him, the text offers an explanation of the concept of foreordination of human spirits, not in terms of an arbitrary decree of God's will but as a concrete reward for obedient pre-mortal acts. Hence, while intelligence is developed through righteous use of agency, it is also its reward.

For most of Smith's contemporary colleagues as well as later expositors of his texts, the most important development to come out of the Book of Abraham in terms of a theological anthropology is the idea that human spirits may be designated generally as intelligences. When these expositors combine this development with the parameters of the concept of intelligence as set forth in May 1833, they understand human intelligences to be in some measure possessed of divine-like attributes that ensure their capacity for a glorified existence: they are everlasting and uncreated, and they possess the ability to act independently within the order or sphere they have been placed by God. As such, they use these texts as evidence for the claim that the nature of God and humans, rather than existing on either side of an unbridgeable chasm, are in fact of the same species, endowed fundamentally with the same capacities, even if God's nature has realized a fullness of glory while humans are only to become such.

Up to this point, the Book of Abraham and the May 1833 revelation together serve as the basis for LDS theological claims that humans possess some kind of core, foundational personhood by virtue of their status as eternal, uncreated spirits. While in one sense the concept of *intelligences* here describes a community of spirits all headed by the Father God,

and as such, describes spirits who are subjected to social mechanisms of formation, it also

works to designate humans as discrete, self-existent entities in their own right by virtue of their

uncreated status. Whatever is left ambiguous in this latter regard, Smith attempts to state

more clearly in a funeral sermon he preached a couple of months before his death.

The King Follett Sermon

Most scholars of Joseph Smith's thought agree that in one particular sermon, given just

a few months before his death, we may find a distillation of the most innovative features of his

teachings in one place. This is known as the King Follett sermon, so called after the name of a

Latter-day Saint who had recently died.[48] Smith intended his remarks concerning the origins,

nature, and destiny of humankind to be a source of comfort to those who were grieving. In this

sermon we see Smith offer a unique narrative of God the Father's status and experience in the

primordial depths of pre-existent antiquity. Smith bases this narrative on a profound literalist

interpretation of biblical passages that depict Jesus Christ and God the Father as being one. For

Smith, this unity between the persons of the Godhead denotes a oneness not only in nature but

in experiential trajectory. From there, Smith pivots to include humankind in such experiential

oneness, such that God and humans are described as existing on the same divine-human

spectrum.

As the King Follett sermon revisits the pre-existence, it begins with a slightly different

entry point on the nature of beings in that realm than what we have seen so far. Smith begins

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[48] We have four extant versions of the King Follett sermon that were written down by men who were in attendance on the day it was given. The sermon itself was not published in Smith's lifetime, since he was killed only a short time later, but early amalgamated versions were published, with the first appearing in August of 1844. I am relying on the amalgamated text compiled by Stan Larson. To see each of the four versions separately, consult Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 397-408.

with the question, "What kind of a being was God in the beginning?" Smith's conclusion,

derived from his biblical hermeneutics, is that God was once a man: in "person, image, and

fashion . . . [the] very form of a man."[49] Smith takes his hermeneutical point of departure from

biblical parallels between Christ and God the Father, such as John 5:26, which Smith

paraphrases in the sermon by having Christ say, "As the Father has power in Himself, even so

has the Son power *in himself*."[50] Christ in effect is here saying, What you see me do, the Father

did also. Smith interprets similar biblical passages, like John 5:19-20, to conclude that not only

are the Father and the Son the same *kind* of beings, but they *do* the same kinds of things in the

most literal sense.[51]

Of course, Christians of the time read such passages with vaguely similar conclusions

regarding a oneness shared between divine Father and Son, but the implications seem to be

much different for Smith. The sameness between God and Christ here does not refer to a

Trinitarian understanding of persons of the Godhead who are same in substance. Neither does

it refer to a modalistic God in which the two persons are the same God but with different

modes or personas.[52] Now, in Smith's mature theological development, this biblical parallelism

between Father and Son refers to two ontologically separate persons who are one in purpose,

but with the added element that the Father and Son have the same material make-up, similar

life experiences, and the same life trajectories as Gods.

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[49] Larson, "King Follett," 200.

[50] Larson, 201 (original emphasis). John 5:26 (KJV) reads: "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself."

[51] John 5:19-20 (KJV): "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father . . . sheweth him all things that himself doeth."

[52] Although the earlier Smith might have seen it this way. See Vogel's claims for Smith's modalist theology as found in the *Book of Mormon* in his biography, *Making of a Prophet*, 149-153.

In fact, according to Smith, God the Father once died and then took up his body in resurrection, as did Jesus. Smith promises that he will "show it from the Bible" that his paraphrase of John 5:26—"as the Father has power in Himself, even so has the Son power *in himself*" to do "what the Father did"—is evidence that as Jesus had laid down his life and then raised it up again, the Father had done the same. "Jesus, what are you going to do?" Smith as Christ's interlocutor asks. The answer Smith puts in Christ's mouth suggests God the Father's life experience parallels that of Jesus: "To lay down my life as my Father laid down His body that I might take it up again."[53] Smith continues with Christ's response to explain how Christ is merely treading the same path as the Father: "I do the *same* things I saw my Father do when worlds came rolling into existence. . . . I saw the Father work out His kingdom with fear and trembling and I am doing the same, *too*."[54]

According to Smith, this working out of a kingdom is what all Gods must do. They must seek to achieve an inheritance of "glory, powers, and exaltation until [they] ascend a throne of eternal power *and arrive at the station of a God*."[55] The process to arrive at this station is cast in terms of a hierarchical structure of divine progression. As one lower god achieves his exaltation and god-status, the god above is bumped up into a "higher exaltation." The lower god takes the place of the higher god, and the status the lower god obtains adds further exaltation and glory to the higher god. This process is what has taken place with God the Father in relation to Jesus Christ. God the Father in some distant past, worked out his own kingdom

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[53] Such language suggests that God the Father not only is a resurrected human being like Jesus, but that, like Jesus, he also served as a savior in a different world.

[54] Larson, "King Follett," 201 (original emphasis).

[55] Larson, 201 (original emphasis).

and arrived at the status of God. Christ is now engaging in the same god-formation and will give

the kingdom he obtains to the Father, and this kingdom "will exalt [the Father's] glory." "When

I get my kingdom," Smith's Christ declares, "I will give it to the Father and it will *add to and*

exalt His glory. *He will take a higher exaltation and I will take His place and am also exalted*, so

that He obtains kingdom rolling upon kingdom."[56]

Such a view of God the Father and Jesus Christ has a direct bearing on the divine nature

and destiny of humankind, for the parallelism Smith draws between the Father and Son is not

limited to a divine dyad but is extended to a threefold parallelism that includes humankind.

When those humans for whom Jesus Christ serves as God attain their own exaltation, they will

add to Christ's exaltation, and on down the line: the human-gods will then receive added glory

from those for whom they serve as gods.

To establish a parallelism between humans and God the Father, Smith begins the

sermon by connecting an understanding of God with an understanding of humankind that on

the surface sounds like Calvin's beginning to the *Institutes*. Calvin had stated, "Nearly all the

wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the

knowledge of God and of ourselves."[57] He goes on to say, "man never achieves a clear

knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from

contemplating him to scrutinize himself."[58] Smith seems to concur with such sentiments by

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[56] Larson, 201 (original emphasis).
[57] Calvin, *Institutes*, 35.
[58] Calvin, 37.

asserting that if one does not "comprehend the character of God," one does not comprehend one's own character.[59]

However, Smith's interpretation of the meaning of this coupling between God and humankind is the opposite from Calvin's. For Calvin, knowing and contemplating God will lead to a recognition of utter human dependency on God for all gifts and abilities, and to the insight of human "ignorance, vanity, poverty, infirmity, and—what is more—depravity and corruption."[60] Although Smith's *Book of Mormon* had earlier made use of a few similar Calvinistic terms and concepts to describe human nature,[61] by the time of the King Follet sermon, Smith decidedly asserts that to know the attributes and capacities of God is to know the same about humankind, since human nature exists in a relationship of sameness, not opposition, to the divine. Smith consciously sets himself against Calvinistic theological anthropology in an attempt to tell a more "noble" narrative of the "character of man."[62]

Smith seems to derive this sameness between God and humans from passages in the Bible which say that humans, Christ, and the Father are one.[63] Such passages are taken to mean by Smith that both Christ and God the Father are archetypes for human experience and potentiality. If humans can be one with Christ in human experience, material embodiment, and divine trajectory, and Christ is at the same time one with the Father in the same kind of

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[59] Larson, "King Follett," 199.

[60] Calvin, *Institutes*, 36.

[61] For example: "all men that are in a state of nature, or I would say, in a carnal state, are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity; they are without God in the world, and they have gone contrary to the nature of God" (Alma 41:11); "all mankind . . . had become carnal, sensual, devilish by nature" (Alma 42: 9-10); "because of the fall our natures have become evil continually" (Ether 3:2).

[62] Larson, "King Follet," 203.

[63] For example, John 14:20: "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you" or John 17:21-23: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one."

experience and life history, then it seems to follow for Smith that the Father and humankind

exist in the same isomorphic relationship regarding experience, embodiment, and the status of

Godship. If "God Himself who sits enthroned in yonder heavens is a Man like unto one of

yourselves," Smith declares, then humans will "inherit *and enjoy* the same glory, powers, and

exaltation until [they] ascend a throne of eternal power *and arrive at the station of a God*, the

same as those who have gone before."[64]

"Those who have gone before" designates God the Father and Jesus Christ, who have

now arrived at the status of Godhood because they successfully worked their way through

human life experiences to divine exaltation. Christ thus serves as the hinge that connects what

both God is (an exalted man) and what humans have the potential to become (an exalted God).

This is Smith's most mature understanding of exaltation and glory: humans have got to learn

how to make themselves gods, the same as Jesus Christ the man and as God the man have

themselves learned.[65]

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[64] Larson, "King Follett," 200-201 (original emphasis).

[65] Smith speaks of these godlike capacities ambiguously when it comes to gender. He and his colleagues use gendered language in the way that most people of their time did, such that the word "man" is used to designate humans as a general category, much like gender-conscious people today would use the term "humankind." Some readers see his use of the gender-neutral terms "spirits" and "intelligences" in the Book of Abraham as designating a pre-existent realm that included both men and women. However, when he speaks of the rewards for those who experience the expansion of intelligence that comes from experiences with divine light and knowledge, he and his colleagues often shift to an androcentric register, speaking in terms of priesthood and kingship. For example, when Smith states in King Follet that the key to eternal life for humankind is to "learn how to make yourselves Gods," he clarifies by adding, to be "*kings and priests* to God, the same as all Gods have done" (201, my emphasis). This raises the question of what status women held in Smith's teachings regarding their position and capacities in the next life, that is, their status regarding exaltation. On one hand, Smith privately taught and practiced polygamy, and the one revelation that makes a gesture to explain it speaks of women as something which Smith, as polygamist patriarch who is building his own heavenly dominion, *receives* from God, the same as Abraham was to gather children, wives, lands, and other marks of prosperity because of the covenant God made to bless him (D&C 132:55-57). This kind of approach to post-mortal kingdom-building promised to obedient servants of God seems to suggest that men are primarily those who will be exalted and certainly are those who will have dominion, while women will act as consorts to such men. It seems to be in this sense of a relationship of consort, rather than embryonic god-intelligences in their own right, that the temple ceremonies Smith introduced during the Nauvoo period are best understood when they name a woman as "a Queen and Priestess *unto her Husband*" (Buerger,

Resonate with the concept of intelligence, the key attribute in this work of making

oneself a god is knowledge. Smith declares that "knowledge" specifically "saves a man," and as

such, knowledge is the measurement in the world of spirits for exaltation, a formulation with

clear similarities to Abraham's vision in which intelligence is the measurement for

righteousness and to the May 1833 revelation, which defined glory in terms of truth and

knowing all things. "In the world of spirits," Smith explains in King Follett, "there is no way for

man to come to understanding and be exalted but by knowledge."[66]

Knowledge is again here associated with keeping God's commandments. But the

manner in which humans receive these commandments is characterized in dualistic terms of

the mind and body, similar to that found in traditional Christian understandings of intelligence.

God's commandments are perceived by human spirits in a distinctly spiritual manner: they "are

revealed to our spirits precisely the same as though we had no bodies at all."[67] It is in this sense

that Smith equates the "immortal spirit" with the "mind of man," which itself is equated to "the

intelligent part" of human beings.[68] The dualistic nature of his formulation here is made

interesting by the fact that in this sermon Smith speaks of intelligence as solely a quality or

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"Development of Endowment Ceremony," 95, n. 70, my emphasis). On the other hand, the revelation on polygamy also seems to designate men and women as *together* capable of becoming gods as partners in marriage. In addition, Smith organized a women's association in 1842, the Nauvoo Relief Society, at the height of all these teachings regarding intelligence, intelligences, and kingdom-making. During one sermon to this society, he used the same language as when he spoke to men: he spoke of turning the "key" to the women, in which he seemed to be invoking some form of authority or even priesthood power, and thus he characterized the society as open now to receiving "knowledge and intelligence." In the same address to the Society, Smith also promised that women will have the opportunity to "come into the presence of God" if they remain "pure and innocent" ("Minutes," 57-59). In the end, it seems most likely that Smith had in mind an elevation of social and religious status for women that was nevertheless still bogged down by androcentric assumptions and language, and as such, that he viewed women as existing in some kind of enduring subordinate role to men.

[66] Larson, "King Follett," 205.
[67] Larson, 204.
[68] Larson, 203.

attribute of the mind, rather than as designating human spirits as "intelligences" (with an *s*). It

is the capacities of the mind to attain a certain level of knowledge which here dominate in the

measurement of exaltation. This is not to say that bodies play no part in the King Follett

narrative, but they do so in terms of the unit made up of resurrected bodies conjoined to their

spirits. This necessarily conjoined unit will eventually move into the phase of immortal

exaltation. The pure revelations of commandments that are revealed to the mind will thus save

both spirit and body.

But, again, it is the "mind of man—the intelligent part" which is singled out as that

which is specifically immortal for humans. And it is this issue of human immortality which leads

Smith to make his most distinctive claims for human anthropology. According to his logic, any

claims for immortality post-earth-life necessarily suggest a pre-earth-life immortality. He

reiterates the same formulation of everlasting intelligences from Abraham's vision to explain

here that "the spirit of man" has no beginning precisely because it has no end. For Smith, it

doesn't make sense to attribute immortality to a being that was created out of nothing and

thus had a beginning "because," he says, "if a spirit of man had a beginning, it will have an

end."[69] He takes the resurrection as an indubitable biblical data point: the *destiny* of humans

simply is immortality. It follows from this fact that the *origin* of human spirits is also

immortality.

Significantly, it further follows for Smith that a being with no beginning must also be co-

equal with God in terms of a shared "self-existent principle."[70] This being must be uncreated, as

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[69] Larson, 204.
[70] Larson, 204.

God is uncreated, existing "in like manner and upon the same principle" as God.[71] The *imago dei* is thus formulated in radically literal terms. Such co-equality awards to humans the same ontological substance and faculties as God, even if human faculties will always possess a lower degree of intelligence relative to God. God is not capable of creating such immortal ontological substance, for it is intelligence which is, according to both the May 1833 and this present sermon, uncreated, eternal, and self-existent.[72] For Smith such parallelism between humankind and God means that human spirits inherently possess sufficient divine characteristics that would allow them to take their rightful place within the universal cosmic endeavor to bring to pass glory and thus godhood to humankind.

The May 1833 revelation, the Book of Abraham, and the King Follett sermon together serve as a textual and historical blueprint for an LDS theological anthropology. Taken together, these three texts offer the footings for what will come be constructed, at least in one line of interpretation, as an intensification of the liberal and foundationalist subject. The most pivotal attribute in this regard is intelligence, for Smith establishes it as a substance that is akin to the first principles or elements of the cosmos. As primal stuff, intelligence might easily slip into the register of *essence* terminology. It can be seen as that which resides at the core level of being, pointing to what is true and authentic precisely because it signifies the characteristics and attributes that lay an ontological foundation for an autonomously agentive human entity.

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[71] Larson, 203.

[72] Another basis for such an idea comes from Smith's teaching in both the May 1833 revelation and reiterated in King Follett that the elements of the universe are eternal. The "pure principles of element" are materials that God found in a state of chaos, which he then organized to create material objects, including the human body. But the "first principles of man," that is, spirit or intelligence, is a separate uncreated entity that is conjoined to the uncreated elements as body. These dual aspects of human beings together are self-existent, "no creation about it" (Larson, 203-204).

Accordingly, the epistemological faculties available to subjects by virtue of intelligence might be understood to develop in such a way as to pierce through to the very heart of reality in order to see things "as they are."

While such a view of the human may have been shocking to Smith's Christian contemporaries, it seems to have been embraced by his associates with an exhilaration for the divine possibilities it suggested for human nobleness as well as human destiny. As we will see, some LDS theologians who follow after Smith further solidify such a strong version of the self-existent character of the LDS subject, although they faced others who sought a more moderate position.

Post-Joseph Smith Anthropology

As noted earlier, in keeping with his understanding of his role as prophet and seer who uttered revelatory statements rather than as one who constructed theological demonstrations, Smith did not entirely explain or expand on his concept of intelligence. Whatever theological proclamations Smith seemed to lay down authoritatively in his revelations regarding human nature, on closer examination they appear as somewhat ambiguous concepts that were left open to different interpretations posited by those that followed him. As a result, a couple of different possibilities developed in Mormon thought in the decades after Smith's death regarding what this doctrine of intelligence might mean for conceptions of personhood. At the heart of these differences of interpretation of human intelligences lies the push and pull in Mormon thought between, on the one hand, commitment to the view of human personhood based in some sort of fundamental individual identity that is coequal with God and, on the other hand, commitment to retaining some sense of God's status as supreme creator. However,

both sides of this debate still posited a version of the subject that can be described as classically

liberal and foundationalist. The difference between them is of degree, not of kind, in this

regard.

<center>*Radical Personhood and Begotten Personhood*</center>

Those thinkers who offered interpretations of Smith's teachings regarding the pre-

existence and intelligence adhered simultaneously to two formulations, but maintaining these

two formulations together created some tension. The first is adherence to the teachings of

Smith that we have just reviewed, namely that intelligence as a pre-mortal entity is self-existent

to the extent that God is not actually capable of creating it. As such, it is an uncreated,

necessary feature of existence. Further, it is linked to pre-existent human spirits such that they

are designated intelligence*s* who are "co-equal" with God in their self-existent nature. The

second formulation is the idea that the spirits who existed in the pre-existence are the literal

offspring of God. Their spirit was first created by God in that realm by some kind of procreative

process, before being born into mortality to human parents. These two formulations taken

together juxtapose, on one hand, the idea that human spirits at some primal level are "co-

equal" to God as self-existent entities and, on the other hand, the idea that they are dependent

on God as a literal father for their origin. What ultimately lies at stake in such tension is the

moral status of the primal element intelligence, whether that primal element, as a self-existent

entity, is imbued natively with powers associated with personhood, namely, agency,

deliberation, judgment, and action, or whether it only takes on such characteristics once it is

organized with a spirit body that is formed by God. This tension led LDS theologians to ponder

when true personhood of the human spirit began—or for some, whether true personhood even had a beginning.

The formulation that the human spirit is the literal spiritual offspring of God the Father, what I will call "begotten personhood," still posits intelligence's eternalism as prime element but mitigates the potential for intelligent element to possess a degree of total autonomy and will. In this view intelligence is some kind of basic spiritual substance that endows humans with the capacity for God-likeness and eternal duration but is itself, as mere primal element, never fully autonomous in the sense of possessing moral agency. The spirit bodies of these offspring clothe this inchoate intelligent sub-stratum of the human individual, and their individuality and personhood are not fully realized until that spirit birth. God's spirit offspring literally inherit qualities of divinity from him, the way mortal children inherit qualities from their biological father. This divine inheritance is linked to the qualities of personhood that each spirit child takes on as they become intelligences, children of God.

This line of thinking relies in part on what appears to be a theological innovation after Smith's death: that God the Father and a heavenly Mother are the literal parents of spiritual offspring who were birthed in the pre-existence. Smith is not on record teaching the existence of a Heavenly Mother nor of a multi-step process by which the primal element intelligence is clothed by a spirit body.[73] According to Terryl Givens, the first published instance of the idea that pre-existent spirits are the offspring of God was from Orson Pratt, one of Smith's close

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[73] Since we have on record some of Smith's followers who claimed, years after his death, that they learned the idea of a Mother in Heaven from him, it is possible he privately taught this doctrine. For the history of Heavenly Mother in LDS thought, see Wilcox, "Mother in Heaven."

associates, in January 1845 (Smith died in June of the previous year).[74] Pratt offers a sort of catechism regarding the existence of "man": "How many states of existence has man? He has three. What is the first? It is spiritual. What is the second? It is temporal. What is the third? It is immortal and eternal. How did he begin to exist in the first? He was begotten and born of God."[75]

However, Orson Pratt's overall thought illustrates the fact that the outlines of any potential debate regarding intelligence and personhood were not drawn in hard lines among Smith's earliest associates. The idea of a voluntaristic element known as intelligence could exist in Pratt's thought alongside the idea that human spirits are begotten offspring of God without much tension. In fact, his formulation of intelligence could be seen as a precursor to the later line of thought that characterized intelligence per se, separate from a spirit body, as a radically autonomous entity. Pratt describes intelligence as an attribute of autonomous atomistic particles that make up the most elemental material of existence. These particles have energy, life, and directed action; they are self-willing, self-moving, and thinking.[76] When they are formed or organized into composite beings they act as a collectivity to give the quickening component that itself imbues life in objects. Pratt was more concerned to defend a theological rendering of physics and atoms than to consider the status of intelligent personhood per se of humans, but his theory does endow the concept of intelligence with an autonomy that is

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[74] See Givens' historical discussion of the interpretive possibilities of Smith's anthropological teachings, along with how the concept of a Heavenly Mother impacted the development of the doctrine of intelligence in *Wrestling the Angel*, 147-158.

[75] Orson Pratt, *Prophetic Almanac*, No. 1 (1845), n.p. In the *Almanac*'s 1846 issue, Pratt again characterizes "men" as "offspring or children of Gods."

[76] Orson Pratt, *Absurdities of Immaterialism*. For a treatise with similar themes and claims, see Orson Pratt, *Great First Cause*.

distinct from its being organized with a spirit body. The intelligence found within individual atoms is "thinking substance" and "self-moving substance," and it can "originate its own motions, and act according to its own will."[77] "Intelligent substance," then, is independent of whatever form a collectivity of intelligent atoms chooses to take as they morphologically unite, presumably even a human spirit body.

It wasn't until the early twentieth century when a debate between the two lines of thought regarding how intelligence is linked to personhood came to the fore when B.H. Roberts, a prominent LDS theologian and Church leader, published his own interpretation of Smith's teachings on intelligence.[78] His stance might be called "radical personhood." In this view, the term "intelligence" specifically designates the original and primal individuality of personhood: personal intelligence as moral agent is a personality that is conscious of itself as a separate and distinct ego even in a state before spiritual or material embodiment. Thus, *before* the spirit birth of an individual, the intelligent core of that individual is self-conscious and autonomous. It is aware of "me" set off from "not me." It has the power to deliberate and to form judgments, and it has the power to choose. This "intelligent entity" is "a person" because "he is possessed of powers that go with personality only." As such, Roberts states, "that entity is a 'he,' not an 'it.'"[79] The self-existent intelligence thus undergoes different phases of embodiment. First, it is simply intelligence, the locus of personal attributes and powers. As per Smith's teachings, it is "uncreated, self-existent, indestructible" and it possesses all the powers

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[77] Pratt, *Absurdities of Immaterialism*, 7-8.
[78] Roberts, "Immortality of Man." A line of thinking similar to Roberts's regarding intelligence was also suggested around the same time by Nels Nelson in *Scientific Aspects of Mormonism*. See Godfrey's discussion of both authors in "History of Intelligence," 6-9.
[79] Roberts, "Immortality of Man," 406-7.

that go along with personhood.[80] Next, it becomes a "spiritual personage" when God as Father

provides a spirit body for the intelligent entity. (Roberts makes no explicit mention of a God as

Mother in this process.) By virtue of this progenitive inheritance, these spiritual personages

become "sons of God."[81] This human spirit (intelligence plus spirit body) is now ready to move

to the mortal realm where it will become a soul, that is, a spirit plus a body of flesh.

Roberts' theology appears to have raised questions among some members of the

Church. In "Immortality of Man," he mentions that he set forth his anthropological theory in a

1906 manual for the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Associations. He felt it necessary to

write a response to some of the more salient questions that were raised in letters members

wrote to him after they read his theory, a response which he published in the *Improvement Era*

in April 1907 titeld "Immortality of Man." One question he received has to do with ideas that

come from the begotten personhood theory. He summarizes that view: "they hold 'that the life

of the parent is imparted to the offspring and . . . as a separate individual *it did have a*

beginning at the time of birth or conception.'"[82] Roberts' reply to this objection is based on the

difference of status among intelligences described in The Book of Abraham. He tries to account

for why "perfect beings" such as God would bring forth "by act of generation spirit-offspring so

widely different from one another."[83] The answer must be, according to Roberts, that the

intelligent personality that each offspring brought with it into a spirit body willed and acted

according to a native agency, either virtuously or viciously. Thus, God is not responsible for such

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[80] Roberts, 406.
[81] Roberts, 408, 415-6.
[82] Roberts, 419 (my emphasis).
[83] Roberts, 419.

differences. The responsibility lies with the use intelligent personalities made with their innate agency.

Notwithstanding Roberts' opinion that such theodicy constitutes the "value" such anthropology offers to LDS theology, his theory was questioned by some of his colleagues in the LDS leadership as well, mostly because it got caught up in an effort by some to push back against the theory of evolution. In November 1909, a few years after Roberts published his articles containing his theory on intelligence, the First Presidency of the Church published a statement on "The Origin of Man" in the *Improvement Era*.[84] Here the First Presidency decidedly proclaims that God is the "Father of spirits,"[85] that "man as spirit was begotten, born of heavenly parents," and that "man" is the "direct and lineal offspring of Deity."[86] This document makes no mention of an intelligent entity that is a precursor to spirit bodies and which is the locus for individual personality and autonomy.

"The Origin of Man" also places such claims for God as the creator of human spirits squarely within the context of the controversies that raged in the Christian world over evolution, and these controversies are precisely why the First Presidency chose to adhere to the begotten personhood theory. They were committed to asserting God as supreme creator, whose power and wisdom has guided the various stages of existence that humans have experienced. The radical personhood theory, on the other hand, seems to bump the status of humans up a notch and to bump the status of God down a notch, to assign not only greater

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[84] First Presidency, "Origin of Man." The men who made up the First Presidency when this article was published were Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund.
[85] First Presidency, 77.
[86] First Presidency, 80-1.

parity between humans and Deity but to put limitations on God's powers. The implications

which Roberts's theory had for a lessened role on the part of God in the origin of humankind

thus landed it on the wrong side of any move to emphasize God as creator against claims that

humans evolved from animals. It probably didn't help matters that Roberts himself argued for

the scientific validity of the theory of evolution.[87] For some members in the ranks of leadership,

his thought paradigm as a whole seems to have been suspect.

What's more, Roberts watched with dismay when, in 1912, an unidentified source

within the Church's leadership had Smith's King Follett sermon revoked from Roberts' *History of*

the Church as the volume was heading to press. Around the same time, Apostle George Albert

Smith had written in a letter to a colleague that he "feared [Smith's sermon] contained some

things contrary to truth."[88] Roberts repeatedly defended his anthropological views as being

entirely "in harmony with what God has revealed" upon the subject, which was one of the

points he specifically addressed in his 1907 article.[89] Indeed, Roberts seems to have been

willing to take the implications of Smith's theological anthropology to their fullest extent.

Toward the end of Roberts' life, he offered his masterwork *The Truth, The Way, The Life*

to the Quorum of Twelve Apostles and the First Presidency of the Church—the two highest

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[87] See, for example, chapter 31 in Roberts, *Truth, Way, Life,* 338-364. This book, Roberts's most important theological treatise, explicitly takes up the issue of evolution, arguing for pre-Adamite peoples. Such a stance was the main point of controversy between him and some on the reading committee who reviewed the book for publication by the Church. His defense of evolution and pre-Adamites was most likely the deciding factor for the committee to not publish his book, although they raised objections to other of Roberts's views, including, as we will see, his claims that an unbegotten spirit (i.e., an intelligence) is the locus for personhood and agency. See also the correspondence that passed between Roberts and various leaders of the Church, including members of the reading committee, in "Appendix: Correspondence Related to *The Truth, The Way, The Life*" in Roberts, *Truth, Way, Life,* 654-680. See also Ostler's discussion of this debate in the early twentieth century involving Roberts and other contemporary LDS thinkers in "Idea of Pre-existence," 68-72.

[88] See editor's note 20 in Roberts, *Truth*, *Way, Life*, 285-86.

[89] Roberts, "Immortality of Man," 416.

ranking councils—as a manual for Church instruction and wished for the Church to publish it.

The Truth offered basically the same theological anthropology that "Immortality of Man" had

argued for, with a hard stance on the idea that "there is no intelligence existing separate and

apart from persons, from intelligent entities," emphasizing, "either intelligence exists as

individual persons, or as proceeding from such persons."[90] But the reading committee assigned

to review his manuscript, made up of men from the Quorum of the Twelve, questioned his

formulations regarding intelligence, spirits, and agency. What was at issue for them was that

Roberts' rendering suggested intelligences have the power to rebel against God, a power that

the committee believed was not possible until after intelligent element was clothed in a spirit

body.[91] In other words, they placed the power of agency as being active only after God fathered

spirit offspring, and thus they adhered to the begotten personhood theory. Such an

interpretation suggests intelligent *element* is just that—primal substance in a degree of

inchoate existence as impersonal element but with the attributes that align it with the truth

and light of the May 1833 revelation. The committee says as much when they offer as a

rejoinder to Roberts that the reason pre-spirit-body intelligence cannot rebel is because

intelligence is "light and truth" and as such "forsaketh the evil one." Thus, an intelligence that

would rebel would only be rebelling against itself.[92] This response to Roberts seems to invoke a

paradox regarding two features of intelligence as defined in Smith's texts: on one hand,

intelligence is intimately linked to truth, light, and glory, while on the other hand, it is

understood as independent action. While intelligence is categorically defined as truth and light

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[90] Roberts, *Truth, Way, Life,* 283.
[91] See Appendix to Roberts, *Truth, Way, Life*, 663-4.
[92] Appendix to Roberts, 663-4.

by Smith, independent action, another categorical quality of intelligence, by definition can work against such truth and light. Thus, the committee seems to be right to say that intelligence works against itself if it chooses such contrariness to its own attributes. Their approach to this paradox locates agentive action only with spirit persons who possess intelligence and not with the primal attribute of intelligence per se, thereby creating some distance between primal intelligence and agency.

One of the more vocal critics of Roberts on the reading committee was Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith, grand-nephew to Joseph Smith and later president of the Church. He shared the sentiments of the begotten personhood line of thought precisely because he was an ardent opponent of evolution and higher criticism of the Bible. In *Man: His Origin and Destiny*, Fielding Smith argues polemically against evolution specifically by entrenching in the position that God is the creator of the world, albeit as an organizer of eternal elements, and that humans and their personhood originate from him. In terms of the LDS doctrine of pre-existence, God the Father is a literal parent, and human spirits are the offspring of him. When Fielding Smith states that by the term "intelligences" we should understand "personal spirits,"[93] he seems to be obliquely countering Roberts, since Roberts made a clear distinction between "intelligences" and "spirits," with "spirits" being reserved for the second-phase entities that were begotten by God the Father and "intelligence" being reserved for personhood.[94] Fielding Smith here specifically links the idea of personhood with those offspring spirits and thus with a begotten, not a radical, personhood.

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[93] Smith, *Man*, 118.
[94] Roberts, *Truth, Way, Life*, 287.

Although Roberts' *The Truth, The Way, and The Life* was never published by the Church, still the Church never released an official statement deciding in favor of one over the other of the theories of the origin of personhood. And even despite the fears of a George Albert Smith that Joseph Smith's King Follett sermon doesn't get things quite right, Smith's teachings have continued to be more or less the basis for anthropological claims in LDS thought. However, Smithian texts alone do not conclusively decide for one or the other of these theories—that is, whether the concept of intelligence designates either the source for radical personhood or some primal, nonpersonal element. For example, although the basis for begotten personhood seems to have followed closely *after* Smith's death, there is some evidence that he taught about a Heavenly Mother with its implied idea of heavenly parents that beget spirits. Smith thus remains the perceived source for the construal of both interpretations.

Granted, a foundationalist subject could potentially follow from either type of personhood, by virtue of the fact that the concept of a pre-existent self as such might signify some "true" self in relation to the self of mortality. However, the disagreements regarding the details of how intelligence, agency, and personhood operate in a human subject, I argue, might result in very different conceptions regarding the status of a "made" quality of the subject in its most primordial stage. The theological sticking point is to determine the status of the primal intelligent core in terms of its powers of deliberation, judgment, and choice, and whether these attributes are progressively learned or are self-existent in their own right. The difference seems to lie in whether intelligence as an entity is understood to be fundamentally formed and static or unformed pure potentiality, that is, whether it is ontologically autonomous entity or fundamentally a faculty waiting to be constituted.

Again, granted, both theories offer at least a minimal version of progression within a familial context, since both affirm three phases toward human embodiment. In both theories, intelligence first exists as a primary element, which is then clothed in a spirit body through some procreative act of God. This intelligence/spirit-body unit then moves on to mortal experience as one part of the human soul, which is itself made up of this spiritual unit and a body of flesh. Both theories are positioned to affirm some kind of communal context for such progression, which could render either type of personhood as, at least eventually, being subject to communal forces.

However, the begotten personhood theory alone makes it possible for communal forces to be originally constitutive, while the radical personhood theory suggests an original ready-made self that then merely faces communal influences. The radical personhood theory, thus, is a much stronger version of classically liberal and foundationalist subjectivity. It takes self-consciousness and volition to be inherent characteristics of a radially autonomous ego. This ego originally exists separate and distinct from any bodily or social processes whatsoever, operating with awareness of a core "me" before it enters into any social and relational setting with other ego-entities. This Cartesian-esque ego, as distinct and independent personality, is *the* enduring feature of a subject. In contrast, the primal intelligence of begotten personhood is inchoate and unformed and, as such, represents pure potentiality and unformed faculty. It better allows for the idea of dynamism and malleability to be the ontological pattern of human endeavor as such. In addition, it does not posit some kind of autonomous identity that exists prior to a bodily existence; rather, it locates the constitution of personhood as occurring only in and with a body (including a spirit body—more on that in the next chapter). If begotten personhood

points to a primordial entity that is unformed potentiality, radical personhood tends in the

opposite direction, into that which replicates the actuality of a static Platonic Form.

Authentic Selfhood and Platonic Recollection

In the years after Roberts, the line of demarcation between the two theories of

personhood is not always stark, as some LDS thinkers try to harmonize aspects of both, since

Smith is perceived to be the originator of both. The obvious way to harmonize the static

features of radical personhood with the dynamic features of begotten personhood is to locate

progressive features of the subject only after a radical-personhood intelligence is born into its

respective bodily stages, first spirit body in the pre-existent and then coarse-matter body in

mortality. But such a move to locate dynamic processes in later bodily stages leaves a space

available in which intelligence itself can then be characterized in terms reminiscent of Platonic

Form.

One such example of such harmonization is the theological anthropology of Truman

Madsen, a Harvard-trained philosopher. Some thirty years after Roberts' death, he offered an

interpretation of the doctrine of intelligence that clearly follows the line of radical personhood

through B.H. Roberts, but which also tries to reconcile the role of a Fatherly God who has some

degree of involvement in the destiny of humankind. However, notwithstanding Madsen's

gestures toward subjects who live in relation to each other and to God, the enduring picture of

the self in his theology takes the implications of both Smith's and Roberts' rendering of the

doctrine of intelligence to an even more explicit foundationalism than his admired

predecessors.[95] He does so through poetic-like imagery associated with the notion of Platonic recollection.

In *Eternal Man*, Madsen affirms Roberts' three-step stage of human development by describing a "threefold nature of man"[96] in which he distinguishes a "primal intelligence" from the "spirit-elements that compose the Divinely sired spirit" as well as the "matter-elements that compose [man's] physically sired body."[97] Although he, like the begotten personhood line of thought, declares all three to be "eternal," Madsen explicitly aligns himself with the radical personhood theory of Roberts when he locates individualism and personhood in the primal intelligence. Such personhood, he declares, has no beginning: "man as a self had a beginningless beginning."[98] For begotten personhood adherents, personhood has a beginning; it is not beginningless. Madsen obviously disagrees, for the "conscious, purposive existence" of "man" as intelligence is "guaranteed forever," not only in the sense of looking forever forward, but of looking backward into the primordial origins of the forever individual.[99]

Madsen notes the debate regarding personhood when he summarizes the begotten personhood stance: for some, he says, "intelligence" is understood as "primal stuff out of

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[95] In addition to his clear admiration for Joseph Smith, Madsen seems to have greatly admired Roberts as well. In fact, he wrote a biography of both men. See *Joseph Smith the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989) and *Defender of the Faith: The B.H. Roberts Story* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1980).

[96] Madsen, *Eternal Man*, 34. Madsen frames the project of *Eternal Man* as an attempt to show how Joseph Smith's thought was able to address some of the most difficult puzzles regarding "man" that the best minds within Western thought have struggled to make sense of. He thus sees Smith's theological anthropology as an impetus to effect a major shift from traditional Christianity and certain lines of thought in secular philosophy regarding the understanding of the ontological status of the human.

[97] Madsen, 11. Earlier in the book, Madsen invokes "three modes of . . . being—intelligence, spirit, and body," and associates such "tripartite perfection" to God as well (4).

[98] Madsen, 12. Madsen calls this beginningless feature of human nature "personal eternalism" (11), a term which Ostler seems to have borrowed for his article "Idea of Pre-existence," 68-72 to describe the dominant trend in LDS anthropological thought in the twentieth century.

[99] Madsen, 3.

which, perhaps, the spirit personality is constructed"; for such thinkers "individuality does not really emerge until then." He rebuts this notion when he says, "the doctrine of the Church, however, is clearly a doctrine of individual, separate intelligences." He then provides a list of textual warrants that "require" such a conclusion, including the King Follet sermon, the Book of Abraham's use of plural "intelligences," and Roberts' "Immortality of Man."[100]

Madsen deepens his stance in this debate by locating freedom in the same domain as the pre-spirit-body intelligence. As he describes it, freedom is identified with "primal intelligence" and is thereby as uncreated as intelligence.[101] It is thus a permanent feature of beginningless personhood, part and parcel of what persons are in their ontological depths. He does not seem to have the same concerns as the reading committee for Roberts' *The Truth, The Way, The Life* for whom intelligence, as primal attribute tethered to truth and light, cannot have limitless agency, even to the point of rebellion even against itself. In fact, the freedom possessed by intelligent individuals runs deep for Madsen, even to the extent that they are, at a basic level, free of serious limitations or determining causes to action. This is a subject that can stand apart from the myriad of choices that present themselves to human consciousness, can objectively observe and deliberate upon such choices, and then make decisions as a sovereign entity in control of where it is headed. He states as a "truth": "Any chain-tracing [of cause and effect] will eventually lead us to ourselves, and some sovereign decision. . . . [Some] may justify the cry, 'I can't help it.' But it can always be said truly, 'You could have helped it.'"[102]

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[100] Madsen, 63-64, note 4.
[101] Madsen, 4-5.
[102] Madsen, 51.

However, for Madsen the uncreated freedom that inheres in human nature is not entirely free from commitments, covenants, responsibility, and eternal laws but is rather underwritten by law and the relationship with God that such law represents. For him, this means that consequences, what he calls the "exceptionless conditions of life," are a durable feature of law and of freedom. "If *anything* can really happen following any action," he explains, "then the freedom . . . of men is meaningless."[103] The import of his claim here is that the agency of humankind is only meaningful once individuals know what they are up against in terms of what will follow any given course of action. Once those options are laid out, it seems to be only a matter of choice (along the spectrum of wise to foolish choices) that places individuals on a certain path.[104] Such options and consequences are given to humankind by God through laws and commandments.[105]

In addition, notwithstanding a capacity for autonomous thought and action, pre-existent humans are understood by Madsen to be undeveloped in their full potential until they experience the growth that can only come through spirit birth and then mortality. In his view, the creation process involves God taking an embryonic intelligence (of a radical personhood variety) and clothing it with spirit. This occurs "long before mortality, in a process of actual

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[103] Madsen, 50 (original emphasis).

[104] Although Madsen does not cite it, the idea that freedom is bound to law and consequences is often related in LDS thought to a chapter in the *Book of Mormon* in which it is stated, first, that "there must be an opposition in all things," and second, that redemption of Christ endows humans with freedom but comes with certain consequences: "men . . . are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil." See 2 Nephi 2:11-13, 27. I will discuss this passage further in chapter four in the context of a Mormon doctrine of agency.

[105] Madsen cites a Smithian revelation from December 1832 (now Doctrine and Covenants 88), in which the celestial realm is depicted as being ordered by the law of Christ. The revelation defines the concept of law by describing it as that which establishes "certain bounds . . . and conditions" within which certain heavenly "kingdoms" must operate. A similar idea is found in another citation of Madsen's, a Smithian revelation dated to April 1843 (now Doctrine and Covenants 130). See Madsen, 71, note 11.

transmission" within a pre-existent family structure wherein this spirit-encased intelligence begins to mature. This spirit-intelligence thus both inherits, as a literal spirit child of God, and absorbs, through environment, the qualities and traits of God such that it will be "nurtured in the Divine image."[106] This nurturing of the spirit-intelligence is repeated again in mortality, where spirit-intelligence is further encased in a physical body and is again molded by the material inheritances of the body and temporal circumstances in which it finds itself. Although throughout these stages of spirit and physical embodiment in which the intelligence remains as the self that is at the core of it all, Madsen does not untether this autonomous intelligence completely from God's power to shape and create it once it takes on a bodily form.

An important feature of God's guiding influence for Madsen, however, is to help the intelligence-spirit-body in mortality find its true self through intimations of its origins. Madsen's description of these intimations has a distinct Platonic flavor: the "real" self is remembered and recovered; it wells up in the form of "intuitive" flashes that may be repressed but not stopped entirely, which may be shadowy and veiled but lead to a concrete reality.[107] When one learns to attend to what is going on inside, to feel the "numinous sense" of the self that is in harmony with the holy and the sacred, then one may be led to experience even an "awe of the self."[108]

Madsen does qualify his Platonic formulations here, as he must, with a two-prong rebuttal that situates him within LDS materialism that denies any substantive dichotomy between spirit and matter and, in particular, the denigration of matter that such a dichotomy led to in Plato as well as in the Christian thought influenced by Plato. As we will see in more

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[106] Madsen, 22.
[107] Madsen, 28.
[108] Madsen, 55 and 59. Madsen cites this phrase as a borrowing from Rudolf Otto's *Idea of the Holy*.

detail in the next chapter, a Smithian sermon states that "all spirit is matter" and thus leads LDS theologians to affirm a version of monism grounded in the material.[109] To be consistent with this doctrine, Madsen first rejects any idea that the spirit is regrettably imprisoned in a mortal body. For him, the mortal body is just one later-stage step in the realization of the three-fold human nature that began with primal intelligence, and as such, is the "crowning stage of progressive unfoldment toward celestial personality."[110] The finer spirit-material and the grosser body-material, conjoined together with primal intelligence, will eventually lead to the "enlightened" body of exalted existence. Madsen also tries to reject the idealistic character of Plato's concept of recollection. For him, "spirit memories" are linked to the concrete, present world, precisely because the present world is a "grosser duplicate" of the heavenly order. In contrast, Plato's conception was "mainly conceptual or mathematical"; his heaven transcended "space, time, and materiality."[111] Because of his commitment to a metaphysics of materialism and thus to a version of realism, Madsen rejects such philosophical idealism.

In the end, Madsen seems to appropriate a Platonic notion of recollection as a convenient vehicle for what he is actually trying to convey: what he seems most invested in is being able to tap into "what one authentically is."[112] Madsen finds great religious power in the idea that humans have some inner, deep, intuitive "flame" that flashes insight of truth and light associated with divine glory into our very souls. He draws a whole constellation of imagery to

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[109] The sermon was given May 17, 1843, in Ramus, Illinois. The full passage reads: "There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter but is more fine or pure and can only be discerned by purer eyes. We cant [*sic*] see it but when our bodies are purified we shall see that it is all matter." See Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 261 as well as the current Doctrine and Covenants 131:7-8.

[110] Madsen, *Eternal Man*, 37.

[111] Madsen, 72, note 6.

[112] Madsen, 7.

describe this inner self upon which we can lean for inner security. It is a "numinous sense,"[113] a

"glow of evanescent past,"[114] an "uprush of fountain at our center," our "own burning

deeps."[115] It's an inner self that gives assurance that a soul journeying in mortality possesses

the power to break through the shadowy veil to sense an intimate guiding voice: "someone

nearer than you, that is you."[116] Because these "bell sounds of a whole self" are veiled and half-

defined, they are not phenomena of logic but of sensing, feeling, recollecting. Madsen

characterizes such sensing as being "rooted" in God," but whether God is a separate entity

from the self is left ambiguous.[117] It's as if the person God and the generalized godly powers

associated with self-existent intelligences are mingled into one. As Madsen explains, if God

were to be revealed to Christ, all that is required is to "reveal Christ to Himself." The same is

true for us.[118]

An original, authentic, autonomous, even sovereign self—we can see here the

ingredients for a profoundly foundationalist, even libertarian, version of the self that follows

from radical personhood. Madsen valorizes such Mormon teaching because he sees it as

endowing substance and empowerment to human reflections on life and meaning. For him,

Smith's teachings on intelligence are superior attempts, in comparison to both Christian and

secular philosophical attempts, at understanding the human predicament, for they are the

ultimate "experiment in depth."[119] He embraces them, he says, because they have religious

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[113] Madsen, 55.
[114] Madsen, 28.
[115] Madsen, 59-60.
[116] Madsen, 59.
[117] Madsen, 58.
[118] Madsen, 60.
[119] Madsen, 58. This phrase from Madsen is meant as a critique of the existential philosophy that dominated the academy in his time.

power: they "electrify, inspire, and ennoble."[120] He quotes Joseph Smith: "This is good doctrine. It tastes good. I can taste principles of eternal life, so can you."[121]

Conclusion

As with Roberts earlier, Madsen's radical personhood views seemed to have been somewhat threatening to those within Church leadership who felt it necessary to protect God's role as controller of the universe and as a Father who has a determining influence over his spirit children. Blake Ostler relates a letter exchange between Madsen and Bruce R. McConkie, an influential apostle of the Church in the mid-twentieth century and son-in-law to Joseph Fielding Smith, who censured Madsen for adhering to a doctrine that McConkie described as going beyond what was appropriate. According to Ostler, McConkie's neo-orthodox stance toward God led him to insist that "no agency prior to spirit birth" ever existed and that individuals "did not exist as entities" until after spirit birth.[122] This interchange is an illustration of the fact that even today the debate between begotten personhood and radical personhood has not been entirely settled within LDS thought.[123] What's more, LDS theologians in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have increasingly lost interest is the speculative nature of the debate between radical personhood and begotten personhood, with the result that we see discussion of the doctrine of intelligence show up far less often in current devotional LDS thought.

However, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the idea of heavenly parents who procreate spirit children in the pre-existence has only gained a surer footing in LDS

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[120] Madsen, 27.
[121] Madsen, 26.
[122] Ostler, "Idea of Pre-Existence," 72.
[123] For a summary of the personhood debate as well as the conclusion that because no official position has been taken by the Church leadership, the questions that have arisen in this debate remain unanswered, see Packard, "Intelligence," 692, and Hyde, "Intelligences," 692-693.

discourse. The context for this development is a feminist-inflected push to affirm the presence of a feminine divine within LDS theology. On the other hand, debates regarding issues surrounding sex, gender identity, and gender roles have pushed many, including leaders of the church acting in official capacity, in the direction of renewed emphasis on assumptions of core personhood that are available to them through the doctrine of pre-existence. Through the idea that pre-existent souls carry with them certain stable, permanent features related not only to the spirit body but to the very core personhood of each soul, sex and gender are then cast as eternal, essential attributes of the human spirit in ways that could easily appeal to the notion of radical personhood.

From another direction, the line of radical personhood that goes through King Follett, Roberts, and Madsen has been reiterated in an especially popular devotional treatise written by one prominent LDS couple, Terryl and Fiona Givens. The Givenses themselves neutralize their stance within the context of Mormon anthropological debates by attributing their view of the subject as deriving from the doctrine of the pre-existence as such, stripped of the distinctions that define either of the personhood labels. But they do indeed offer a picture of the subject that has strong echoes of Madsen's Platonic remembrances of a pre-existent, core self, which is the locus for a real "I," one that "precedes and transcends" the circumstances we experience in mortality.[124] This primordial "I" represents a personal identity that is "deeper than the body," is "rooted beyond action" and comes with a strong sense of its reality.[125] In a very Platonic sense,

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[124] Givens and Givens, *God Who Weeps*, 44.
[125] Givens and Givens, 43-44.

these intimations are characterized as recollections of life experiences prior to mortality, as "chords of memories swept by an invisible hand."[126]

Personal identity for the Givenses is, then, something to discover and recapture from a prior life, not something that is entirely made. As such, their anthropological framework carries with it overt Platonic, even Cartesian, and thus foundationalist, resonances. Such resonances, however, exist in tension with other doctrines of the LDS tradition, most notably Mormonism's commitment to metaphysical materialism. As we will see in the next chapter, such an idealist conception of the self cannot escape critique when the tradition's materialism is taken seriously.

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[126] Givens and Givens, 42.

Chapter 3: The Doctrine of Materialism

As the discussion of the last chapter illustrates, to engage in an inquiry of an LDS view of the human is to engage in a conversation largely grounded in metaphysics. The previous chapter took us into the speculative primordial realms where the concept of the human spirit has its origins. This chapter will examine views regarding the metaphysics of substance, specifically the Mormon doctrine of material monism. Although there seems to be a wide consensus within LDS discourse that the tradition is committed to a material metaphysics, there is also much debate regarding how to interpret the theological implications that follow from such materialism. This chapter will present both aspects: both the theological basis for the commitment to a doctrine of materialism as well as the debates of interpretation that follow in its wake.

One interesting conundrum for a Mormon doctrine of the human subject is that a non-foundationalist anthropology, along with a theory of habitus and of the made subject that underwrites it, seems to offer explanatory power for a material, practice-centric Mormon subject *until* it butts up against a metaphysics that posits a foundationalist, already-made primordial intelligence that undergirds human personhood. One aim of this chapter is to take some initial steps to address this conundrum. I will draw on certain resources within LDS thought that could move the tradition away from a radical personhood point of view and toward theological interpretations that are consistent with a discursive, communally constituted subject. A begotten personhood view of intelligence is just one resource that I addressed in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I will point out some others that arise from

my own and others' suspicion of Platonic models being applied to an understanding of the pre-existence, especially when those applications occur within the context of a supposed material monism.

My stance is to critique a Platonic/Cartesian line of thought regarding the human subject as it shows up in Mormonism because such a branch of philosophical and Christian thought allows for a bifurcation of mind and body that ignores or effaces the role of the body in the constitution of a thinking, desiring, and acting subject. In the last chapter, I employed the terminology of "foundationalist" to designate my critical stance toward such a bifurcation that establishes radical personhood as the foundation of human identity. In this chapter, I will shift the critical terminology to the concept of dualism. This shift is due to the fact that, notwithstanding the common claim that Smith's theology of materialism effectively leads the faith away from classical dualism, many of the more prominent theologians, even from the beginning, tend to exhibit some of the same assumptions as classical dualism. The assumptions I address specifically have to do with how certain theologians render the different operations between spirit and matter in such a way that results in a higher valuation for the concept of spirit. Such a rendering of different operations and valuation leads, then, to the view that the category of spirit remains the favored locus of human identity, while the body is neglected as a potential constitutive basis. With the help of LDS theologian Adam Miller, I will draw on the Mormon doctrine of the soul as a distributed entity made up of body and spirit in order to take steps toward establishing the body as an integral aspect of Mormon anthropology.

Nineteenth-Century Doctrinal Basis

We can trace the evolution of Joseph Smith's thought that began with a theology that gives primacy to the spiritual over the material, then to an eternal parallelism between the two entities, and finally to a form of material monism. Along the way, we see a push and pull between attempts to move beyond old metaphysical formulations along with moves that still retain something of the old valuations and sensibilities. Part of why we see the latter is that Smith never takes steps to more fully retheorize the concepts of matter and spirit as a result of the metaphysical shift that results from his theological pronouncement that endows Mormonism with a doctrine of material monism. While Parley Pratt makes an attempt to do such retheorization, we are still able to trace in his thought a subtle adherence to certain features of classical dualism regarding the concept of spirit.

Early in Joseph Smith's ministry, he seems to have privileged the category of *spiritual* over the category of *temporal*. In the summer and fall of 1830, just months after the *Book of Mormon* was published and the Church officially organized, Smith engaged in a "translation" of the Bible, in which he made what he believed to be inspired corrections to various biblical passages based on the idea, found in the *Book of Mormon*, that certain plain and precious parts of the Bible had been lost. One of the documents that came out of this endeavor is what is known as the Book of Moses, purportedly lost writings of this ancient prophet. In this Book of Moses, Smith offers a retelling of the creation story found in Genesis 1 and 2 but in a first-person point of view, with God as narrator. Once the seven days of creation are complete,

Smith has God declare: "I, the Lord God, created all things . . . spiritually before they were

naturally upon the face of the earth."[1]

During this same time period, Smith dictated a separate revelation in which he

expanded on this concept of a spiritual creation. According to this revelation, all things that God

created were first created spiritually and then temporally. The Lord states, "all things unto me

are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal . . . and I gave

unto him [Adam] commandment, but no temporal commandment gave I unto him, for my

commandments are spiritual."[2] This revelation designates a certain primacy of the spiritual, for

the things of God pertain to the status and well-being of the human *spirit* first and then to the

temporal or material. There is little in these passages to indicate that Smith thought of the

concept of spirit differently from what he inherited from his Christian milieu, that is, as

something dichotomous and even superior to the material.

So when the May 1833 revelation states that "man is spirit," it can be taken to indicate

that spirit here is understood to be the primary ontological status of the human, that is, the

spirit is the locus of being for humankind. However, the May 1833 revelation also states that

"the elements are eternal." This statement is found within the context of a reference to the

resurrection, such that when the spirit of an individual is "inseparably connected" with eternal

elements, that is, the stuff bodies are made of, then a "fulness of joy" is possible.[3] The

revelation thus speaks of spirit and element as distinct entities. The characterization of spirit

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[1] *Millennial Star* 13.6 (March 15, 1851): 92; Moses 3:5. This spiritual creation before a material creation seems to be Smith's interpretation of Gen. 2:4-5 (KJV): "These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, And every plant of the field *before it was in the earth*, and every herb of the field *before it grew*" (original emphasis).
[2] D&C (1835), 115; D&C 29:34-35.
[3] D&C (1835), 212; D&C 93:33.

here again does not seem to be different from the traditional usage of the concept of spirit that

depicts it as that which designates the true and durable identity of persons, over and against

the body.[4]

In an 1839 sermon, Smith again invokes both spirit and matter but this time in order to

designate a metaphysical parallelism between the two. The basic elements of the material

world, he says, such as earth and water, "had existence in an elementary state from eternity."

This statement is made along with the declaration that the "spirit of man" was also "not

created."[5] A year later, Smith's journals indicate that he gave a discourse on the "eternal

duration of matter."[6] From then on, Smith seems to have preached regularly about the eternal

duration of spirit *and* element. His understanding of elements seem to be that of the basic

elements of Western thought generally: fire, water, air—that is, the basic stuff that composes

the earth itself.[7] As we saw in the last chapter, these elements are seen by Smith as, not

originating out of nothing by God, but as being everlastingly self-existent and then organized

into various forms of objects by God.

Smith's logical warrants for such claims were consistently the same in the sermons that

led up to his definitive King Follett sermon, and which are expressed there as well: it is

"impossible for something to be made out of nothing" and "that which has a beginning will

surely have an end," along with its inverse, whatever does not have an end does not have a

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[4] Park in "Salvation Through a Tabernacle" seems to agree with my reading of this passage, when he states, in the context of his own reading of this passage, that in the first decade of the LDS Church's existence, Mormon writings "retained the traditional Cartesian dualism" (6).
[5] Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith,* 25.
[6] Ehat and Cook, 74.
[7] Ehat and Cook, 93.

beginning.[8] Since God seems to have guaranteed, in Smith's mind, that spirits, bodies, and the

earth will not have an end through the doctrine of the resurrection, it seems to him a logical

conclusion that the temporal eternality assumed for the next life is also the temporal eternality

of a pre-mortal existence. The same logic obtains for both the human spirit and material

elements. Both are self-existent principles before the foundation of the earth precisely because

scripture promises they will be everlasting entities in the life to come. However, as yet Smith

does not appear to indicate that spirit and matter are made of the same basic material stuff,

merely that both entities are everlasting. His theology at this point seems to be a parallel

dualism of two distinct everlasting entities. We have here a duality of eternalism but not quite

substance monism.

Such an understanding of Smith's theology of eternalism up to this point is illustrated by

a treatise of 1839 written by Parley P. Pratt, "The Regeneration and Eternal Duration of

Matter," in which he extolls the doctrine of the eternal duration of matter and spirit. As the title

suggests, Pratt's treatise actually attends more to the theorization of matter than of spirit

because of his aim to counter the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* in terms of the world itself. God

formed the earth, according to Pratt, out of common elements which are themselves eternally

durable and uncreated and thus able to withstand annihilation. Pratt also echoes Smith's

teachings as he argues that both matter and spirit are eternal, self-existent, and uncreated

principles. As such, he speaks of spirit and matter as "the *two* great principles of all existence"

and are accordingly referred to in terms of a linguistic compound, "matter *and* spirit," "matter

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[8] The quoted words are from earlier sermons. See Ehat and Cook, 92-93. For similar sentiments in the King Follett sermon, see Larson, "King Follett," 203.

as well as spirit."[9] They thus operate as dualistic and parallel cosmic entities, which come to be

inseparably combined, as Smith had taught, as an aftereffect of the resurrection. Pratt's

rendition of Smith's theology at this time does not seem to view spirit and matter as being

elementally of the same substance.[10]

In May 1843, however, Smith shifts the metaphysical landscape significantly when he

proclaims in a sermon: "There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter but is

more fine or pure and can only be discerned by purer eyes. We cant [*sic*] see it but when our

bodies are purified we shall see that it is all matter."[11] Such a conflation of spirit and matter

into a two-tiered materialism now seems to render matter, not spirit, as the privileged

metaphysical category. Such a formulation has been understood to offer to LDS theology a

monist materialism since there is ostensibly now no radical ontological split between spirit and

matter. Spirit and matter are made up of the same substance in the most basic sense. However,

what we have here is still a twofold formulation, one which still posits a certain distinction in

terms of different degrees of refinement. As such, this formulation still enables interpretations

that emphasize real differences between spirit matter and coarse matter in terms of how they

operate and how they are valued within the metaphysical landscape, even if it has also opened

the door to material monism.

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[9] Pratt, "Regeneration and Duration," 105, 111 (my emphasis).

[10] Park in "Salvation Through a Tabernacle," notes that Pratt's essay here does not "completely" destroy "the concept of Cartesian dualism," but it does place "spirit and matter on an equal level." This move, he states, is in service of moving closer to a corporeal God (12).

[11] Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 261. Park in "Salvation" notes that the idea that spirit is material was actually first made public a year earlier in an editorial in the *Times and Seasons* (13). For that source, see "Try the Spirits," *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 11 (April 1, 1842): 745. The May 1843 sermon serves as the canonical text for the doctrine, now D&C 131:7-8.

We see some evidence in King Follett that Smith himself had not entirely left behind traditional dualistic sensibilities. Even a year *after* the 1843 spirit-is-fine-matter sermon that pushes Mormon theology into a materialist metaphysics, Smith still adheres to a conception of spirit as that which is set against the body. As we saw in the last chapter, in King Follett Smith designates the "the mind of man—the immortal spirit" as self-existent, uncreated, and thus an everlasting feature of the cosmos, along with the elements of the earth, which in parallel form are also indestructible and eternal.[12] But he does not explicitly speak of the two, immortal spirit and indestructible element, as made up of the same substance. He speaks of the spirit as that which is separated from the body at death and which carries with it the mind, "the intelligent part."[13] And it is here, as we saw in the previous chapter, where Smith characterizes human minds specifically as the receptacle for revelation, received in a manner as if these minds "had no bodies at all."[14] Granted, Smith here does not say anything that would outright deny a fine-substance matter to spirit, but he does not explicitly speak about spirit as if it looks any different from traditional assumptions about spirit that obtain in standard dualistic discourse. The implications surrounding the idea that minds and bodies can be conflated as one category of substance is certainly not explored in this sermon.

True to his non-systematic habits of thought, Smith never offers concrete details regarding what it actually means for spirit to be matter or how the processes and mechanisms of entities made up of spirit matter and coarse matter work contrary to traditional dualism. What exactly would it mean to him, for example, that the mind is a material entity? Would he

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[12] Larson, "King Follett," 204.
[13] Larson, 203.
[14] Larson, 204.

distinguish the brain from the mind, the former being made up of coarse matter and the latter of fine matter? If so, how exactly does the mind's more fine and pure matter compare to the body's grosser materialism? How are the mechanisms of this spirit matter different from traditionally conceived spirit? Based on his comments in King Follett, spirit matter does not appear to operate for him much differently than traditional conceptions of immaterial spirit, and the material body does not obviously operate as that which constitutes the spirit. The most we may say of Smith's statement that "all spirit is matter but more fine or pure" is that his language articulates the two substances in terms of an optical meaning. Spirit matter is something that can only be seen "by purer eyes," presumably because it is too fine in texture for our bodily senses to capture. But the full implications of his two-tiered materialism, particularly for a doctrine of anthropology, seem to get lost in his polemics against creation *ex nihilo*. As with the doctrine of intelligence, this doctrine of a two-tiered material monism has been left open to interpretations by his theological successors.

Parley Pratt, the first systematizer of Smith's thought, offers his own interpretation of a two-tiered material monism in which he attempts to think through some of the implications of what it means to recast spirit as material substance. In his renderings, spirit is an actual material substance, but because it is more refined than coarse matter, it offers possibilities that go beyond any that are attributed to the kind of matter we find empirically in the world. Spirit matter is precisely divine substance in his view. Accordingly, it is the principle that gives life and light to all existence. It does not stay mired in the restraints that are imposed upon coarse matter.

For example, in his essay "Immortality and Eternal Life of the Material Body," Pratt explicitly asks what the concept of spirit means, and his answer defines spirit in a couple of different ways. In one sense, *spirit* describes a disembodied person in the state between death and resurrection. This spirit lacks flesh and bones, and it also lacks the grosser properties of a body made up of coarse matter. Such a spirit is still matter, but of a more subtle and refined type not tangible to the senses. Spirit in this sense looks very similar to the conception of the human spirit found in traditional Christianity, as being that which carries on a durable personal identity after its separation from a corporeal body. But Pratt then goes on to compare a specifically *spiritual body* against a *natural body*. The spiritual body is the immortal, resurrected body, while the natural body is the body of mortality. The spiritual body is composed of flesh and bones, like the natural body, but is quickened with a substance that Pratt also calls spirit, the replacement for the blood that quickens the natural body. This spirit fluid is a pure, renovating energy for all the bodily systems. It fills them with "eternal life and vigor."[15] Pratt seems to envision this spirit fluid to be a thoroughly material substance. But this spiritual fluid also acts as a signifier of the apex of human ontology, to undergo greater and greater refinement until what Pratt calls the "confines of spirituality" is reached, the highest state of refined existence.[16]

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[15] Pratt, "Immortality and Eternal Life," 31-34. Pratt draws his concept of spirit fluid from a Joseph Smith teaching, in which spirit operates like a material substance analogous to blood. See Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 370-71, in which Smith preached, in the context of the resurrection, "the flesh [will be] without the blood and the Spirit of god [will be] flowing in the vains in Sted of the blood for blood is the part of the body that causes corruption." He states further: "we could not abide [God's] presents unless pure Spirit [is] in us." Smith here is offering his interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:50, 53 (KJV): "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit corruption. . . . For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." Within the context of Pratt's apologetics for the eternal duration of material bodies, this spirit fluid for him takes on a more decidedly material form than is obvious in Smith's initial preaching of the idea.

[16] Pratt, "Immortality and Eternal Life," 31.

This apex of refined spiritual existence can only occur after the body undergoes resurrection. However, Pratt also theorizes a spiritual life force that is part of everyday existence in the guise of material spirit-atoms.[17] These spirit-atoms are not deterministic or mechanistic but intelligent entities, with the power and will for self-motion. Such intelligent entities possess within them enlightening knowledge and power to control all other elements. Not all matter has such capabilities but only that which he names "holy, divine fluid or spiritual element." The more refined matter is conceived to be, the more it behaves like intelligent immaterial spirit has always behaved, as a divine substance with agency, which enables all things to "live, move, and have their being."[18] The refined quality of spirit matter still retains, then, the metaphysical payoffs of a classical spiritual entity.

The concept of *matter* does valuable theological work for Pratt in that it allows for a view of the human that places humankind in the same species with God. If God has a corporeal body made up of matter as do human beings, then humans have within them the same potential for divine capabilities that God has realized as an exalted, and thus materially refined, divine being. The concept of materialism also allows Pratt to imagine an afterlife that is full of the affectionate relationships enjoyed in mortality, as well as full of all the material goods that

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[17] Pratt approaches such material spirit-atoms within the context of his nineteenth-century Newtonian thought-world that posited physical laws for all matter. As he explains in *The Key to the Science of Theology*, such laws include the idea that spirit-atoms must occupy their own space and cannot occupy the same space that other atoms or bodies occupy (37). Spirit-atoms also cannot be created or annihilated and are thus self-existing entities of the universe (43). Pratt appears here to be following the theories of his brother Orson Pratt. For Orson Pratt's theology of intelligent atoms and intelligent particles, see his *Absurdities of Immaterialism* and *First Great Cause* respectively. See also Garland E. Tickemyer, "Joseph Smith and Process Theology," 78-83, for a helpful summary of Orson Pratt's theology of atomistic materialism.

[18] Pratt, *Key to Theology*, 107.

can be obtained and enjoyed in the present material world, with their attainment serving as one concrete reward for a life lived in holy devotion to God.[19]

On the other hand, a more traditional conception of *spirit* also performs valuable theological work for Pratt. Through the formulation of spirit matter, it enables traditional distinctions between realms such that a more perfect spiritual order may still obtain in a monistic material universe. The spiritually material realm of the divine is ordered by eternal law yet infused with a dynamic and vivifying life force. It is a realm free from moral and natural decay, as well as the physical limitations of what is usually associated with a material world. The concept of spirit thus retains the kind of life-giving powers that have traditionally been valorized as superior to the decay inherent in traditionally conceived matter.

Obviously, Pratt does not see the body and the matter that composes it as undesirable and ontologically expendable, as did Plato, Descartes, and historical Christianity. Matter is built into his cosmos in a very basic and foundational way. But because of the two-tiered formulation of matter from which he works, he does not push the tradition in a radically non-dualistic direction, either. He even has a moment in his essay "Intelligence and Affection" in which he characterizes the coarse matter of the mortal body as a chain or physical prison of a mind that yearns to be free to expand without such limitations. He likens the temporary mortal body to the first set of children's teeth: such a body will be shed upon death and be replaced with a perfected, resurrected one. Once that first body of coarse matter is shed, the mind is "set free"

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[19] Pratt in "Immortality and Eternal Life" describes the "material inheritance" that will be bestowed upon exalted people in the life to come: possession of "houses, and cities, and villages, and gold and silver, and precious stones, and food, and rayment," as well as bodily and social activities such as eating, drinking, conversing, singing, learning, and playing music. (30)

like "a prisoner, suddenly freed from the iron shackles and gloomy dungeons of a terrible

tyrant." In this "joyous consciousness of its own liberty," the mind now is refreshed with

intellectual vigor to an "enlarge[d] field of operations" never experienced before.[20]

Notwithstanding Pratt's view that such a perfected mind is conjoined to an equally perfected

body made up of spirit matter, such descriptions of intellectual and spiritual liberty sound a lot

like Plato's description in the *Phaedo*, in which the spirit is freed upon death from the chains of

a physical body.

Pratt is thus more concerned to valorize the perfections of a postmortal refined spiritual

existence and less concerned, or not at all, about thinking through what a materialist existence

looks like in the here and now. The spiritual tier of refined materiality always interjects and

becomes the star of his narrative. While the details of the afterlife are markedly different

between his material realm and a traditionally Christian immaterial one, the characteristics of

his spiritual-material realm are such that it exhibits an affinity for a classical dualist approach to

the differences between refined spirit matter and coarse matter. Pratt brings his theology full

circle to Smith's early thought by privileging the spiritual over the material. Neither Pratt nor

Smith seem to envision a scenario in which the body, with its coarse matter, is the constitutive

basis for the spiritual. Neither seems willing to let go of the constitutive primacy of the concept

of spirit.

Contemporary Mormon Debates

The nineteenth-century doctrinal basis for Mormonism's materialism has left a lingering

tension regarding not only the presence of dualism within monism, but also about how the

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[20] Pratt, "Intelligence and Affection," 36-37.

concepts of spirit and matter should each be understood as separate entities as well as how

they should be understood to relate to each other. It is not uncommon for LDS scholars to

comment on the presence of a certain dualism that follows from the two-tiered formulation of

that monism. For example, in Sterling McMurrin's attempt to capture the general tendencies of

the LDS theological thought-world, he notes Mormonism's dualism within monism. Mormons'

conception of reality is, he says, "in a sense dualistic but in another sense monistic. There are

two kinds of reality, mind and matter, but they are different only in degree and not in

nature."[21] He also notes, though, that Mormonism teaches a "strict numerical dualism of the

spirit and body," which equates into understanding the two as "two different entities."[22]

Benjamin Park also notes that Mormon materialism contains its "own unique blend of monism

and dualism,"[23] while Stephen Webb describes Mormon materialism as "paradoxically

idealistic."[24]

 For other LDS scholars, however, the tension between dualism and monism is too great

to allow Mormonism to claim an uncomplicated materialism. Max Nolan examines how many

of Mormonism's other theological commitments directly contradict materialism as it has been

traditionally conceived in classical metaphysics. He notes that the LDS doctrine of eternal

intelligence in particular is in "radical conflict" with traditional materialism to the point of a

"chasm" existing between the two.[25] Samuel Brown also is skeptical that Mormon theology can

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[21] McMurrin, *Theological Foundations*, 8.
[22] McMurrin, 6.
[23] Park, "Salvation Through a Tabernacle," 10, footnote 39.
[24] Webb, *Jesus Christ*, 259.
[25] Nolan, "Materialism and the Mormon Faith," 70.

be characterized in terms of material monism, for, he notes, "Smith's dualism of fine and coarse matter would satisfy almost no materialists."[26]

Nevertheless, most LDS theologians do still retain a commitment to some form of material monism, even in the midst of discussion and debate regarding how to interpret the two-tiered monism inherited from Smith's May 1843 revelation. The two most prominent voices in this contemporary debate are Terryl Givens and Adam Miller. Givens defends a version of Mormon cosmology that staunchly affirms substance monism yet veers in the direction of static self-existent entities. His interpretation is quite consistent with the tradition as viewed through Smith's scriptural legacy and historical theologies such as Parley Pratt's, but as such it exhibits what Miller calls "theological knots endemic to" Mormonism when theologians fail to appreciate the metaphysical implications that follow from a thoroughgoing materialism.[27] However, Miller's own offering of a radical materialism has stirred pushback. It seems that when faced with at least his version of a genuine radical materialism, many LDS theologians respond as if they are entering into unfamiliar territory.

In what follows, I will lay out the respective interpretations of matter and spirit offered by Givens and Miller. In the discussion of each, I will engage with their interpretations in terms of understanding how each thinker perceives his rendering to be consistent with a materialist monism. However, my ultimate concern is less a preoccupation with metaphysical speculation

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[26] Brown, "Mormons Probably Aren't Materialists," 68. Brown specifically locates the problem in Smith's dualism of coarse matter and fine spirit matter. As he sees it, Smith "does not appear to me to be claiming strict physical materialism" because at the end of the day "fine matter isn't really the same thing" as matter of a coarser variety (69). Brown is gesturing toward the kind of claims I have tried to show, that spirit matter does different work than coarse matter in the thought of at least early LDS theologians.

[27] Miller, *Future Mormon*, 57.

as such than it is to examine what each theologian brings to the table in terms of what might be both helpful and problematic for my effort to think through a Mormon theology of the subject.

Givens' Interpretation: Monism and Eternalism

In his systematic overview of the doctrines and practices that provide the Mormon thought-world its identity, Terryl Givens claims that Joseph Smith and his teaching of spirit as fine matter had the effect of rejecting the "entire heritage" of classical dualism. Mormon teaching, he says, establishes a cosmic monism, which brings with it the "collapse of the radical divide between body and spirit."[28] Both of these entities are now understood by him to be comprised of the same ontological stuff: matter. One consequence of such a metaphysical system, Givens tells us, is that Mormonism's material monism explains away the greatest challenges inherent in the mind/body problem as it is traditionally conceived, in which any interaction between the body and mind, as two entirely distinct substances, becomes difficult or impossible to explain.[29] Givens' explanation of Mormonism's solution to the mind/body problem echoes that of McMurrin's when McMurrin states that Mormonism posits reality as existing along a "single continuum" and thus posits the body and mind as fundamentally of the same "quality or character of reality" because they are both material entities.[30] Because mind and body are ontologically connected, interaction between the two can theoretically be explained.

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[28] Givens, *Wrestling*, 57. Givens is not alone in this assessment. For example, Rosalynde Welch in "New Mormon Theology of Matter" puts it in more stark terms: "Joseph Smith's declaration that 'all spirit is matter'" is "an axiom that dissolves Platonic dualism in a stroke" (69).
[29] Givens, *Wrestling*, 209.
[30] McMurrin, *Theological Foundations*, 2, 6.

An LDS doctrine of matter that effects a "collapse of the radical divide between body

and spirit" is entirely conducive to the theology of the subject that I am promoting. If Givens'

theology of the subject were consistent with this thrust into a non-dualistic understanding of

what constitutes the self, his anthropology might complement mine. As I will discuss below, he

offers a theology that celebrates the potential for refinement of matter as it pertains to the

stages of human existence in mortality and beyond and thus incorporates a dynamic dimension

to the human subject. However, when it comes to the stage of the pre-existence, his

anthropology exhibits a contrast to such dynamism, and thus a contrast to the radical

dynamism of the made subject such as I am arguing for.[31] His interpretation of the pre-existent

subject, in fact, remains within the purview of dualistic orders of reality: a static pre-existent

realm side-by-side with dynamic mortal and post-mortal realms.

To be sure, Givens is so steeped in the LDS historical tradition that his own thought

closely tracks with that historical tradition as established by the line of prominent LDS thinkers,

beginning with Joseph Smith and carrying through to Parley Pratt and then to twentieth-

century theologians such as B. H. Roberts and Truman Madsen. Hence, much of his work

appears to be that of a mere compiler and organizer of the tradition of Mormon thought.

However, a constructive undertone is present even in his historical systematizations, and he

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[31] McMurrin, in *Theological Foundations*, describes Mormonism as adhering to a metaphysics of becoming, which then commits it to the view of reality as dynamic, as opposed to a metaphysics of being that sees reality as static. He states, "from its beginning, Mormonism has laid much stress on the dynamic character of reality" (12). In addition, because Mormonism is also committed to a metaphysical monism, McMurrin claims, the tradition ostensibly does not adhere to a Platonic and traditional Christian view of two orders of reality, one which is static and timeless and another that is full of objects that change. Interestingly, Givens, in *Wrestling*, seems to agree with this latter assessment, for he states that "McMurrin is right that the LDS conception of matter is 'essentially dynamic rather than static'" (61). However, I see an inconsistency here in Givens because, as we saw in the previous chapter and as I will discuss further below, he promotes a rather static Platonic formulation of the pre-existent self.

also offers works of overt theological construction in which some of his own metaphysical commitments are made clear.[32] Especially when it comes to his doctrine of the pre-existent self, a fair amount of constructive interpretation of the tradition occurs alongside any straightforward summary of what he discovers in the textual record. Based on his body of work, we may delineate at least two doctrinal points, closely intertwined with each other, that allow us to summarize Givens' stance on the metaphysics that underwrites his view of the human subject: these two points are his interpretations of the LDS doctrines of material monism and eternalism.

First is the obvious observation that material monism underwrites Givens' stated rejection of Western dualism, but the two-tiered form that LDS monism takes is an important interpretive basis for his understanding of the concept of matter. He takes it that Smith's gradations of matter have elevated it to "unorthodox capacities," because it now becomes possible for glory to inhere in matter.[33] For example, he describes the embodiment of the human soul as a purposive enterprise, especially given the fact that God is an exalted man who possesses a physical body.[34] The purposive aspect of a physical body suggests for Givens that humans did not fall from the pre-existence into the punishment of a mortal body, as Plato would have it, but unleashes possibilities that actually only follow from a physical existence.[35]

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[32] For Givens' work as a historical theologian, see *Wrestling the Angel*; for his work as a constructive theologian, see *The God Who Weeps*. As noted in my previous chapter, *Weeps* is co-authored with Givens' wife, Fiona Givens, an able and important LDS thinker in her own right. For purposes specific to this discussion, however, I will only address what I perceive to be Terryl Givens' contribution to that book as those contributions relate to an overall picture of his view of the human subject.

[33] Givens, *Wrestling,* 60.

[34] Givens, 199.

[35] Givens, 184.

These possibilities have to do with the idea that matter can be perfected. Because spirit matter is more refined, it offers a teleological destination for coarse matter, to be achieved not only because of the gift of a renovated resurrected body, but through the process of making righteous choices that lead to refinement of the soul, that is, as the soul moves progressively toward perfect harmony with the divine.[36] As he states in *Wrestling*, the "polarity" between spirit and matter "collapses" because "materiality becomes spiritualized."[37] Givens sees such fluidity between matter and spirit as a basic feature of a monistic cosmos because the two entities are at base made up of the same ontological substance, even if of differing degrees. This two-tiered material monism gives to his view of the mortal subject a progressive and dynamic dimension precisely because of the fluidity he conceives to obtain between the two degrees (spiritual and material) of the same substance.

Givens' second metaphysical commitment, the principle of eternalism, carries with it implications for the structural cosmological entities that Smith established as eternally durable and thus self-existent. If Givens' interpretation of the matter of mortality is dynamic, in the sense that it is subject to processes of refinement, his interpretation of the spirit matter of the pre-existence takes his thought in the direction of static, timeless, and unchanging entities that inhabit the universe because such entities are everlasting and uncreated. Along with eternally durable elements and human personhood, universal laws that govern the cosmos, according to Givens, are an additional manifestation of self-existent entities that structure the universe. These laws are understood to be self-existent to the point that even God is subject to them.[38]

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[36] Givens and Givens, *Weeps,* 91-92.
[37] Givens, *Wrestling*, 205.
[38] Givens, *Wrestling*, 63; Givens and Givens, *Weeps*, 79-80.

These laws are not just those that govern the physical universe, but they include moral laws that govern human beings in their interactions with each other and with God.

Material monism is cited by Givens as the underlying premise for such an idea. "A monistic scheme," he says, "is a small step" to the idea "that physical and moral laws are also but two manifestations of universal law."[39] One way to explain the idea that universal moral law is material is to award a certain parallelism to exist between the mechanistic nature of physical law and that of universal moral law. Just as materialism is often associated with some form of mechanistic determination, a form of such determination seems to also be applied by Givens to moral and religious law. It is this very mechanistic nature of moral and physical law that is linked to their materiality: if physical laws of the universe are based on nature's very materiality, then the parallel laws of morality must also be grounded in materiality. One way such materiality seems to play out for morality is through the idea that moral law must be radically consistent and predictable. Such predictability highlights its mechanistic nature.

One example of such predictable moral law cited by Givens is the relation between choice and consequence. Like Madsen before him, Givens argues for the idea that certain consequences necessarily follow from certain choices and that humans are capable of anticipating the consequences that are coupled to specific choices. Humans can know these consequences because they "find themselves in a universe pervaded by laws that define the relationship of action and consequence."[40] For Givens such an understanding of moral law is necessary in order to protect human agency as *free* agency. "Genuine moral agency," he states,

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[39] Givens, *Wrestling*, 63. Givens here cites Parley Pratt's *Treatise on the Regeneration and Eternal Duration of Matter* as one theological warrant for such an idea within the tradition of LDS thought.
[40] Givens and Givens, *Weeps*, 83-84.

"must entail necessary consequences": "there must be immutable guarantee that any given choice will eventuate in the natural consequence of that choice."[41]

An important aspect of such immutability of moral law is the idea that these laws operate independently of God or anything else precisely because they are self-existent.[42] God did not create this law of consequences but is subject to it. As such, God does not have the power to change or remove consequences. The atonement of Jesus Christ, according to Givens, is God's gift to the world precisely to buffer the full onslaught of suffering that comes from experiencing the consequences of our poor choices, consequences that by law must follow in a predictable pattern. These laws operate on an internally calibrated auto-pilot, much as any mechanistic operation would. For Givens, though, this situation is a "lovely paradox" in that conformity to law breeds freedom and individualism.[43]

One response to Givens' view of universal law is to observe that what applies to physical operations does not necessarily apply to moral principles. Universal physical laws have been established through scientific methods, but it is harder to make the case that moral law can be discovered through the same scientific methods, especially when we are dealing with phenomena as complicated and multi-layered as consequences to human actions.[44] The physical and the moral are not the same thing in this regard. One can, of course, affirm that

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[41] Givens, *Wrestling*, 226-27.
[42] Givens, 64.
[43] Givens and Givens, *Weeps*, 114.
[44] Miller, in *Future Mormon*, challenges Givens' model of moral law, saying that it looks more Platonic and thus idealist than radically materialist (57-64). In response, Givens defends his view of eternal law, stating, "I am unaware of a single cosmologist or theoretical physicist who believes that the most hard-core reductive materialism is inconsistent with the notion of universal laws ("Responses," 63). But Givens does not address whether such cosmologists or physicists have specifically moral law in mind when they trace the consistency between universal law and materialism.

materialism is consistent with the idea that universal laws govern physical nature and still be

able to make the following two observations regarding moral "law." First, even if Mormon

scripture uses the language of and affirms the concept of law,[45] it does not necessarily follow

that moral "law" then behaves like laws that govern the physical universe.[46] Such an idea needs

to be argued for, not taken for granted. Second, when the context is morality rather than the

physical world, casting moral law as unchanging mechanistic law has the same conceptual

outcome as casting it as unchanging universal ideal principles. It is precisely at this point that

the idea of eternally durable, self-existent moral law veers into the realm of timeless absolutes,

that is, into a realm that is impervious to any outside influences and that operates outside of

any relation to anything else, including God.[47]

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[45] Givens states in *Wrestling* that Joseph Smith was a legalist "by disposition and by pronouncement" (299). Thus, Givens associates moral law with the law invoked in Smithian scripture. He quotes a passage from an early revelation in order to establish a canonical place for law in Mormon theology: ". . . that which is governed by law is also preserved by law and perfected and sanctified by the same. That which breaketh a law, and abideth not by law, but seeketh to become a law unto itself, and willeth to abide in sin, and altogether abideth in sin, cannot be sanctified by law" ("Responses," 64; D&C 88:34-39). For Givens, the value of such a doctrine is that it challenges the arbitrariness associated with Divine Command (64), which attributes law solely to God's will, as opposed to an understanding of law as a self-existent entity, which means God is subject to law along with everyone and everything else.

[46] Givens and Miller have exchanged critiques regarding the idea that early Mormon thought was influenced by Newtonian physics. In *Future Mormon*, Miller attributes Givens' model for eternal law as a "Pratt-inflected, nineteenth-century brand of Newtonian physics" (58). In Givens' "Responses," he counters by saying that his view of law is found in LDS scripture, including the *Book of Mormon*. But Park in "Salvation through a Tabernacle," discusses how both Joseph Smith and Parley Pratt were influenced by Thomas Dick, a nineteenth-century scientist-theologian who tried to reconcile the science of his day (which would have included Newtonian physics) with religion. Dick offered an "anti-annihilation argument" that could have been the basis for Smith's idea that matter cannot be created or destroyed (11), which is an idea linked in Mormonism to not only a model of self-existent laws but to a material metaphysics in general. I would argue, then, that if it is the case that nineteenth-century Mormon thought shows evidence of being influenced by Newtonian physics, then LDS theologians need to at least consider and then grapple with the possibility that an outmoded scientific model has been enshrined in canonical and other foundational theological sources.

[47] I am working from McMurrin's definition of the concept of the absolute found in *Theological Foundations*: "In its technical meaning, the absolute is the unrelated and unconditioned" (27). It is interesting to note that while in this treatise McMurrin acknowledges that "absolutes are not difficult to locate" in LDS thought (13), in a later piece he laments that Mormonism is "infected with," as with an illness, "strong absolutistic tastes." See McMurrin, "Response Comment: On a Paper by Floyd M. Ross," 27.

How the concept of time is used in the context of self-existent entities can become complicated, even Janus-faced, since what is described as material temporality (and in the case of laws, mechanistic materiality) bleeds into what looks like timeless form. The concept of eternalism for Smith and his colleagues did not denote a realm that exists outside of time and therefore out of relation altogether but was taken to mean *temporally* everlasting and thus *within* time. Eternal elements, eternal personhood, eternal laws, and even God himself exist *in* time[48]—albeit time that has no beginning and no end and thus is understood to be everlasting, perpetual, and ceaseless. Because time has been traditionally associated with materiality, Mormon thinkers tend to equate their material metaphysics with a fundamental temporal quality of their cosmos. What such materiality and temporality should lead to, it would seem, is cosmological entities that are situated within certain temporal and spatial contexts and the relationality that then would follow. But this is not what we find in Givens' handling of the concept of universal law. Givens' rendering posits a case where that which should be temporal entity actually operates as that which transcends that very temporality. No moral law or its consequences has ever or will ever cease to be exactly what it has always been. These laws have the same timeless quality about them as atemporal immaterial entities have always had. The doctrine of self-existent, durable entities, then, exists in tension with a traditional idea of material temporality.

In the case of Givens' doctrine of human intelligence, pre-existent personhood is also cast in terms of a similar timelessness and changelessness by virtue of its eternalist, self-

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[48] In *Wrestling,* Givens acknowledges this aspect of time in Mormon thought: "God comes very early to be firmly situated within the same ontological *and* temporal realms as humans[,] instead of dwelling outside of space and time" (99).

existent attribute. As noted in the previous chapter, Givens' anthropological thought falls better

within the radical personhood branch of the doctrine of intelligence, which posits as self-

existent the agentive and individualized aspects of personhood, than within the begotten

personhood branch, which posits as self-existent merely an inchoate primordial iteration of

intelligence that only begins to take on personhood once God forms a spirit-body to clothe it.

We saw there that Givens associates a pre-existence subject with the most true and authentic

version of the self, one that whispers intimations of its presence to the mortal self, reminding

the latter of its own "timeless" core identity, an "independent, existing principle of intelligence

within us."[49]

Although Givens roundly criticizes Plato for a dualism that denigrates matter, he is eager

to affirm Plato's recollection of knowledge from a pre-existent realm as it can be applied to

human identity. But in that affirmation Givens reveals his own deeply dualist mode of thought.

Plato's theory of recollection rests on the idea that various absolute and stable entities (the

Forms) exist prior to any human recollection of them, and that for recollection to have any

meaning for human knowledge, they must remain in place everlastingly as the cosmologically

stable entities that they are. On this model, if a human subject recollects a pre-existent self,

then the pre-existent self acts, for all intents and purposes, just as a Form does: it is

fundamentally static and everlastingly stable, which means it cannot be dynamic and in

process.

If Givens posits such a static self for the pre-existence, while at the same time positing a

dynamic self for mortality, then he is in effect positing a bifurcated set of operations for a dual

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[49] Givens and Givens, *Weeps*, 6, 12, 38-40.

set of selves. In addition, the pre-existent self seems to be a perfected version of a static core

identity in contradistinction to the dynamic self of mortality caught up in the work of

refinement and perfectibility. The anthropological picture that appears here is one of a

bifurcated self that is split between two ontological locations with differing operations. Such a

split between a spirit-matter/pre-existent self and a coarse-matter self of mortality operates

much like the Cartesian split between mind and body. It also reveals a Janus-faced use of time

when everlasting temporality is recast as timeless absolutism by virtue of the concept of self-

existent entities. While this problematic concerning temporality and self-existent entities does

not originate with Givens, he does illustrate the idealist avenues it can take. Needless to say, of

the two selves posited here, it is Givens' dynamic self of mortality that is more consistent with

the metaphysical materialism he claims for Mormonism than is the self that replicates a

Platonic Form.

As illustrated in the previous chapter, Givens' anthropology echoes that of Truman

Madsen's as they both interpret the doctrine of intelligence as Platonic remembrance of some

ideal form of the self. As noted in the previous chapter, Madsen does try to differentiate his

version of primordial memory from that of Plato's by explaining that Plato's notion was "mainly

conceptual or mathematical," that is, idealistic by virtue of being grounded in the mind, while

the LDS version is grounded in a monism that does not transcend "space, time, and

materiality."[50] However, as is the case with Givens, Madsen's primordial self, even in its

materiality and because of its self-existent attribute, is still interpreted as the vehicle for

bringing to the present self's memory that which looks like an equivalent to a Platonic form.

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[50] Madsen, *Eternal Man*, 56, footnote 6.

Hence, material monism as an underlying metaphysical premise does not seem to undo for

Madsen a dualism of operation between spirit matter (the pre-existent self) and coarse matter

(the present self) that looks like classical dualism.

To be clear, neither Givens nor Madsen denigrates the coarse-matter self of mortality.

One central reason why Givens takes issue with classical dualism is that it casts matter as

something that is both inferior to spirit and ultimately expendable.[51] Although most modern

criticism of classical dualism has rightly targeted this problem of the denigration of matter, a

general concept of dualism as such does not require the traditional degree of denigration of

matter in order to posit a distinction of value between it and spirit. Stated differently, just

because one does not rigorously denigrate matter does not automatically mean one moves

beyond all dualism. Madsen and Givens do not explicitly posit coarse matter as necessarily

corrupt or as a burden to the intelligence of the human spirit. They merely describe it as a

potentiality, that is, as an undeveloped, perhaps immature self that can realize its fullness only

through the spiritual influences of the (somehow) previously perfected spirit-matter self. But as

such, they still offer a bifurcation between the operation of realms as well as a higher valuation

of the spiritual dimension offered by the pre-existence self.

Consistent with my own views, Adam Miller aptly captures what is at stake in such a

critique of Givens' anthropology (and of Madsen's by association): it tends to devalue the

present world precisely as it posits "something better, simpler, and more independent" than

the this-world self appears to be. Miller describes Givens' pre-existence self as that which acts

as a foil to the "poverty" of this world and as the antidote to the messy complications and

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[51] Givens, *Wrestling*, 59, 209-11.

opacities of the present self. It serves as a sort of escape hatch for the problems and messiness of the present realm. As he puts it, this ready-made pre-self doesn't have the same problems as the this-world self, such that to be "spiritually solvent" one must rely on this other-worldly self that lies within us.[52] Givens indeed states in *The God Who Weeps* that "we never feel completely at home in this world." Although he casts the "recurrent intimations of a different sphere, a different domain of existence only dimly perceived" as something that ultimately leads us to a feeling of familiarity, he is still referring to "those realms beyond the veil" in which a pre-existent self operates differently from a this-world self.[53] For Miller, the whole idea of substance monism means that there are no separate realms that function differently than the present one. Whatever instabilities, problems, or complicated social mechanisms with which we are involved in the here and now must be those we are subject to as we pass through any stage of existence.

In the end, Givens' and Madsen's Platonic-inflected version of anthropology strikes me as a non-essential interpretation. That is to say, the operations and theological role of the pre-existent self can be interpreted otherwise, just as the radical personhood view of intelligence is a non-essential view that has been counterposed by the non-essential begotten personhood view. A case in point is James McLachlan's critique of Givens' adherence to Platonic and Neoplatonic assumptions regarding the pre-existence.[54] McLachlan believes that Givens' treatment of the concept of the pre-existence focuses only on the Platonic views of that realm as adopted by orthodox Christianity and philosophy, which characterize it as encompassing a

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[52] Miller, *Future Mormon*, 49-50.
[53] Givens and Givens, *Weeps*, 38-39.
[54] McLachlan, "Givens Among Heterodox Theologians," 47-55.

changeless and impersonal ideal of perfection. But, McLachlan argues, Givens overlooks one heterodox tradition of the pre-existence, which sees dynamism as the durable feature of eternity.

This heterodox tradition began, McLachlan tells us, with Isaac Luria, who in the sixteenth century constructed a version of Jewish Kabbalism, which was then picked up in the seventeenth century by Jacob Boehme, and then later by F. W. J. Schelling and Nicolai Berdyeav. This branch of thought posits an evolutionary model of perfection that applies even to God: God-with-the-world is greater than God alone and thus adds to God's perfections. In terms of the pre-existence, chaos is at the basis of everything, such that a creation was needed and desirable so that order and form may be realized. Instead of a perfect and changeless pre-existence, then, this Lurianic Kabbalism posits the idea of an imperfect primordial beginning, a point from which change and refinement might be incrementally realized for God and the world together. McLachlan sees such a heterodox theory of the pre-existence as more resonant with the two-tiered monism of Mormonism than static Platonism because the former accounts for a dynamic universe all the way through, while the latter does not. This heterodox view of the pre-existence is also, I would point out, more conducive to a dynamic model of a subject which is made through processes—the type of subject Givens posits for the subject of mortality—rather than a ready-made model of Platonic Form that he and Madsen posit for the subject of the pre-existence.

Miller's Interpretation: Network Theology

Adam Miller offers a contrasting vision to Terryl Givens regarding the implications that follow from a Mormon doctrine of materialism. His interpretation of that doctrine can be

described as a truly strict monism and therefore what a rejection of dualism might actually look like. Even more, Miller's overall project could be summarized as a reexamination and rewriting of the metaphysics that underwrites traditional concepts within philosophy and theology. In so doing, he draws on the work within mainly post-modern French philosophy and sociology through such thinkers as Bruno Latour, Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Marion, and Jacques Derrida, thinkers who themselves can be understood as participating in the same project of the reassessment and rewriting of Western metaphysics. In such philosophical texts, Miller seems to have found resources to think materialism in religion all the way through.

In what he calls "experimental metaphysics," he draws specifically on Bruno Latour in order to reconfigure the traditional binaries of classical metaphysics, such as part/whole, transcendence/immanence, body/mind.[55] His approach can be described as, on one level, jettisoning the concept of binaries as such but, on another level, of taking more of a both/and approach rather than the either/or approach such binaries have traditionally represented. In terms of Mormon metaphysics, Miller correlates the idea of experiment with that of a "working approach" to theology, an approach that presumably makes room for the provisional and revisable. He pushes theologians to consider the "speculative question of what Mormon beliefs *might* mean were they experimentally tethered to a particular metaphysical platform."[56] The metaphysical platform of choice for him is a thoroughgoing materialism.

Following Latour, then, Miller adheres to a radically materialist object-oriented ontology, and as such suggests that objects are the basic unit of reality. The term "object," he

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[55] Miller, *Speculative Grace*, 12-14.
[56] Miller, "Review of Webb," 183 (original emphasis).

tells us, is simply "a generic name for any and every kind of existing thing," such that to be is to be an object.[57] Thus, humans are objects along with the vast variety of nonhuman objects. Under this view, God is also an object. Objects exhibit what Miller calls the "principle of irreduction." According to this principle, each possesses the attribute of "resistant availability," in which each object maintains its own dignity and agency to resist whatever potential connections other objects may pressure it to enter into, but simultaneously each object remains open and available to make such connections. No object is entirely resistant or available; every object is a conglomeration of both impulses.[58] Such a both/and understanding of objects makes the world they inhabit messy.

One important underlying feature of such resistant availability is the idea that each object is a "full-blown" actor, including nonhuman objects, and as such each object has full responsibility for itself. Such a move in terms of agency also has the effect to democratize the ontological plane, such that humans cannot lord over all other nonhuman objects. There is also no "metaphysical king."[59] Miller envisions, then, democratic relations between God and humans and nonhuman objects. God is subject to the principle of irreduction just like every other object.[60] What Miller suggests such a flat ontology can accomplish is that in examining the processes and mechanisms that objects participate in and thus are formed by, we will bring no preconceptions with us regarding any one object. Such a method of irreduction is meant to

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[57] Miller, *Speculative Grace*, 10-11.
[58] Miller, 37-40.
[59] Miller, 19.
[60] Miller, 22.

allow the objects to speak for themselves. Both Miller and Latour view such methods as being inherently empirical.[61]

In addition, each object individually cannot be understood as a simple and uncompounded unity but is itself teeming with the networks and relations that traverse through it and that shape it into what it is. Between objects there exist alliances, connections, negotiations, and networks—all of which are never permanent but are always provisionally based on the contingencies that obtain in any given context. In fact, this is a world made up of provisionality. Unity can only be provisionally achieved through negotiated alliances.[62] Truths can only be provisional based on the ability of any given object to persuade others to go along.[63] Morals are established only through provisional statements that objects in a given network can agree on.[64] And so on. The basis of such a provisional world is the idea that reality is a busy hive of activity, a series of concatenating networks, with connections and alliances continuously being made, amended, or entirely cut off, based on the agentive action of each object involved. Some connections are more durable than others, and in fact, Miller suggests that some become so long-lasting that they are worn smooth enough that the visibility of their connection becomes transparent.[65] But in principle, even such smooth and transparent alliances can always be negotiated anew.

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[61] Latour uses a model of scientific empiricism based in the laboratory to describe such methods in *Reassessing the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[62] Miller, *Speculative Grace*, 30-33.
[63] Miller, 103-104.
[64] Miller, 140-142.
[65] Miller, 153.

Thus, for Miller reality is multiple, an "incommensurable plurality," but a pluriverse that is ontologically flattened.[66] There is no dualism of mind and body here. There is no transcendent macro-force working behind the scenes that pulls the levers of existence. There is no behind world at all. Miller suggests that the idea of an invisible hand working behind the scenes amounts to a "conspiracy theory."[67] For Miller, when Latour rejects such a metaphysics, he is the ultimate realist. As objects in such a messy pluriverse are tasked with the work of not only creating networks among themselves but with understanding the emulsified object that they themselves are, there is no possibility of flight to another realm that offers a utopian dream of a cleaner, more tidy existence. The work all objects are faced with, and have always and will always be faced with, is the work we are engaged in right now in the present.

For Miller, this understanding of the world is precisely what a radical materialism would look like. The implications of this view for religion are that the theological formulations of a God who exists as a ground for existence and who, to a certain extent, is relied upon to "make everything better," as well as formulations of personhood that guarantee autonomy, are both fictions. Moreover, the idea that there is some already given reality of another realm that we simply need to discover is, for him, a fantasy. Rather, the work in which we are already immersed, in medias res, is to "actively construct the real itself."[68] The world indexes processes and operations, not static units of already given wholeness.

The above describes Miller's metaphysics. His theological project, which he calls "network theology," is underwritten by this metaphysics, and its main task is to explore the

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[66] Miller, 27-29, 66-67.
[67] Miller, 9-11.
[68] Miller, 62-63.

possibility of thinking grace as immanence.[69] He begins from the premise that immanence is the

domain of religion, and as such, the concept of transcendence needs to be either substantively

reformulated or outright banished from its discourse. He posits his project as situated from the

question, Can grace be thought without a Giver? He thus portrays his approach as non-theistic,

in contrast to the theistic view that God is just such a transcendent Giver of grace. Miller's view

of grace is that it is not some kind of stop-gap measure with which some other-wordly God

intervenes in the world. Rather, it is something built into the very structures of creation and as

such is anterior to sin.[70]

Nevertheless, Miller does retain the concept of transcendence, albeit in a refashioned

form. He refashions it in a couple of interconnected ways. First, he retains the traditional

connection between transcendence and the idea of unknowability but flattens it in order to

assert that unknowability is a feature of all objects, linked to their resistance. The idea of

transcendence as linked to some unknown and unknowable unity and wholeness that exists in

some faraway realm, whether that unity is God or personhood, is rejected. Transcendence here

refers to the fact that objects are only ever partially grasped and, concomitantly, always

partially not grasped. The flipside of this principle of transcendence, is of course, immanence.

Immanence does not exist in strict dichotomy to transcendence, however, but as one piece of

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[69] Some of Miller's texts that engage with grace specifically are *Badiou, Marion, and St. Paul: Immanent Grace* (New York: Continuum, 2008); *Speculative Grace: Bruno Latour and Object-Oriented Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013); *"General Theory of Grace,"* in *Future Mormon*, 1-12; and *Original Grace: An Experiment in Restoration Thinking* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2022).

[70] Miller, "General Theory of Grace," 1-3, and *Paraphrase of Romans*, 2-5. The traditional Christian narrative that Miller is responding to is that because sin was introduced into the world because of the Fall, God needs to respond by bestowing grace on mortals as a means to deal with the consequences from the Fall. In this version, sin comes first and then grace. Miller rejects this ordering. He suggests grace is built into the very structures and being of the world, and sin represents a rejection of this grace.

irreduction, that associated with availability. Transcendence and immanence, heaven and earth, human and nonhuman—such concepts are "emulsified into a single, messy, metaphysical pulp."[71]

A second aspect of Miller's refashioning of the concept of transcendence involves what Miller calls the "logic of exception."[72] The idea of exception has to do with elements in the world that are irreducible to the processes of that world. In a traditional logic of transcendence, certain elements of human religious experience, for example, are seen to be unaccountable within an immanent economy. As such, they are understood to exist as exclusions from that economy, as something inherently outside of and alien to it. Such a view underwrites the theological problem that is the counterpart to the mind/body problem: how can a transcendent being who is understood to be ontologically alien to the world interact with that world? The answer has traditionally been that God, as omnipotent ruler of the world, has the ability to miraculously intervene in the world. But that answer leaves unresolved the ethical implications that such a being is still inherently unknowable and even alien to human experience. Miller's logic of exception still posits the existence of certain irreducible or unaccountable elements within the networks of objects, but these exceptional elements are that which are excluded for the very purpose of constituting those networks. As such, they are simultaneously included and excluded from network systems. Exceptions are thus that which constitute a network and its elements by designating that which it is not. The "not-this" attribute still retains a constitutive function because the very relationships of objects in a network are structured by this exception.

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[71] Miller, *Speculative Grace*, 41-44.
[72] Miller, *Future Mormon*, 61-63 and "Notes on Petrey," 49-50.

One analogy of exception within a network could be a Venn diagram made up of a

plurality of circles that represent particulate objects. When objects in networks come together,

they are never capable of accomplishing perfect coincidence with each other because of their

material and thus particulate nature.[73] A Venn diagram-as-network, then, is composed of

multiple objects that are capable of only partially intersecting with each other and thus are

never able to fully or absolutely eclipse into one unity with one another. In the areas that lay

outside the area of intersection are where exceptions are found. In any analysis of a Venn

diagram, those areas of exception are as important to understanding the connections between

objects as are the areas where the circles intersect. What's more, the areas of exception are

still *within* a network as they define the boundaries around the overlap of alliances that objects

manage to make with one another. As such, exceptions are still part of the immanent economy

of the network.

Miller locates both grace and faith as residing in this area of exception—that is, anything

that could traditionally be defined as supernatural. While he rejects the supernatural as the

default explanation for religious experience,[74] he does not deny the occurrence of events that

can be experienced as offering something exceptional to ordinary experience. It in this vein that

Miller describes "network grace" as an emergent "systemic excess" that is produced by the

complexity of interactions in a network.[75] However, he also seems to envision immanent grace

as operating in terms of certain naturalized elements within ordinary experience. It cannot be

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[73] Miller in *Future Mormon* states: "The defining condition of materialism is a thoroughgoing particularism that structures every relationship with exception" (63).
[74] Miller, 77.
[75] Miller, 86.

wholly accounted for because it is not seen, precisely because it is that which is baked into the very givenness of the world. As a constituting element, it is obscured in the very act of constitution. An important aspect of Miller's theological project, then, is to call Mormons to the task of denaturalizing elements of exceptional grace within the immanent flow of ordinary life and, in the process, to see the very givenness of life as an exceptional gift.[76]

Miller's theology is a bold experiment in trying to grapple with the implications of the substance monism that many LDS theologians claim to be committed to, and it is also an effort to bring logical consistency to LDS discourse regarding this monism, something he sees as a weakness in the Platonic renderings of theologians like Terryl Givens. However, Miller's metaphysical offering is not without its critics. I will address two areas of critique that I believe Miller's theology is open to. The first is that he does not adequately grapple with the theological sensibilities of his Mormon audience such that he then becomes vulnerable to the accusation that his theology is not recognizably Mormon. The second has to do with his view of the subject: although the subjectivity he envisions is quite close to the one I am arguing for, it does not fully account for a pedagogical feature to the made subject. The concept of individual progressive refinement, so important to Mormon theology, seems to be muted in the network connections of his objects.

First, Miller does not adequately grapple with Mormon sensibilities that tend toward more traditional doctrinal renderings and thus leaves himself open to the critique that his

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[76] As Miller describes grace, it is not necessarily that which carries with it obvious desirable outcomes. He states that "grace is the name for that which we suffer," by which he means that givenness as grace is not the same thing as having all of our problems solved. Grace is "not concerned with preferences" but with simply giving unconditionally, even if that gift at first appears to be detrimental to our well-being. Grace is unseen in this sense because, as Miller explains, "if something doesn't show up as being to my advantage, then typically it doesn't show up at all." See Miller, *Rube Goldberg Machines*, 11-12.

theology veers away from legibility. While Miller and Givens seem to agree on the basic claim

that Mormonism is committed to a radical materialism, they disagree on the actual features

and parameters of that materialism. Givens goes so far to say that Miller's rejection of Givens'

version of universal law is "radically incompatible with Joseph [Smith]'s cosmological

pronouncements, the scriptural canon, and LDS soteriology," so much so that he doesn't

believe Miller's counter version of material law and immanent grace even requires serious

refutation.[77] He does not deny that Miller's Latourian object-oriented ontology might be

"philosophically coherent" or that Miller's network grace might find some textual support in the

Pauline epistles. However, he doesn't see how Miller's "counter-theology" is "in any way . . .

recognizably Mormon."[78]

This accusation that Miller's theology is unrecognizable to Mormon doctrinal norms and

sensibilities could also be extended to skepticism toward a flat metaphysics which seems to

equalize God with humans in a way that LDS thinkers and practitioners generally do not. In

practice, Mormonism's divine being of greater Intelligence among lesser intelligences is still

regarded as a Creator (or Organizer) of the world who intervenes at times in miraculous ways,[79]

who is a wise Heavenly Father that listens to and responds to personal prayer, and who is an

everlastingly stable providential force in the universe. Indeed, the view of God from the Book of

Abraham that we saw in the previous chapter is certainly not a being who lives in flat equality

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[77] Givens, "Responses," 63.
[78] Givens, 64.
[79] For example, Mormons seem to embrace the passages in Moroni 9 of the *Book of Mormon* that assert that God is a God of miracles, such that LDS worship services often include narratives of personal experiences in which God performs miracles.

with other objects of the universe but who reigns over a deeply hierarchical universe as supreme being.

This hierarchical view of God and the cosmos is the dominant theological tableau in Mormonism, notwithstanding the gesture in King Follett toward a co-equality of God with humans. For all of the infractions that a Mormon God may be guilty of against the philosophical notions of classical theism, the Mormon God still tends to operate in quite traditional ways within LDS discourse. Even if a philosophical case could be made that Miller's theology is entirely consistent with the implications of a Mormon doctrine of materialism, as Givens has seemingly granted, the fact that Miller's theology might *feel* foreign to the theistic sensibilities of those within the tradition would still need to be addressed.

Samuel Brown's critique of Miller's theology is a case in point. Brown's discomfort with a monism that seems to push Mormonism into a companionship with secular humanism is what motivated him to revisit the LDS historical record to see if something like flat ontology actually holds up. Based on his findings, he takes issue with how weak Joseph Smith's materialism seems to be, and he further rejects the thoroughgoing materialist path Miller proposes, specifically, to appropriate Latour's object-oriented ontology. His greatest concern is that Miller's network theology results in a world in which there is no external grounding for order and meaning. He states, "The network theology seems to embrace groundlessness as if God were a beat poet, cigarette ash falling like existential dandruff onto his black turtleneck. Traditional Mormons . . . [are] unwilling to follow Miller into radical materialism."[80]

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[80] Brown, "Mormons Aren't Materialists," 71.

At stake for Brown, then, is locating a metaphysical source that grounds ultimate meaning and thus saves it and any metrics for goodness, truth, and morality from arbitrariness, contingency, and relativism. In the protection of such meaning, Brown exhibits a sensitivity against Miller's move to de-hierarchize God in relation to humans. Based on his examination of the historical record, Brown tells us, it is possible to see something that looks like a "reasonable approximation to the God of classical theism" in at least some of Smith's revelations,[81] which therefore means that "Joseph Smith really did believe in something like the God of classical theism,"[82] notwithstanding the direction his theology took toward a corporeal God of flesh and bones.

Brown's constructive answer to both Miller's radical materialism and Mormonism's ostensibly weak materialism may itself be an overcorrection in that he declares that materialism is probably not the appropriate metaphysical system to describe Mormonism at all.[83] Instead, he posits a more traditional theology of transcendence in which some divine essence exists, more ultimate than Elohim, as the source for all metrics of truth, goodness, and morality. This essence is what he calls the "True Light of *agape*."[84] In the end, though, Brown

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[81] Brown, 58.

[82] Brown, 72.

[83] Brown's conclusion here is most likely a response to a comment Miller makes in *Future Mormon* in which he ponders whether the "costs" of a "radical and thoroughgoing materialism" seem to be "too high," which, Miller says, would mean that "Mormonism is *not* actually committed to a radically monistic materialism." Miller admits that such a rejection of materialism "is likely the simplest response" to the problem he raises of a latent idealism within Mormon theology (60). Brown seems to pick up where Miller left off by arguing that Mormonism is indeed *not* materialist.

[84] Brown presents this True Light theology less as his own constructive move and more as a recovery of a theological idea that Joseph Smith himself was positing, a historical move of which I am skeptical. Brown draws from various canonical Mormon sources, including the May 1833 revelation, to make the case that he has textual and historical evidence of both Mormonism's non-materialism and this True Light theology.

does not quibble too much with the entrenched features of LDS theology[85] because he believes

he has located a source of meaning that transcends the entire material complex of that

theology and which thus encompasses it in a metaphysical foundation that saves it from

problems of infinite regress and blind ends, something he claims Miller's network theology is

simply not equipped to do.

Stephen Webb, a Catholic sympathizer of certain features of Mormon materialist

theology, analyzes Miller's theology in terms of what Webb references as a "category of

depth," which carries some of the same concerns that Brown has voiced.[86] For Webb, Miller's

appropriation of Latour leads to a problem of insubstantial identities for objects because they

operate in a sort of "hook-up" framework of convenience. He describes "Latour's objects" as

having "no lasting loyalties or deep commitments to enduring identities."[87] He also notes that

Miller's and Latour's "nonstandard" account of matter leads to Miller's seeming contentment

with relativism as well as a jettisoning of various levels of being and their "corresponding

variations in intensity of experience."[88]

In Webb's own project of arguing for a non-orthodox theology of Heavenly Flesh

Christology, he acknowledges how difficult it can be to reconstruct theological renderings in

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[85] For example, Brown attempts to reconcile the problem of how True Light can ground Being (as opposed to Meaning) within the context of the Mormon doctrine of self-existent elements and intelligences. This problem derives from the fact that he views the May 1833 revelation as a source text for both his True Light theology and for the idea of uncreated human souls—although, it's worth pointing out that Brown uses the language of "coeval" from the King Follett sermon in this passage rather than the language of intelligence from the May 1833 revelation (65). He also leaves alone Smith's doctrine that "both God and Jesus are conspecific with humans" (44). The idea that True Light transcends even Elohim, the traditional God of Mormonism, allows for the idea that Elohim, although exalted, is still a physical, corporeal being and thus limited in terms of serving as the ultimate source for meaning.
[86] Webb, "Review of Miller," 181.
[87] Webb, 181.
[88] Webb, 176-79.

new and unfamiliar ways. His own attempt is attentive to the entrenched assumptions and explicit teachings that have been dominant in the long tradition of creedal Christianity. Perhaps some of the pushback against Miller could have been eased if he would have adhered more to Webb's methodology, that is, more explicitly led his audience from old to new. This is not to say Miller's theology is entirely lacking recognizable Mormon theological formulations. Quite the contrary. But his theology is an attempt to thoroughly rework such formulations to make them radically materialist conceptions and to erase any idealism he sees lurking in the various interpretations of them. At least some of the pushback against Miller, especially that of Givens, represents the fact that from the beginning Joseph Smith and his colleagues adhered to certain classical metaphysical assumptions that led to canonical formulations and interpretations that retain idealist and dualistic features. The "latent idealism" Miller criticizes in Givens has a strong hold in the hearts and minds of Latter-day Saints precisely because it is grounded in the entrenched orthodoxy of canonical texts.

Another aspect of Stephen Webb's analysis of the category of depth in Miller's theology is helpful to set up what is at stake in my second critique of Miller. In addition to his concerns regarding Latour's "hook-up" model of objects and their identities, Webb means to compare Miller's modern metaphysics to classical Platonic metaphysics in terms of the concept of depth. According to Webb's telling, Platonic religion has historically served as one vehicle to an experience of varying levels of meaning, based on the different ontological realms one perceives oneself to be tapping into. In a Platonic paradigm, as Webb describes it, the spiritual has served as the realm intended to yield the deepest experiences. But various intellectual turns throughout history have complicated such a search for depth, not the least being a

modern turn toward a material metaphysics that strips aways such layers of being and meaning. Thus, in a purely flat world, such as Latour's and Miller's, Webb sees a potential problem for the realization of traditional spiritual experiences. One component of Webb's own project can be described as a theological attempt to come to terms with modernity's materialist turn while still retaining the spiritual as a meaningful category of human experience. This is why he finds Mormonism's two-tiered formulation of spirit matter and coarse matter as useful for Christian theology at large, because it allows for states of being and of refinement that help the material and the spiritual remain correlated.[89]

The higher valuation of spirit, spirit matter and its operations that we see within Pratt's, Givens', and Madsen's interpretations of Mormonism's two-tiered monism might be understood within this history of the concept of spirit. The spirit matter of post-mortality for Pratt signifies the promises of what divinized humans could experience once coarse matter was left behind. The spirit matter of the pre-existence for Givens signifies the promise of an empowering source of identity that speaks from out of a realm quite distinct from that of the mundane here and now. In Madsen's similar promotion of a model of Platonic recollection of a true self, he uses the image of depth repeatedly, for example, in describing his anthropological model as an "experiment in depth."[90] All three turn to various conceptions of spirit and spirit matter to be a source for deeper meaning and experience than the otherwise mundane level of material existence has to offer. It is true that Givens and Madsen eventually run into the problem of coherency when they attempt to attach their Platonic interpretations to a

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[89] See Webb, *Jesus Christ,* especially chapter 9, "Godbodied: The Matter of Latter-day Saints," 243-70.
[90] Madsen, *Eternal Man*, 58.

metaphysics of monist materialism. Miller's theology, however, perhaps overcorrects for this Platonic dualism with a strictly flat ontology that appears to wipe out a meaningful category of experience.

I am sympathetic to Miller's project to posit Mormon theological formulations that adhere to a more materialist than a classical idealist (and thus dualist) metaphysics, not the least because I believe his non-dualist anthropology is an apt image of what is at stake in the kind of subject that is made through Mormon practices. Practice-centrism, which is claimed by many LDS thinkers as the more salient method of understanding Mormonism than the doing of theology, lends itself to a material view of the subject that begins with the body and with bodily practices. The challenge is to see whether it is feasible to retain the idea of "depth of experience" that the spiritual represents in Mormon Platonic renderings while staying firmly grounded within a material monist paradigm.

One way to make such a move is to reconceptualize spirit and spirit matter as they have been traditionally rendered within LDS discourse. In contradistinction to the idea of a pre-existent, spiritual self acting as some kind of ready-made cosmological entity that speaks to the mind of a coarse-matter embodied self, the idea of the body, even in its coarse matter iteration as that which constitutes the spiritual, needs to be established as a legible interpretation of Mormon anthropology. Miller has helpfully done some of the groundwork for this task, and I will present some of his ideas here below. However, I do not believe he has gone far enough to establish legibility because he does not adequately address the issue of refinement, that is, the layers of being and experience that Mormonism's two-tiered metaphysics tries to retain. Once I discuss how Miller is helpful, I will then turn to the question of whether and how his theology

handles the idea of dimensional experience. My sense is that certain aspects of his theology do

retain what could be called a category of graded dimensions of experience, but, I will argue, his

view of the subject does not go far enough to theorize a specifically pious dimension of the

subject.

At one point, Miller acknowledges that Mormonism's two-tiered materialism may still

stand as a viable model, but with the caveat that spirit must be handled as a "fundamentally

material" entity.[91] In his theorization of spirit, however, he actually shifts the theoretical

framework away from spirit as such and toward the concept of soul. Such a move is important,

not the least because it is consistent with another of Smith's canonical revelations which

defines the LDS doctrine of the soul in a distinct way: "the spirit and the body," the revelation

states, "is the soul of man."[92] As Miller sees it, this definition means that the soul is a

distributed entity of body and spirit and thus cannot escape materiality. He grants that while

spirit could be conceptualized as immaterial in this scenario, even still the *soul* would remain

material because the spirit is so closely tethered to the body that it is necessarily "tied to the

spatiality and temporality that are characteristic of matter."[93] Because of this definition of soul,

Miller thinks about spirit only at the same time that he thinks about the body. The spirit is only

one entity in the larger complex of soul. It is an equal player, not the star player, in the model

that he lays out. It has its role to play, but it is so enmeshed with body that it is difficult to

decipher where one begins and the other ends within the soul. Thus, Miller can state, "there

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[91] Miller, *Future Mormon*, 59-60.
[92] D&C (1835), 100; D&C 88:15.
[93] Miller, *Rube Goldberg Machines*, 39-40.

are no souls without bodies,"[94] while at the same time he can describe the soul as a distributed

entity which is not "localizable in either the spirit or the body."[95]

Miller's theorization of soul as a conjunction of spirit and body is made possible by the

principles of network thinking. He sets his discussion of soul, spirit, and body within the

terminological framework of his network theology in which all three entities are understood as

networks in their own right, and which exhibit various network attributes.[96] For example, body

and spirit are both characterized as an "interpenetrating weave" of various entities and

processes that intersect within them. For the body, this weave is made up of physiological

systems and processes along with bodily organs.[97] For the spirit, this weave is made up of

"thoughts, ideas, judgments, feelings, passions, desires, and aversions." It is also what Miller

calls the "dimension of looped awareness and reflexivity."[98] Such a distinction between body

and spirit is based on the standard Mormon formulation of the two tiers of spirit matter and

coarse matter. The body's network is made up of fleshly organs and cellular synapses, while the

spirit's network is made up of thoughts, ideas, and feelings, "finer" than what belongs to the

body and as such harder to discern.[99] This distinction between body and spirit is meant to

capture the granular difference between the two entities that is set by the idea from the May

1843 revelation that spirit is "more fine or pure."

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[94] Miller, 51.
[95] Miller, 39.
[96] In *Future Mormon*, Miller lays out a set of eleven "primary traits" for networks: complex, dynamic, open, distributed, looped, nonlinear, self-organizing, emergent, historical, local, and flat (80-83).
[97] Miller, *Rube Goldberg Machines*, 40.
[98] Miller, 42.
[99] Miller, 42.

The soul is the entity that gathers all of these various bodily and spiritual interactions together into one bounded meeting place. It is also the locus where the bodily and the spiritual processes are then distributed into each other to create the larger complex network that is a human soul. Miller borrows the image of a watershed from George Handley to describe how he thinks about the soul. A watershed, Miller tells us, is the gathering place for all of the surrounding tributaries, bringing them together into one place. As each discrete river and stream flows into the watershed, they are connected into one locale and thereafter take on the appearance of being one unified body of water. Like the watershed, the human soul gathers a "litany of brains, bones, beliefs, scruples, prejudices" and the like into one discrete locale of a human person.[100] This litany represents a network of relations among various entities such that the soul can be said to be comprised of the relationship between the body and spirit and all of their related objects and processes, from granular to hefty matter.

The view here of the body, spirit, and soul is one of open systems, which is an attribute of a network. For a network to be open means that it makes itself available to communicate with other networks.[101] It means that each network ceaselessly engages with other objects and environments, continually sending parts of itself out and bringing parts of others back in. This openness means that no network is entirely self-sufficient because it is made up of mutually constitutive objects and processes. Openness operates at all levels of the soul: from the internal networks that make up the body and spirit as discrete entities to the interpenetration of the body and spirit within the soul itself.[102]

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[100] Miller, 50-51.
[101] Miller, *Future Mormon*, 81.
[102] Miller, *Rube Goldberg Machines*, 41-43 and *Future Mormon*, 87-88.

Such a description of the soul also bleeds into other network attributes. These networks are complex, meaning their constituents parts cannot be analyzed entirely as discrete units without oversimplifying them. The networks are dynamic and fluid as well as distributed, in the sense that they lack one center unifying point. The body, spirit, and soul all operate like what Miller calls a "black box," that is, they *appear* to be a simple and stable unity.[103] But within each entity is a teeming set of networks, subject to never ending relationships and interactions, all ceaselessly moving around, bumping into each other, latching on and letting go, in the same way that microscopic cells are constantly buzzing with relational activity within objects that to all appearances seem to be stable, solid, and unified entities.

It's worthwhile to note here that Miller's picture of the soul as network is at the same time a picture of the subject as network. His theorization of spirit, body, and soul, then, takes him directly into a theoretical space that engages with subjectivity. The human subject is itself constituted by not only the internal network processes of soul as conjunction of body and spirit, but by the relationships, interactions, and interpenetrations it experiences with other network objects in the world. Subjectivity, he tells us, is itself a gathering process because the subject in its turn acts as "a site, a passage point, a relay station, a halfway house that hosts the objects passing through."[104] Each subject is thus constituted by many layers consisting of the various social and cultural objects, codes, and influences that are absorbed from them, but also familial inheritances, from personal interactions and family culture to genetic traits and family histories, as well as the inheritances from biological evolution. All are layers within the subject, and all

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[103] Miller, *Speculative Grace*, 82-84 and *Rube Goldberg Machines*, 40, 42.
[104] Miller, *Speculative Grace*, 151.

these layers write and rewrite the human subject in such a way that the subject may be

described as a palimpsest, with layers of traces composing and constituting the human soul.

"There is no escaping this," he says, "to be human is to be overwritten."[105] Miller's model of

network subjectivity has much in common with the model of subjectivity that I am arguing for. I

too view the making of subjectivity as a deeply relational process that produces precisely such a

layered, social self.

Still, the pedagogical dimension of the made self that I also argue for tries to account for

an intentional cultivation of a pious dimension of subject-making that at the very least is muted

in Miller's theory of the network subject. If we were to try to locate the conceptualization of

dimensional experience in his thought, there are two potential areas we might look. The first is

in his description of the category of exception. The second is in his description of the practice of

prayer.

Miller's category of exception tries to capture a dimension of experience that exceeds

the network processes of objects as they perform both their availability for and resistance to

alliances and relationships. An inability to fully account for a network's remainder is at the

heart of the principle of irreduction, which contextualizes the idea of resistant availability.

Exception is precisely that which names this irreducible element in much the same way that

traditional conceptions of transcendence were meant to name irreducible elements of human

experience within classical metaphysics. This understanding of exception makes it an obvious

site for dimensional experience within his flat ontology. For example, Miller explains that in the

production of scriptural historical accounts there are certain "indigestible" elements that

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[105] Miller, *Rube Goldberg Machines*, 44 and *Speculative Grace*, 149.

escape such products of history as well as act as the very constitutive elements that make such history possible. Thus, "commitment to the dimension of faith" exists as an irreducible exception that both constitutes such history and arises out of it as a "systemic excess."[106] Because the dimension of faith can never be reduced to strict historical data, faith exists as a remainder that both hovers over the historical product but that also serves as the very element that makes a certain quality of scriptural exegesis possible. Faith in this scenario acts as a site of exceptional, perhaps spiritual, experience when a practitioner encounters the history of scripture.

An important aspect of the constitutive forces of historical products, moreover, is that they are obscured as constituting factors, such that archeological work needs to be done to recover them as the conditions of possibility that make such products what they are. The same can be applied to the human subject. It is constituted by various layers and traces of layers that are themselves obscured in the very act of constitution, but which make a particular iteration of subjectivity possible. Certainly, a dimension of faith is just such a constituting element for the religious subject.

However, some of the qualities Miller uses to describe the exceptional component of networks don't quite capture at least part of what I am trying to capture when thinking about the constitution of a pious subject. For example, networks are self-organizing and emergent phenomena such that they operate with a lack of intention, design, or overt teleology[107]—attributes which align well to the logic of exception. I affirm that such blind forces do operate as

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[106] Miller, "Notes on Petrey," 49-50.
[107] Miller, *Future Mormon*, 81-82.

153

constituting forces for a subject. However, I do not believe this is the full story for a pious

subject. Piety is something that is consciously produced through work a subject performs on

the self, and as such, represents an overt aim. Spirituality can thus be deemed a dimension of

experience that is nurtured and cultivated through intentional bodily practices that discipline

both body and spirit. It is true a whole host of exceptional elements are imbricated with such

discipline: aspects of experience will be obscured as constituting forces and will represent a

remainder that cannot be reduced to the intentions themselves. But Miller's logic of exception

seems to obscure acts of conscious cultivation as an important dimension for the making of

spirituality.

To be fair, it is not accurate to say that Miller does not attempt at all to address religious

practice and the dimension of spirituality that derives from it. At times, he uses the term Spirit

(with a capital S) in a rather traditionally Mormon way to designate moments in which some

extra-ordinary dimension of experience is interlaced with ordinary experience. He also speaks

about the aim of religion as such in the context of the practice of prayer. The point of religion

and prayer, as he tells it, is to push the subject to see the network that it is, to peel back the

sides of the black box in order to reveal the activity that is going on within. Prayer makes it

possible for the "circulation of ordinary objects" to come "into focus as Spirit," which then

creates awareness that subjectivity is itself a network phenomenon.[108] For Miller the

consequences of this awareness should be to reject the autonomous, self-sufficient view of the

self and to see that there is no ready-made primordial self to be found at all. An act of sin would

be to reject this network reality of the self and to retreat back into the delusion of the

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[108] Miller, Speculative Grace, 151.

foundationalist self, which would be to reject a relational view of self and world. But to

embrace the view of the self offered by the Spirit is to embrace kenotic practice, to realize that

since there is no core self there to protect in the first place, the best way forward is to forget

the self and focus on the love that enriches relations.

Built into this view of the practice of religion is a Pauline rejection of law as that which

saves. What saves, in Miller's view, is the kenotic embrace of relationality and to see this

relationality as the immanent gift that it is. Although Miller's theology of grace is a result of his

reading of Paul, he seems to have similar concerns about the loss of power in religion that

Martin Luther expresses in "Freedom of a Christian." Luther there argues that the works of law

lead practitioners to get stuck in the "form of religion" while not allowing them to "attain unto

its power."[109] Miller shows similar sentiments in his concern with a certain legalism that exists

within LDS thought and its resulting perfectionism within the LDS community. His concern with

such legalism and perfectionism is an important reason he takes issue with Givens' universal

law. Miller calls on Latter-day Saints to embrace self-emptying and relationality as the best way

to live a religious life, rather than being too overly preoccupied with perfect obedience to law,

which he doesn't believe is ever attainable in a material, fundamentally particulate world

anyway.

Miller's concern with legalism and perfectibility for the Mormon community is a

legitimate concern for a tradition that is highly attuned to not just practice as such but to

orthopraxis, that is, communal norms that are constantly measured against prevailing

standards of orthodoxy. The challenge of living up to a strict standard of perfection—in Miller's

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[109] Martin Luther, "Freedom of a Christian," 85.

language, where particulate entities such as persons and laws try to perfectly coincide with each other, which is impossible in a material world—is bound to be fraught with tension. I believe many Latter-day Saints would be sympathetic to the idea that some immanent grace must intervene in the interstices of partially interpenetrating entities in order to make up for this impossibility of perfect coincidence. However, the work of piety through practice is a deeply entrenched feature of Mormon religion, and a grace-only theology that does not account for the work of piety is not entirely legible to Mormon sensibilities. I believe that while Mormonism has been a works-inflected religion precisely because it has traditionally propounded a high anthropology of humans as gods in embryo, the kind of subjectivity that Miller and I are proposing, one which moves away from radical personhood and radical autonomy, is still consistent with a model of conscious, cultivated work on the self. For a Mormon anthropology, a softened version of the concept of refinement can obtain over a discourse of strict perfectionism.

In the end, it is not entirely clear how to take Miller's Latourian flat ontology within the context of Mormonism's two-tiered materialism. Perhaps one way to articulate my concern is with the comparison between Saba Mahmood and Pierre Bourdieu that I made in chapter one. Just as Mahmood was influenced by Bourdieu's theories of habitus but decided those theories did not completely capture everything there was to say about subject-making, I believe that Miller's theology does not quite capture all of the implications that the Mormon two-tiered formulation of matter offers for a level of being that can be experienced as a cultivated spirituality. Mahmood perceived that for the religious Islamic women she studied, Bourdieu's theory did not address the more granular pious dimension of subject-making that was

observably a significant part of her research subjects' own self-understanding. She turned to the Aristotelian tradition of pedagogical subject-making and applied it to religious practice in order to account for this pious dimension.

Similarly, the flat ontology of Miller's theology mutes the commitment in Mormon theology to the cultivation of gradations of experience that the two-tiered formulation was designed to capture. A pedagogical model of subjectivity can account for the experiential dimension of practices of refinement while at the same time cite the body as that which serves as the constitutive site for the development of such spirituality. Miller helpfully establishes much of the theological ground for the kind of Mormon thinking about the spirit, body, and soul required for the rendering of a materialist theology of subjectivity, which also takes as its constitutive beginning point the body and bodily practices. His view of the layered subject can serve as that which underwrites a pedagogical model of the self. But in the end, his primary focus on the network webs of objects that form across a horizontal plane, a plane in which he places God as well, means any vertical reach between humans and God does not seem to register in his field of inquiry. The work of self-refinement is precisely perceived, by Latter-day Saints who engage in it, to be located within a hierarchical plane. Without acknowledging such an aim for religious experience, the model of a religiously made Mormon subject is incomplete.

Conclusion

To speak of a "hierarchical plane" of pious experience does not necessarily send Mormonism back into the arms of Platonic dualistic realms. Whether the metaphor is going "up" or going "deep," the pious dimension of a Mormon materialist self can be understood as a process in which the subject works on the self in order to access a mode of being that is

differentiated from other modes of being. This work is rooted in the body but is made possible by the distributed nature of the soul. The description here is one of levels of possible experience that are grounded in the mortal body of the here and now, not in speculative metaphysical realms.

The meaning of the gradations inherent in Mormonism's two-tiered matter point to fluidity, dynamism, and malleability, perhaps even mystery and ineffability. As Webb points out, even modern physicists are coming to view matter not as an entity we can accurately or consensually define but as something with such "bottomless depths" that it may never have "an upper limit of finality or closure."[110] But rather than try to latch metaphorical and discursive understandings of matter to physical literalism, perhaps it is instructive to view Mormonism's matter more like Taylor Petrey's theological description of it, as mythological in character rather than as something empirically and scientifically verifiable. Spirit matter in particular, he argues, is a mythological entity that plays a role in the tradition's narratives, which is to point to the possibilities that matter offers in terms of its malleability and plasticity. As Petrey points out, Mormonism's matter, with its "lingering dualism," is itself a reimagination of the nature of matter that "cannot and should not be mapped onto deterministic materialism," by which he means secular and scientific views of matter.[111] Because we cannot actually see fine spirit matter, as the May 1843 revelation explicitly states, it is not something we can ever hope to empirically observe nor accurately theorize.

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[110] Webb, *Jesus Christ*, 9.
[111] Petrey, *Queering Kinship*, 117.

158

Accordingly, the question of what kind of entity matter is in a literal sense is not, in the end, a theological question that needs to be conclusively solved, for signifying processes themselves can be a source of deep meaning. What a two-tiered monism of spirit matter and coarse matter offers mythologically to Latter-day Saints, I suggest, is to reaffirm their metaphysical commitment to dynamic processes, not cosmic static entities. In anthropological terms, such a metaphysics maps well onto the idea of a made, not ready-made, subject.

Chapter 4: The Doctrine of Agency

So far in this dissertation I have tried to show a contrast between the possible renderings of a Mormon theological anthropology based on the resources to be found within the tradition itself. In chapter two, I have shown how the doctrine of intelligence might be interpreted in a couple of different ways. On the one hand, it might be interpreted in a quite libertarian way in which personhood, with its various associated capabilities like agency, deliberation and judgment, is understood to be an inherent feature of a self-existent and uncreated human intelligence. Personhood in this rendering does not have a beginning and is radically autonomous. On the other hand, intelligence might be interpreted as an inchoate element of the universe that represents possibilities of personhood for the individual human spirit, but the elements of personhood in this rendering are only active once the human spirit is begotten by heavenly parents. I argued in that chapter that, contrary to the line of LDS thought that favors the first rendering, the second interpretation of the doctrine of intelligence is more consistent with the view of human subjectivity suggested by Mormonism's practice-centric orientation.

In chapter three, I attempted to further show how the implications of the radical personhood interpretation of intelligence leads theologians into inconsistencies with another favored LDS teaching, the doctrine of materialism monism. Those who adhere to the radical personhood view of subjectivity tend to posit the human subject in a dualistic way in which the self is bifurcated between two realms, one realm of pre-existence, which is characterized in static and absolute terms, and another realm of mortality that takes as a given the dynamism inherent in a fundamentally material universe. I tried to show that if consistency with the LDS

doctrine of materialism is to be maintained, LDS theologians need to be committed to a

universe that is metaphysically dynamic all the way through. Such a metaphysical view undoes

any bifurcation of the human spirit and allows the full force of materiality to bear on an LDS

understanding of the human subject.

By taking the arguments of the two chapters together, I hope to illustrate how a re-

envisioning of anthropology in LDS theology might render plausible the idea, illustrated in

chapter one, of the ethical subject. The ethical subject is a *made* subject. It consists in a

dynamic, socially constituted, and distributed soul. It is not static, radically autonomous, nor

dualistic. The ethical view of the subject along these lines has explanatory power, I argue, for

the kind of subjectivity we see enacted within lived Mormonism, where certain schemes of

practice result in an embodied habitus that is particular to an LDS communal ethos.

The task of this chapter is to address one potential risk of positing a socially made

subject: such a subject might lend itself to the characterization that it is overly determined by

the social forces that constitute it. A theory of a made subject thus intimates the issues that are

caught up in the age-old problem of the dichotomy existing between freedom and

determinism. Because the doctrine of agency is so important to LDS theology, any adequate

rendering of an ethical Mormon subject must address it. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to

deepen the view of the kind of subjectivity I am arguing for by addressing the problematic of

how a made, social subject can also be understood as possessing substantive agentive powers.

Such a view must address not only the specter of determinism as such, but the question of

domination over the subject by those in positions of power. In what follows, I draw on the work

of theorists of the social self in order to think through these important issues.

Agency and Sociality

Free agency as a doctrine is a significant feature to LDS theology and cannot be ignored in any adequate rendering of a theological anthropology. Indeed, agency has been deemed by Amy Hoyt as an "indigenous" theological concept for the tradition and by Terryl Givens as a "bedrock value."[1] Although not explicitly focused on for its own sake so far, the Mormon discourse on agency has been present in various places throughout this dissertation, especially in the discussion of the doctrine of intelligence in chapter two. In that chapter, agency was seen to play an important role in the debates regarding personhood as LDS leaders and theologians grappled with whether Joseph Smith's revelations designated agency as an everlasting and primal feature of human intelligences as self-created entities or as an operation of personhood only once it is activated when God clothes elemental intelligence with a spirit-matter body. We saw that in May 1833, Smith appoints at the very least an elemental cosmic intelligence with agency when he states that intelligence, along with truth, is "independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself."[2] While I do not read this particular passage in the May 1833 revelation as explicitly referring to the human spirit, as many within Mormonism do, I do see this passage as imbuing Mormon cosmology more broadly with some conception of agentive action baked into, as it were, the structures of the universe.

Once Smith establishes, with the Book of Abraham and the King Follett sermon, that intelligence, as self-existent and agentive entity, can be conclusively associated with human spirits, it has been easy for some theologians to conceive of a Mormon subject as possessing a

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[1] Hoyt, "Agency," 194; Givens, *Wrestling*, 45. The term Givens uses in this context is "moral agency."
[2] *Doctrine and Covenants* (1835), 211.

libertarian kind of freedom in some kind of primal, essential, and even absolute sense. At the same time that individual agency seems to be assumed by Smith to be a necessary feature of the human spirit, however, he also casts human spirits as essentially social beings. In a sermon given a year before his death, he declared, "the same sociality" that humans enjoy in mortality will continue through to the relationships that will endure into the afterlife, the only difference being that the latter sociality will be "coupled with eternal glory."[3]

While Smith does not here explicitly invoke this sociality as existing in the pre-existence, his logic for the everlasting nature of human spirits might well apply to sociality: because there is no end to such sociality, there can be no beginning to it. Humans may be understood to exist in relation as a fundamental feature of their cosmic existence. Such a logic is backed up by the fact that LDS theology has long cast pre-existent spirits as existing in one large family structure from primordial time, an idea which resulted in the begotten personhood theory that depicts spirits as being procreated by a Father and Mother God, who then nurture spirits to prepare them for their journey to mortality. This pre-existent family life can be seen as the prototype of what is expected of earthly parents as they act as a sealed couple to shepherd children toward immortality as gods. Such a model is then resonant with the idea, noted by Douglas Davies, that Mormonism posits, not an individual salvation, but a communal one.[4]

Once again, we are faced with a paradox within LDS discourse. On one hand, human spirits can be cast as radically self-sufficient and autonomous while, on the other hand, they

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[3] Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 216-18.
[4] Davies, *Introduction to Mormonism*, 146, where Davies states: "it is absolutely fundamental to appreciate that even a person's ultimate salvation depends upon his or her relationship to someone else. It was common for early Mormon leaders to stress that nobody is 'saved' alone. Indeed, this is a distinctive feature of LDS theology, for exaltation is a corporate venture."

can be cast as radically social beings. In terms of the models of the subject I have addressed in this dissertation, we have here a liberal view of the subject that butts up against a social view of the subject. One important aspect at stake in this paradox is how to characterize agency. Is it at some level entirely free from social constraints, as some versions of the liberal subject might suggest, or is it fundamentally constrained at some level by social structures that are themselves the result of social relations? How far can an LDS theology bear to go in either direction? In this section, I will seek to address such questions, with the intent to show that a doctrine of Mormon agency might exist in a middle, hybrid space between the radically liberal and the radically social extremes. In order to arrive at such a conclusion, I will first relate how LDS theologians have contextualized and interpreted Mormonism's doctrine of agency before turning to some broader theorizations in order to help me illustrate how agency can best be understood within the context of a made subject.

LDS Interpretations of Agency

Many LDS thinkers invoke a passage from the *Book of Mormon* as important for understanding the LDS doctrine of agency, which states, "the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself."[5] This passage also depicts the world as being made up of "things to act and things to be acted upon."[6] These verses are placed in a larger context in which the Garden of Eden, with its two trees that offer enticing fruit to Adam and Eve, was created expressly for the purpose of offering an opposition of choices so that Adam and Eve could employ their ability to act. An earlier verse states that a "law of opposition in all things" is necessary so that

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[5] *Book of Mormon*, 2 Nephi 2:16.
[6] 2 Nephi 2:14.

the world will be made up of differentials rather than one mass unity of things, with the latter

scenario making it impossible for humans to experience joy since such an emotion would not be

set off from misery. It states,

> "For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, . . .
> righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor
> misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one;
> wherefore, if it should be one body it must needs remain as dead, having no life neither
> death, nor corruption nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor
> insensibility."[7]

The passage further relates that if Adam and Eve had not employed their agency to

make a choice to partake of the forbidden fruit, they would not have fallen, which means they

would have remained in a state of innocence, not knowing the difference between good and

evil. The import of Adam and Eve knowing good from evil is no less than the potential for joy

and happiness for all of humankind. As this passage states, "Adam fell that men might be; and

men are, that they might have joy."[8] But, the passage continues, a Messiah is necessary to aid

humans to achieve such joy, since the Fall did land them in a state of sin. Because humans are

redeemed through Christ's act of redemption, they are then made "free forever, knowing good

from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon," except by any punishment God feels

is necessary in order to maintain justice to the commandments he gave to humankind.[9] By

virtue of the Fall and the Atonement, humans are "free to choose liberty and eternal life . . . or

to choose captivity and death."[10]

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[7] 2 Nephi 2:11.
[8] 2 Nephi 2:25.
[9] 2 Nephi 2:26.
[10] 2 Nephi 2:27.

These *Book of Mormon* verses establish a couple of concepts important to an LDS

understanding of agency. First, agency has to do with a fundamental trait that comes with

being human: the ability to act and to do. It is perhaps possible to understand this passage as

offering a view of the human as just such a being that acts, and to be able to posit this attribute

analytically separate from any qualitative features of particular acts. Such a separation of the

human attribute of acting from the moral judgments regarding the quality of those acts is

short-lived, however, for the overall import of this *Book of Mormon* passage is to teach that

certain good acts will lead to eternal joy. The quality of acts, then, has a direct cause-and-effect

connection to the quality of a future state of being. This leads to the second theological concept

derived from these verses, which is that the concept of agency is intimately connected to

obedience to God's law. In other words, the entire purpose of the ability to choose between

different options is to present the opportunity for humankind to learn through the different

experiences that follow from those options how to agentively work their way toward living in

harmony with God.

Douglas Davies' assessment of the doctrine of agency according to this passage is that

agency in LDS theology primarily has to with "human responsibility."[11] He associates such

responsibility both with relationships and with an individual commitment to be obedient to

"principles" that govern the world.[12] Davies seems to agree with me in seeing a sort of paradox

obtaining in LDS theology when the Mormon subject is cast both as relational and as

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[11] Davies, *Introduction to Mormonism*, 144.

[12] Davies, 146. By "principles," Davies is indexing the notion in Mormonism having to do with "the fundamental laws that underlie the universe" (23), that is, the universal laws that Givens also sees as an important feature of LDS theology.

individualistic. He affirms that LDS theology has a "strong relational background" in that salvation is understood to depend on relationships. In this sense, everlasting happiness and joy follow from familial ties. But he also notes that Mormonism affirms individualistic capability and even necessity for personal choice-making. "This means," he says, "that the Mormon 'self' must be understood as an interplay of community and agency." But he further notes that this interplay "produces a potential paradox," for the logic that underwrites both aspects of the self are "not entirely coherent."[13]

Many of the more prominent LDS theologians we have engaged with in this dissertation also note this *Book of Mormon* passage as a textual source for a doctrine of agency. But they tend to emphasize more *individual* responsibility to work out salvation by choosing God over evil—all made possible through the freedom to choose that Christ's atonement makes possible. Additionally, when they seek to assess a Mormon theological anthropology specifically, they tend to take the doctrine of the pre-existent self as the most important warrant for their analysis, which then often lends such a doctrine a notable individualistic and liberal character.

For example, in Sterling McMurrin's description of a Mormon concept of humankind, he highlights in somewhat stark terms the prominent role of agency in LDS thought. He contextualizes this feature of Mormon theology within the liberal, humanist milieu of nineteenth-century America which offered to especially Protestant theologians of Smith's time a "commitment to expansive possibilities of human freedom."[14] As a result of the influences of this milieu, McMurrin attaches the description of "liberal" repeatedly to Mormon thought. He

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[13] Davies, *Introduction to Mormonism*, 146-48.
[14] McMurrin, *Theological Foundations*, 56.

cites certain doctrines to illustrate his point, especially the denial of *ex nihilo* creation with its accompanying doctrine of self-existence—that is, the idea that some element of the human spirit is an uncreated entity, a "necessary existent."[15]

McMurrin's description skews in the direction of radical personhood when he states that Mormon doctrine "guarantees that full individuality is a necessary property of every person," which echoes the interpretations we have seen of both Roberts and Madsen.[16] An outgrowth of such liberalism, according to McMurrin, is that Mormonism exhibits an "almost obsessive concern for free moral agency." Such freedom of the will is the "ontological ground of Mormon humanism."[17] Indeed, he tells us, there is nothing more important to the Mormon "total theological structure" than its doctrine of freedom of the will.[18]

McMurrin even goes so far as to describe LDS theology as a modern-day Pelagianism. Such an association derives from the LDS commitment to the idea that humans come to merit their eternal reward as they work to be obedient to God's commandments. Such a deserved reward is a direct result of a free will ultimately unencumbered by the kinds of limitations that had obtained in the Augustinian branches of theology that derived from Luther and the other Reformers. The free will that Luther argues against in his debate with Erasmus, for instance, is very much like the free will that McMurrin attributes to Mormonism.[19] While LDS commitment

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[15] McMurrin, 49.

[16] McMurrin, 49.

[17] McMurrin, 52-53. In this passage, McMurrin compares LDS views on human agency to Tillich's existentialist theology and to Barth's neo-orthodoxy, both of which focus on the idea of humankind's nonbeing. McMurrin provides this comparison in order to illustrate that these latter two Christian views of humankind exist in "fundamental opposition" to LDS anthropology (54).

[18] McMurrin, 77.

[19] Luther summarizes Erasmus' definition of free will as "a power of the human will by which a man can apply himself to the things which lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from them. . . . a capacity or faculty or ability or aptitude for willing, unwilling, selecting, neglecting, approving, rejecting, and whatever other actions of the will there are." While Luther grants that we might be able to "rightly attribute some measure of choice to man," he

to obedience necessarily places humans in some relation of dependence on God, McMurrin

notes the "libertarian" character of freedom that obtains in many LDS treatises, which is often

defined as "the capacity of the self to effect its choice as an uncaused cause."[20]

McMurrin does offer an important qualification to Mormonism's liberal Pelagianism,

one which actually invokes elements of the begotten personhood theory. He tells us that the

tradition's discourse discourages the idea of self-sufficiency, in part because of its commitment

to the idea, gestured to above, that humans are dependent on God for their ability to live up

fully to the possibilities inherent in their divine nature. Such a commitment stems from the

need to accommodate doctrines of the fall and atonement that in many ways align with

orthodox Christianity. Additionally, he points out, Mormons view humans as living within a

"familial community with God and Christ."[21] Granted, McMurrin suggests that such a concept of

human-divine familial relations is further informed by the idea that humans and the divine exist

on a spectrum in relation to one another, and thus by the idea that humans are equipped with

divine-like attributes, such as a robust free agency. But in alignment with a begotten

personhood view of the pre-existence, humans are grounded in a cosmic family structure, one

which by its nature invokes a primordial sociality.

In the end, McMurrin's analysis seems to come from his own predisposition to valorize

liberal notions of the self, for he downplays the social aspects of Mormon doctrine while

highlighting the more liberal ones. He laments the lack of serious attempts within Mormon

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balks at the idea that "free choice" can be attributed to humans in matters of salvation. "Free choice," he states, "properly belongs to no one but God alone." Any attribution to humans of free choice in divine matters is a "misuse of terms, serious and dangerous." Luther would thus most likely agree with McMurrin that LDS theology of salvation is best labeled as Pelagian. See Rupp and Watson, *Luther and Erasmus*, 169-70.

[20] McMurrin, *Theological Foundations*, 81-82.

[21] McMurrin, 57.

discourse to grapple with some of the more subtle problems that such libertarian views might pose. But he himself does not examine further the implications for a social constitution of the self that Mormonism might offer as a result of its teachings regarding not only social affiliation as a built-in feature of the cosmos but regarding its communal or social requirement for salvation.

We see the same tendency for downplaying sociality and highlighting radical individuality in Truman Madsen. In explicating his interpretation of Smith's doctrine of personal eternalism, Madsen lists the doctrine's "important consequences": individuality, autonomy, consciousness, and capacity for development. The consequence of individuality for him here is premised on a rendering of intelligence in radical personhood terms in which the self had a "beginningless beginning": the mind, he says, "had no birthday" and "memory had no first."[22] Such a view is linked for him with the further consequence of an unending human consciousness. The consequence of autonomy is where Madsen specifically locates radical freedom for the self. His textual warrant is found in the May 1833 revelation, which states that intelligence is "free to act for itself," with "intelligence" in his rendering denoting the human spirit. In a footnote, he clarifies that the further language of the revelation, which states that without intelligence's freedom there would be no existence, must be read to mean that without such freedom, there would be "no existence of selves."[23] Thus, for Madsen the existence of selves is predicated on their radical freedom.

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[22] Madsen, *Eternal Man*, 11-13.
[23] Madsen, 12, footnote 5.

But Madsen makes an interesting move in his discussion of these consequences for the doctrine of personal eternalism. He very subtly inserts a gesture toward the cosmic sociality of all intelligences. On one hand, he notes, intelligences have "always been alone, separate from" each other as a result of their radical individuality, autonomy, and consciousness. But on the other hand, intelligences exist "always together, coexistent with, other intelligences."[24] He seems to recognize the implications of Smith's eternalism for Mormonism's doctrine of sociality and can do nothing less than posit some version of eternalism for sociality. However, under his liberal paradigm for the self, beginningless sociality seems to operate in an atomistic way, such that the identity of each human spirit exists fundamentally as its own discrete unit, which then faces other atomistic identities as they all come together in common geographic space. Such a view seems to invoke a similar image to Kant's Kingdom of Ends: each person is an autonomous entity unto itself, who at some level exists in rational aloneness, but who coexists with other such autonomous persons in a shared "kingdom." In Madsen's version of such a view, identity and personhood does not seem to be formed through processes, let alone through social processes, but is a mere given of the universe. He does not seem to appreciate the extent to which sociality itself cannot but act as a constituting force not only for human identity but for any given person's ability to act in the first place.

Terryl Givens agrees with Madsen that "freedom is man's original condition," and he also cites the May 1833 revelation as his textual warrant for such an idea.[25] He thus maintains that human existence is itself predicated upon "moral agency." Givens repeatedly places the

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[24] Madsen, 13.
[25] Givens, *Wrestling*, 197.

adjective "moral" before the concept of agency because he is committed to a view of agency

that is necessarily linked to human responsibility for choice and action. As we saw in the

previous chapter, his view of agency is tethered to the idea that moral law operates in a

fundamentally reliable and predictable way, such that true freedom is only guaranteed for

humankind when persons know what consequences will follow from any given action.

Accordingly, for these consequences to operate in a just way, they must not result in either

"undeserved punishment" or an "unqualified reward," otherwise freedom itself would be

seriously threatened if not destroyed.[26] Such a view posits the human psyche as capable of a

certain level of transparency when it comes to understanding the mechanisms of the moral law

of consequences. On this rendering, humans have the capacity to make clear-eyed choices, with

little real determinants on either their reasoning capacities or their responsibilities.

Additionally, for Terryl and Fiona Givens, an important underlying theological

component to a world that operates with such transparency regarding individual moral

responsibility is Smith's doctrine of the self-existence of every human being, which results in

the human capacity for "pure and unconditioned self-determination."[27] Such inherent freedom,

they believe, can only be explained through an existence prior to mortality where an eternal

and free consciousness serves as its basis, for, as they explain, "something is free only if it is not

caused or created by something else."[28] This means that humans are only free if God did not

create them. Such an understanding is grounded in a desire to move all responsibility for

human action away from God and to place it within the powers of human choice-making. If God

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[26] Givens, 133.
[27] Givens and Givens, *Weeps*, 51.
[28] Givens and Givens, 48.

is the creator of human souls, their thinking goes, then it is God who is ultimately responsible

for these creatures' actions. Only if human souls are uncreated entities unto themselves can

they be truly responsible.[29] Freedom and responsibility seem to make sense for them only if

they are ultimately devoid of any outside pressures or limitations. The heteronomy of moral

law operates less as an exterior imposition on the human soul and more like a feature of the

universe that the soul seeks to find unity and harmony with.[30]

Such an understanding of human freedom raises an important question about whether

a radical sociality does indeed undermine the idea that humans are beings with agency. Such a

worry seems to underwrite the consistent downplaying within LDS discourse of the implications

that sociality poses for the constitution of personhood. The implicit worry seems to fall along

the old lines of the freedom and determinism debate, seeing each term as a threat to the other.

The thinking along these lines goes something like this: if anything determines persons, then

their freedom is seriously threatened, if not destroyed; if persons are truly free, they must at

some basic level exist as untethered to any determining forces, including social structures.

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[29] Givens and Givens, 47-48. Throughout Givens' work as a whole, he sees such self-existent freedom as the key to theodicy because only in such a model is God not ultimately responsible for evil. Such a God must by definition be limited, and for him only the material, embodied God of LDS theology fits this requirement.

[30] Butler offers basically the same interpretation regarding Kant's system of morality, which seems to require a subject whose desires are somehow internally consistent with and in tune with universal law. To autonomously give oneself the moral law is to take into oneself that which the self is already attuned to. Otherwise, morality would be nothing short of an imposition on a personality who resists the law. Such resistance would ultimately fragment an individual and would precisely not be that which helps a person to find a comfortable metaphysical home.[30] Thus, for Butler, Kant's version of the autonomous subject is designed to show how the subject is rationally aligned with a metaphysics of morals. In contrast, as I showed in chapter one, Butler presents a subject who is *subjected* to a confluence of discourses that each form part of a subject, such that this subject comes to maintain a constellation of desires that exist in tension with each other. Any "law" given to a subject on Butler's model is that which comes from social discourse and the norms that prevail in any given discourse, a far cry from Kant's idea of rational autonomy that has the power to access a realm of *a priori* formal principles. See Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, 4.

Much of the theoretical work on subjectivity since the mid-twentieth century in both philosophy and sociology seeks to undo such dichotomies. One problematic that has received much critical attention is the equation of agency with unfettered freedom, and hence with a critique of the liberal view of the subject. According to these contemporary theories, agency is indeed the power to act, but it does not and cannot necessarily entail unfettered freedom, given the embeddedness of each individual person in social relationships and structures. Such theories might help Mormon discourse move from its radical extremes regarding personhood and toward a more nuanced picture of the self that accounts for its own deeply, even cosmically, social orientation.

Giddens and the Structurated Agent

Anthony Giddens offers one such theory. He begins his work from what he perceives to be the weaknesses and failures of structuralism and functionalism. First and foremost for him, structuralism and functionalism tend to portray human actors as fundamentally constrained by so-called "objective" social structures and, as such, render humans as more socially determined than Giddens believes them to be. Thus, any view of humans as passive and helpless in the face of dominating structures becomes the target of his critique. He is helpful to me for two interconnected reasons. First, his theory of the structurated agent is consistent with the view of the subject that I advocate for, that is, the view of the subject that is made by social processes. But because his structurated agent is precisely a socially constituted one, he runs into the problem of understanding how agentive action can be understood within the context of constituting structures. Thus, the second way he is helpful is in his preoccupation with understanding the nuances and complexities of agency for such a structurated agent. He is

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adamant that structurated agents are just that: *agents* who are capable of acting in ways that

transform the very social institutions they are imbricated with. Giddens, thus, can help me

deepen an understanding of the kind of made subject I am arguing for that also accommodates

for an adequate level of agency.

Giddens names his theory of human action and agency as a theory of "structuration." Its

aim is to account for both the constraining and enabling roles of larger social forces on humans

who by their very nature are beings who act, and who by their very nature think reflexively

about those acts. His theory of structuration is intended to be primarily a theory of action. It is

comprised of what he calls a "stratification model" of the individual subject, which seeks to lay

out the subject's psychic organization. His model of action first posits a particular stratified view

of human consciousness, which then serves as the basis for understanding how subjects act in

the world as knowledgeable agents. The concept of reflexivity turns out to be key to Giddens'

model of agency.

A key point for Giddens' theory of the subject is that agents produce and reproduce

structural elements within the systems in which they are embedded. They thereby draw on

structures as the medium or conditions of possibility for their action, while at the same time

those structures are the outcome of such action.[31] As agents perform their structurally

informed actions, their very personalities become constituted by these structures and thus can

be understood as "structurated." But at the same time, structures are themselves produced

and even transformed by the agentive action of human actors. Structure, thus, "forms

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[31] Giddens, *Central Problems*, 69.

'personality' and 'society' simultaneously" because the "same structural characteristics participate in the subject (actor) as in the object (society)."[32]

Such a description of the interconnection between actors and structures is named by Giddens as "duality of structure." This duality is meant as a corrective for the old dualisms of past social theory that posited a strong divide between object and subject.[33] As he states it, the processes that constitute human actors do not operate independently of the processes that constitute structures within social systems. There are thus no dualistic constitutive operations between humans and structural principles.[34] Humans do not exist at a fundamental remove from structures as some radically free entity, and structures do not themselves represent some totality that has the capacity to overwhelm human actors' ability to put into operation at least some degree of free action.

Additionally, the concept of "duality of structure" is meant to capture the idea that structures themselves are both constraining and enabling for individuals. One way of understanding the enabling portion of such a formula is through Sharon Hays' description of the role that social rules play in agency. Hays points out that "social structure" has commonly been understood as static constraint that is external to individuals and has thus often been put in sharp contrast to "agency," which in turn has been understood as an active, individual freedom from structures.[35] This view that Hays critiques has resonances with the Givenses' view of the implications for a radically free, because self-existent, human intelligence noted

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[32] Giddens, 70.
[33] Giddens, 120-22; *Constitution of Society*, xxi.
[34] Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 25.
[35] Hays, "Structure and Agency," 57.

above, who can be free only if radically undetermined. While such liberal notions of the self tend to see constraint as something that is opposed to, and thus potentially resisted by, an autonomous will, Hays claims rather that the existence of social rules that constrain individuals toward structural thought patterns and behaviors is actually a necessary component for a well-ordered life.

Hays provides the example of a "system of gender stratification": this system does indeed constrain persons to act in certain ways, but it also gives certain persons who feel comfortable within this system both "a sense of identity and a secure position in the world" ("whether we like it or not," she adds). What's more, structures are the ground for taking purposive action. "Without structures," Hays says, "there are no rules. Without rules, there is no grounding for, and no direction to, one's personality, and therefore no possibility for conscious, purposive action." Thus, these structural rules are the basis for both the reproduction of structures and the transformation of structures because they are what make agency possible. They make agency possible because they offer the patterns of life through which choices and outcomes become comprehensible. Hays' view echoes Giddens' own model of structuration: "People produce," she says, "certain forms of social structure at the same time social structures produce certain types of people."[36]

A proper understanding of the notion of *structure*, then, is an important feature for Giddens' theory of structuration. He makes a point of distinguishing "structure" from "social system." A social system is that which is constituted by the "regularized relations of

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[36] Hays, 61.

interdependence between individuals or groups."[37] It is located in time and space, and it is

constituted by social practices. Structure and structural principles, on the other hand, are the

sedimented properties that exist within social systems as a result of social practices and that

give various features of those systems their institutional qualities. Practices that become

widespread through space and time within a given society and that are "chronically

reproduced" can be seen as institutional structures.[38] Such institutional structures represent

the idea that relationships among members of a given social system are "stabilized across time

and space" such that it is possible to discern similar patterns of social practice among

individuals and groups.[39] But Giddens is quick to point out that structures themselves are never

absolutely static. They do change through time because they are the products of human agents

(albeit often in unintentional ways), who are themselves located in various contexts within time

and space.

As a coordinate to structures, Giddens offers an analytical model of the *human subject*

that seeks to make sense of the qualitative features of agency. His "stratification model" of the

subject is comprised of three different levels of human consciousness: the unconscious,

practical consciousness, and discursive consciousness. First, the unconscious has to do with

psychological processes that were largely established in childhood but are also maintained

throughout the entire life span of an individual through social interactions.[40] For example,

Giddens posits a "basic security system" that is developed in the years of infancy when a child

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[37] Giddens, *Central Problems*, 65-66.
[38] Giddens, 79.
[39] Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, xxx, 117.
[40] In *Central Problems*, Giddens notes that socialization does not somehow end at a certain point in an individual's life, but it is at work for the entire duration of what he calls a "whole life cycle" (129).

learns to trust that her needs will be met by her caretaker. Tensions are experienced by the child in the further process of ego creation by which the child increasingly projects herself out into the world. The conventions and social codes that play a significant part in the socialization of the child are that which underwrite the child's basic security system. As the child grows into an adult, trust in normative regulations and social routinization becomes firmly established as a means to manage the tensions of life. It is in this way that certain features of social life become taken for granted as simply "the way things are." It is also in this way that, as the subject further produces and reproduces structural elements of social life, the duality of structure is enabled as the constituting process for both social formations and the actor.[41] These structural features that make up an unconscious basic security system serve as that which enables action. They underwrite any given set of possibilities from which certain actions become legible to certain actors.

Giddens invokes here Pierre Bourdieu's dialectic of subject and object as what he means by duality of structure, specifically in relation to the role of routinization of social forms that makes continuity of those forms possible. Bourdieu's notion of habitus is defined by Giddens as referring to shared communal habits that are "deeply sedimented elements of social conduct."[42] For both Bourdieu and Giddens, these habits are not consciously motivated but are the mechanisms by which social formations are reliably reproduced through time. As habits, they imbibe in a routinized character that allows for a sort of latent acceptance of them as that which can be taken for granted.[43] Giddens' description of habits and habitus thus echoes

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[41] Giddens, *Central Problems*, 120-22, 218-19.
[42] Giddens, 218.
[43] Giddens, 217-18.

Bourdieu's theorization of a doxic mode of action in socialized individuals in which a communal habitus is internalized to such an extent that it is experienced by those individuals as "natural" or "given." Giddens' paradigm example of routinized habit is the reproduction of language. But Douglas Davies' theorization of a specifically Mormon habitus, as a communal belief structure that is internalized by practitioners and that acts as a generative foundation for further thought and action, would also be relevant for the implications of Giddens' theory of the subject. The very routinization of such a communal belief structure helps to ensure the continuity of certain Mormon theologico-social forms through time, for both individuals and the community at large.[44]

The second strata of Giddens' model of the subject is practical consciousness. Practical consciousness is especially highlighted by him as an important element to his theory of structuration. It refers to actors' stock of tacit knowledge that allows them to carry on with ordinary interactions in day-to-day life. It also refers to the skill every actor is equipped with through such tacit social knowledge in order to be deemed a competent actor according to particular sets of social norms.[45] This tacit knowledge is what Giddens terms "mutual knowledge" that is absorbed by actors through their social encounters in the production and reproduction of social structures. This knowledge is not known, he says, in "explicitly codified form" but underwrites the ability of actors to operate on the level of routinization of mutual social knowledge that informs action.[46] In other words, practical consciousness informs the

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[44] For my previous discussion of both Bourdieu's and Davies' handling of the concept of habitus, see chapter 1 above.

[45] Giddens, *Central Problems*, 56-58.

[46] Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 4.

ability of an actor to go on in mundane tasks and interactions without having to think about all

of the various operations needed to be done in order for that actor to be considered competent

within a particular social context. This mutual knowledge serves as the structural component to

individual action, that which both serves as a constituting force for action and that which is

reproduced by an actor such that continuity of structural forms is maintained.

While practical consciousness might appear to be solely the site of unconscious

socialized knowledges, Giddens actually intends for it to serve as a sort of transition point

between unconscious and conscious action, meant to undo any strict binary between the two.[47]

Although certain mundane social functions do not directly activate a subject's consciousness

and are merely carried out as habitual practice, Giddens is quick to point out that actors would

be able, if asked, to provide some kind of accounting for their action. Once an actor begins to

perform such an accounting, the operation that exists at the level of the third strata of the

acting subject, discursive consciousness, is then activated. Discursive consciousness refers to

the point when it is possible for actors to consciously report what they are doing and why.[48]

The mechanism that serves as a kind of hinge between discursive consciousness and

practical consciousness is what Giddens terms "reflexive monitoring of conduct." Actors

monitor their social conduct within the various social contexts they find themselves. This

monitoring is done at a taken-for-granted level associated with practical consciousness that

establishes competence in the way that behavior is seamlessly adjusted according to contextual

norms and needs. But reflexive monitoring also controls the quality of accounts that actors are

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[47] In fact, Giddens prefers to describe practical consciousness as "non-conscious" rather than "unconscious." See his *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 35-36.
[48] Giddens, *Central Problems*, 2-5, 57; *Constitution of Society*, 45-49.

able to provide on the level of discursive consciousness, such that actors are always capable of providing reasons that conform to a particular social logic. Such rationalization of action taps into the routine components of practical consciousness but it also enables all actors to maintain, "without a fuss" a continual "theoretical understanding" of the very grounds of their activity.[49]

The status of the concept of "I" becomes a notable point in Giddens' theory of the acting subject, and it is something he wishes to nuance by "decentering" the subject.[50] Although Giddens associates the concept of "I" as that which is experienced "at the core" of discursive consciousness,[51] even so, "I" as a consciously experienced and discursively accounted for phenomenon does not exhaust the concept of an agentive subject for him. He acknowledges that the concept of "I" might perhaps involve deeply personal aspects of experience, but he also suggests that this concept overall can be quite empty if misunderstood. The "I," he tells us, is not the same thing in time and space as the self. The "I" points to the body as a "sphere of action" that is located in a particular time and space, and in this sense is a slippery, shifting concept because the contexts within which action takes place continuously change. The "I" thus refers to various and discrete social positions a self can take; as such, it points to the fact that one single individual can take on a multitude of "I's."[52] The self, on the other hand, is that which incorporates these multiple "I's" into one overall subject.[53] What's more, it is made up of the above threefold stratification model.

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[49] Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 3-6.
[50] Giddens, *Central Problems*, 38-40, 44-47.
[51] Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 42.
[52] Giddens, 43.
[53] Giddens, 51.

The self, not the "I," is the site of agency and individuation for Giddens because the self

is formed through both conscious and unconscious operations, while the "I" refers only to the

conscious ability of a subject to account for itself through discursive modes of explanation. This

difference between the "I" and the self is actually a helpful image for understanding the import

of Giddens' stratification model as it seeks to make visible the structural undercurrents of

subject formation. A Cartesian model of subjectivity, Giddens points out, is located solely at the

discursive level of the "I," but it erases social location and the ensuing multiplicity of the "I's"

that make up the self. It also seeks to unburden such an unlocated "I" from any social strata

that might cover over it. Like other theorists of the social self that I have examined in this

dissertation, Giddens rejects such a Cartesian view of the subject, explicitly asserting that we

must "decenter" this Cartesian "I."[54] Because of the interpenetration of the consciousness with

the unconsciousness for both human practice and reflexivity, he rejects the idea that

consciousness can be "transparent to itself."[55]

One implication of Giddens' structuration model of the subject also has to do with not

only whether the subject is transparent to itself, but whether consequences of action are also

transparent to a subject. According to his view, subjects are never in complete control of either

their motivations or the consequences of their actions, such that the presence of unintentional

consequences is an important feature of his theory of agency. The unintentional nature of

actions and their consequences is not ultimately linked to the motivations of a subject, as if

they only come about because of human weakness and fallibility. Rather, unintentional

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[54] Giddens, 43.
[55] Giddens, *Central Problems*, 47.

consequences are directly tied to the conditions of possibility for action, both unmotivated and

unacknowledged, that are produced through structural principles of social systems. They are

themselves a systemic feature social life. On one hand, what consequences follow from any

course of action always have the capacity to go well beyond what an actor tries to control

through conscious motivations or intentions because they derive from a plethora of social

operations that come to distill in any given individual's mechanisms of choice-making. And on

the other hand, unintentional actions and consequences come to be absorbed within the larger

social routines and habits that underwrite social subjectivity. In this sense, they are not

something negative that follows from subjects' inconsiderateness of their actions. They are

unseen ripples of social production that come to settle within the larger communal habitus.

They come to have an empowering effect as they enable action in the way that all social

structures enable action.

　　　　Giddens acknowledges that conscious intention and motivation are often assumed to be

equated with a subject who understands itself as an "I" totality, but his three-level stratification

model dislodges such an assumption as it takes into consideration both the unconscious and

conscious processes of subject and structure formation. Action that is consciously intended, he

notes, is only "one category of an agent's doings or refraining."[56] He explains the idea of

intention as a process that occurs within the flow of daily interactions, with an analysis of the

circumstances and context being needed in order to understand how intentions are conjured

and then acted upon in a specific time and place.[57]

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[56] Giddens, 88.
[57] Giddens, 56; *Constitution of Society*, 3-4.

Intentions are attached to his idea of "reflexive monitoring of action," which itself is keyed into the routinization of structurated conduct, its habits and taken-for-granted practices and norms.[58] Intentions can indeed be linked to conscious purposive action. But since purposiveness cannot be understood separately from the structural principles that are sedimented within a human subject's psyche, it cannot be understood as any simple and straightforward voluntaristic will of a free-standing liberal subject. One illustration of such complexity associated with intentions is see that they may or may not be discursively articulated, although they could be at any time if an actor is asked about them. When they move from practical consciousness to discursive consciousness, they become a vehicle, as they are spoken into being, for producing and reproducing structures.[59]

The overall view of the subject that Giddens provides is a social subject thoroughly constituted by structures. But this subject is also the conduit through which these structures are perpetuated within society itself through time and space, acting as one individual in larger social complexes through which social institutions, with their stocks of knowledge and norms, are maintained as deeply sedimented continuities that inform reflexive modes of thought and practice. But the impetus for Giddens to analyze the various conscious and unconscious forces at work in the making of such a social subject is to push against the idea that structures are such powerful totalities that they overrun human agency. He is careful to note that every action

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[58] Giddens, *Central Problems*, 39.

[59] To say that subjects *reproduce* structures is to intimate a level of constraint on subjects as communal rules, codes, and institutions pass through them relatively unchanged. But to say that subjects *produce* structures is to suggest they tweak, change, and otherwise put their own mark on communal practices, thoughts, and routines. The latter idea of individual production is obviously where agency is located for a structurated subject. Thus, Giddens always speaks in terms of "producing and reproducing" structures, that is, he insists on the *duality* of these processes as they relate to human agency.

has the potential to bring with it the production of something new and fresh. Thus, actors are

not mere automatons to social structures. Although he notes that "all action exists in continuity

with the past" such that the past always "makes itself felt in the present," structure is not an

absolutely determining constraint on action. The "present may react back against the past."[60]

With this view of the structurated subject in mind, we are now in a position to state

Giddens' more formal definitions of agency and action. He actually uses the concepts of agency

and action in basically interchangeable terms, such that to be an agent is simply to possess the

power to act; at its most basic level, "agency refers to doing."[61] More formally, he defines

agency as using this power of action to intervene in the events and processes of the world so as

to have at least some effect on causality—that is, to have a capability of making a difference in

the world.[62] This power to act can extend to the power *not* to act, such that a decision to

refrain from acting would itself also have an impact on outcomes. At the base of agency is the

power to have acted otherwise than one actually acted, suggesting that choice-making is

always active, even for structurated agents who carry within them deeply sedimented rules,

habits, and codes that may or may not fully rise to the surface of discursive consciousness.[63]

The idea that agency refers to choice-making obviously does not necessarily lead to a

conception of this human faculty as radically free choice-making. The presence of a choice-

making faculty in human subjects, even one primordially established within everlasting human

spirits, cannot ignore the socially produced conditions that underwrite the operations of such a

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[60] Giddens, *Central Problems*, 70. d
[61] Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 10.
[62] Giddens, *Central Problems*, 55-56; *Constitution of Society*, 14-15.
[63] Giddens, *Central Problems*, 56, 255.

faculty. Giddens' qualified view of agency strikes me as an accurate depiction of how agency

actually operates for human beings, whose continuous flow of actions are never *not* embedded

in social contexts and thus who are always constrained in some way by social structures and

processes. Theologically, the case can be made that LDS teachings suggest that human spirits

are just such radically socially embedded beings, even when viewed from the primordial depths

of the pre-existence, for sociality can be understood to have no beginning because it has no

end. Certainly, when viewed from mortality and beyond, the Mormon subject is deeply

entrenched in social processes and mechanisms, for even LDS doctrines regarding salvation and

exaltation are premised, not merely on a sole individual's relationship with God, but on

communal and familial relationships rendered eternal through temple sealing rituals. What's

more, in the realm of everyday practices, such communal and familial aspects are cast within

the context of a ward "family," where individuals live out their lives in the context of not just

moral responsibilities to their fellow congregants, but through shared social codes and norms

that underwrite the development of a shared social habitus.

Contrary to Madsen's and Givens' picture of the predictable and transparent laws of

choice and consequence, then, Giddens' view posits a world in which subjects never have such

a clear-eyed vision of what will follow from their action or inaction, and the consequences

themselves tend to have an unwieldy character of their own. I believe Giddens' view is more

explanatory of common human experience than Madsen's and Givens' view. With Giddens'

view of structurated selves, we can see that there are just too many wheels in motion when

subjects act, both above and below the surface of the human psyche, for any neat and tidy

formula of choice and consequence to always obtain in every moment of action.

Giddens provides a sophisticated and nuanced rendering of a social but agentive self. His work is an important sociological resource for grappling with the problematic of understanding agency within the context of a social self. However, in terms of how to understand a specifically religious subjectivity, he has much in common with Bourdieu's theory of practice in which the structures of religion seem to be tacitly included into the idea of cultural structures in general.[64] He never really attempts to account for the role of religious practices and knowledge which seek to consciously nurture a particular type of subjectivity centered in piety. Indeed, the concept of habitus only shows up in his work briefly in his discussion of Bourdieu's use of the term, which is bounded by a preponderance of focus on the unconscious. In this sense, Giddens provides a useful basic theory of the social agentive self, but it requires more work to understand the implications of his theory for a consciously shaped pious self. Saba Mahmood remains the most useful theorist of a made subjectivity for this purpose, and I will return to her work on subjectivity and agency at the end of this chapter.

Autonomy and the Social Self

In chapter 1, I noted that the concept of autonomy has come under heavy critique by those who are skeptical of the kind of subjectivity posited by a Cartesian/Kantian branch of

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[64] Giddens briefly addresses religion explicitly in *Modernity and Self-Identity*, where he acknowledges a "resurgence of religious belief and conviction" within high modernity. His purpose in this section, however, is more to address the theoretical failure of previous social thinkers when they hypothesized that religion would disappear with the progressive expansion of secular institutions than to theorize a religious subject per se. Giddens here seeks to account for why religion has only grown in strength in modernity, which he believes is to counter widespread doubt and loss of meaning with a form of conviction. But he places religion alongside other social movements, such as the feminist and ecological movements, as cultural forms that represent a collective "reappropriation of the institutionally repressed areas of life" within modernity (207-208). The closest Giddens comes to addressing modes of subject formation that are similar to what operates within pious religion is when he invokes the modern practice of therapy as an "expert system deeply implicated in the reflexive project of the self" (181).

liberalism. I also noted that the critique has been sharp enough that many theorists of subjectivity have actually pushed back in order to examine ways in which the concept might be recuperated within the context of retaining the theoretical basis of a social self. Much of this work has understandably come out of the perspective of feminist thought: those who are concerned to help women overcome oppressive circumstances have often relied upon the idea that women can claim some level of autonomy over their lives. Autonomy in this sense represents the capacity for a woman to think for herself, to separate her mindset from any oppressive social or familial regulations, and then to claim her own power to resist. Such a commitment to the idea of autonomy has indeed historically led many feminists to embrace some version of the liberal self, one who exists at some "true" or "authentic" individual realm separate from such oppressive social forces.

A feminist backlash against the concept of autonomy began, at least in part, when many divergent voices within feminist discourse, especially from the perspectives of race and sexuality, helped to solidify the idea that there is no single and unitary "women's experience." The idea that experience is shaped differently based on the myriad contexts and circumstances that inform individual lives led to a heightened awareness of the role of social structures as such, that is, of their role as the mechanisms that allow for the very legibility of experience and its meaning-making operations. Once social structures came to be accepted by many feminists as the condition of possibility for any iteration of experience, the idea of a subject who exists at some level of detachment from social forces, that is, the traditional idea of an autonomous self, became suspect.

However, some feminists note that the need still remains to explain how an individual who is enmeshed in oppressive social circumstances can be empowered to not only remove herself physically but also mentally from that which would oppress her—something we can empirically note does indeed happen. Such feminists thus believe that autonomy as a concept does not need to be, and in fact shouldn't be, jettisoned completely. Those who seek to recuperate the concept of autonomy for a social self thus reject a liberal view of the subject, but still try to understand how a fundamentally social self tends to retain some capacity to think and act for itself.

The efforts to reexamine the concept of autonomy within feminism offers a valuable resource for my efforts to explicate a Mormon theological anthropology. This is so not because Mormon scholars have directly entered into this particular feminist conversation but because prominent doctrinal understandings of the subject in LDS theology tend, as we have seen, toward stronger liberal views in which a non-social interpretation of the subject is entirely possible. But as we have also seen, Mormonism's doctrine of sociality complicates any straightforward rendering of autonomy in its most stringent terms, in the sense of a subject that exists untethered at some level from social forces. The analytical efforts to reconcile autonomy with a social self, then, offer one avenue to hold onto the importance of agency as an "indigenous" LDS doctrine while at the same time take seriously the implications for the kind of fundamental sociality that also obtains within the tradition's teachings.

In the introduction to their edited collection of essays that seeks to re-examine the concept of autonomy, Natalie Stoljar and Catriona Mackenzie suggest that the anti-liberal critique of autonomy is often the result of scholars conflating autonomy as a broader concept

with just one particular conception of it. They suggest that such a suspicion of autonomy might then be based on a caricature.[65] In offering a reconceptualization of autonomy, Stoljar and Mackenzie seek to account for the complexity inherent in a subject who is constituted by social forces and who depends psychically, emotionally, institutionally, and culturally on the communal relationships in which it is embedded.

Based on contemporary philosophical accounts of autonomy, they suggest the concept can be conceived at its most basic level as a two-tiered capability: first, the capacity for subjects to reflect on their own internal structures of motivation and desires and, second, the capacity to then alter those motivations and desires in response to personal reflections.[66] The premise of Stoljar and Mackenzie's entire project is that such reflection cannot be conceived as being formed independently of the communal structures that bear on a human life, that it is not a simple, entirely independent impulse that derives from some so-called "original" self. They note that much philosophical debate surrounds autonomy, with efforts that focus on not only how to understand and formulate the reflection process, what is involved generally, but what kind of reflection specifically would even constitute autonomy at all.[67] Compared to anti-liberal characterizations, which tend to use broad strokes in painting a picture of autonomy, their version is in principle modest and theoretically careful in what capabilities can be attributed to a social self.

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[65] Stoljar and Mackenzie, "Autonomy Reconfigured," 5.
[66] Stoljar and Mackenzie, 13.
[67] It is worth pointing out that Giddens also sees reflexivity as a key component to agency, and he also employs the concept of autonomy as one side of a dialectical relationship that also includes dependency, something I will discuss in more detail below. There seems to be a consensus among theorists of the social self that the reflexive capabilities of the human subject are a reliable marker of agency and autonomy.

Linda Barclay seeks to further address the tension between understanding the subject

as social and subjected while simultaneously affirming the concept of autonomy. Using a similar

definition of autonomy as Stoljar and Mackenzie—"autonomy is said to consist of a capacity, or

the exercise of certain competencies, that enables one to reflect on one's aims, aspirations, and

motivations and choose one's ends and purposes through such a reflective process"[68]—Barclay

goes a step further and envisions a subject as incapable of reflecting and responding to all

motivations at once. Rather, certain motivations and ends will remain unreflectively present

while the process of reflecting on others is under way. It is incorrect, she says, to characterize

an autonomous person as able to clean the slate of her motivations by sheer force of will.

Various purposes and ends remain in play, both reflectively and unreflectively, while autonomy

is being exercised.[69]

Barclay also claims it is a misunderstanding when autonomy is assumed to be genuine

only if uncaused or undetermined. Authentic self-reflection does not spring from a hidden self

that is to be found under the layers of socialization, but "autonomy competencies" are

themselves constructed through the reflection process. Inasmuch as autonomy is the process of

fashioning a response to socialization rather than somehow shedding socialization, the

difference between a person who is autonomous and one who is not, according to Barclay, is

that an autonomous person is "not a passive receptacle" of social forces but reflectively

participates with them in shaping her life.[70]

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[68] Barclay, "Autonomy and the Social Self," 53.
[69] Barclay, 55.
[70] Barclay, 55. Barclay borrows the language of "autonomy competency" from Diana T. Meyers in *Self, Society, and Personal Choice* (New York: Columbia University, 1991).

Theories of autonomy such as these further insist that not only is autonomy not

opposed to the processes of socialization but the processes of social formation are the

underlying foundations for autonomous reflections. Much of this type of thinking comes out of

a branch of feminist thought known as "care" feminism. Care feminism began with Carol

Gilligan's critique of Lawrence Kohlberg's psychological theory of moral reasoning that

characterized autonomous moral reasoning as the highest stage. Kohlberg's study ranked men

higher than women in cognitive maturity based on scores that measured autonomy. Gilligan's

challenge to Kohlberg's study was that it privileged male moral values and mindsets over

women's. The study was flawed, she said, because it did not take into consideration the fact

that women value interpersonal relationships and nurturance over rational reasoning.

Autonomy thus became a category of scrutiny within care feminism.[71]

In this strain of feminist thought, scholars have criticized liberal versions of the self if

they seem to imply or assume that an adult individual (usually a man) is self-made, relying on

his own powers to shape his life. One well-known critique along these lines is Seyla Benhabib's

contention that liberal Western social contract theories, such as Thomas Hobbes', posit that

humans come to full maturity "like mushrooms" that instantly sprout fully formed without

taking into consideration the relationships that contribute to human growth.[72] Care feminists

counter that all persons at some point in their life, either in infancy, childhood, or old age are

dependent on someone to take care of them. The important work that adults do to sustain

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[71] Gilligan, *Different Voice*.

[72] Benhabib, *Situating the Self*, 156. The image of men sprouting like mushrooms is actually borrowed from Hobbes himself in describing his hypothetical state of nature: "Let us consider men . . . as if but even now sprung out of the earth, and suddenly, like mushrooms, come to full maturity, without all kind of engagement to each other." Benhabib takes this quote from Hobbes' "Philosophical Rudiments Concerning Government and Society."

human endeavor in our communities, business, and cultural institutions rests on the care such adults received in their younger years, as they were nurtured, fed, loved, educated, mentored, and guided by others. Autonomy competencies, that is, the ability to reflect on one's own values, motivations, desires, and then reason toward particular purposes or ends, are one important component of the nurturance all individuals receive as they grow into adulthood. They are an integral part of the socialization that results from care work. Accordingly, autonomy as a concept does not make sense unless it is understood within the context of socialized persons.

It is worth noting that a radical personhood theory of subjectivity within LDS discourse tends to depict the formation of personhood in similar terms to Benhabib's image of sprouting "like mushrooms" by largely failing to consider the role of social relationships and nurturance in the formation of personhood. Perhaps such a depiction is one inevitable implication that follows from the doctrine of self-existence. However, such a comparison between Benhabib's mushroom image and LDS radical personhood suggests that a care feminist critique could effectively be applied here, especially when considering that such teachings were first formulated within the highly androcentric environment of the formative years of the Church.[73] On the flip side, the Mormon commitment to the practice that all human subjects are to be nurtured in social and familial relations aligns reasonably well with a care feminist perspective, especially when personhood itself is understood to have begotten, rather than radical, origins.

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[73] Of course, a case could be made that the contemporary church's environment, with its all-male priesthood and the institutional mindsets that inevitably follow from it, is still fundamentally androcentric, even if softened a bit from the nineteenth century. Such an observation suggests that if the arguments of care feminism are basically right, then the contemporary depictions of the subject that follow from the radical personhood theory are perhaps blind to, and thus still complicit in, the androcentric valuations of the past.

When begotten personhood is placed within the perspective of care feminism, autonomy of a primordial self would be less an attribute of uncreatedness and more a function of competencies that are nurtured through the care every human soul receives within familial and communal contexts.

Agency and Power

An understanding of social subjectivity, in which a self is constituted by social processes, inevitably runs into questions regarding power, specifically the potential for coercive behavior by those who are in positions of greater control over institutional features within a given social system. Many theorists who examine the processes of subject-making engage with Michel Foucault's thought regarding power, particularly with his work on technologies of discipline that result in a docile subject. Many find his arguments regarding power compelling, while others find aspects of his arguments disturbing. In reaction to the latter quality, they try to find critical inroads into his theory that awards the subject greater agency than they understand Foucault to have awarded. Anthony Giddens is one such theorist. Giddens has clearly been influenced by Foucault's theories of power, but he also seeks to render human subjects as ultimately possessing greater agency in the face of institutional domination than he believes Foucault has described them to possess.

Since both Giddens and Foucault grapple with issues of power and agency expressly for subjects who are understood to be constituted by social structures, both of their models offer valuable analytical resources for my project. I examine their views below with the intent to understand how their ideas are relevant to a Mormon theological context. However, Giddens' critique of Foucault (like so many other critical responses) is applied only to Foucault's earlier

work that deals more centrally with techniques of institutional domination, while Foucault's later work on technologies of the self goes unnoticed and unaccounted for. When understanding the role of Foucauldian techniques of subject formation, the latter part of his work is, I believe, just as important as the earlier when it comes to understanding issues of power involved in subjectivity, especially as this latter work relates to the techniques of conscious nurturance of character from which theorists like Saba Mahmood draw for understanding pious subjects. Foucault's picture of technologies of power is not complete, then, without considering the two-prong nature of his theory of governance.

Giddens' Theory of Power

For Anthony Giddens, the concept of power at a basic level denotes the idea of capabilities that are an inherent part of human agency. Specifically, he defines power as, on one hand, simply the capacity to get things done, and on the other hand, "transformative capacity" in the sense of having the power to "make a difference" in the outcomes that follow from action.[74] His definitions of agency and power, in fact, closely track with one another: agency is precisely the power to act in a causative way; power is the capacity for action that makes a difference in the world. He rejects the idea that when we speak of power we only speak about coercion, domination, oppression, or even violence. Power, he says, is never merely constraint, and it is not inherently divisive.[75]

However, Giddens does not ignore the very real phenomenon of domination, such that he incorporates "structures of domination" within his model of social systems. These structures

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[74] Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 14, 175.
[75] Giddens, 257, 283.

can perhaps be understood not as a separate category from other structural categories, but as a quality of all structural principles within collectivities. They are caught in the fundamental operations of duality of structure, that is, the mechanism of producing and reproducing structures as such through human action and interactions. When Giddens speaks of duality of structure, he speaks of it definitionally as the rules and resources that are reconstituted through interaction.[76] These rules and resources are that which subjects draw upon when going on in the world in the stratified modes associated with their basic security system, their practical consciousness, and their discursive capabilities of explaining their actions. In this sense, the structures that are imbued in any given social system and that constitute the subject precisely are such rules and resources.[77]

Giddens, in turn, associates rules and resources with power-as-capability more generally, but also with structures of domination more specifically. First, he uses the concept of *rules* in a Wittgensteinian way: "to know a rule," he says, "is to 'know how to go on'" within any given social context.[78] These rules are not fixed but have to do with the dynamic characteristics of established norms and social codes that constitute an individual's capability to be a competent social actor. But because every rule carries with it sanctioning possibilities, that is, the possibility that some kind of constraint will be imposed on behavior, rules can be understood as one aspect of structures of domination. According to Giddens, sanctions can run

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[76] Giddens, *Central Problems*, 171.
[77] Giddens, 66.
[78] Giddens, 67.

the spectrum from the threat or actuality of coercive force or even violence to instances of more mild social disapproval.[79]

Second, *resources* refer to certain media through which power can be exercised.[80] They are made up of two types. One type of resource is what Giddens names as allocative. It refers to the capability to control material objects, such as raw materials and their production into goods. This type of resource can be understood to run the gamut from large-scale industrial production within nations to the allocation of material resources within smaller organizations or even within families. The other type of resource is what he names as authoritative, which refers to the ability to organize and control not only the material resources just mentioned but the organization of social regions and their internal temporal and spatial qualities. It also refers to the processes involved in how human bodies are produced and reproduced as well as the "life chances" of individuals, which has to do not only with their chances for basic survival but with their self-development and self-expression.[81]

As human actors participate in, and are constituted by, the producing and reproducing mechanisms of social interaction, they participate in what Giddens refers to as a dialectic between autonomy and dependency. This dialectic is a property of all social communities, and it is a given feature of all power relations.[82] It refers to the fact that power relations always go two ways: even the most autonomous subject is in some degree dependent upon the social collectivity in terms of its personal capabilities, while the most dependent of subjects always

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[79] Giddens, 67.
[80] Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 16.
[81] Giddens, 258-61.
[82] Giddens, *Central Problems*, 6.

retains some autonomy regarding their power to act. Any imbalance of power within this dialectic has to do with an asymmetry of resources available to subjects.[83] Such an asymmetry then constitutes structures of domination that can be recursively perpetuated through time and space, even to such an extent as to perpetuate them as durable institutions.

To illustrate how Giddens' theory of power operates for a structurated agent, we can take a cue from Amy Hoyt's work that posits motherhood as an agentive practice for Mormon women but that is itself situated within a larger theologico-social framework. Hoyt is concerned to assert that women from societies that adhere to, instead of resisting, traditional principles, such as Latter-day Saints, employ agency as they reproduce such structural features. I take this point as a given and am not interested here in entering the long-standing debate within feminism regarding how to define agency in relation to resistance. It is a point that she derives in part from Giddens' theory of structuration, and which leads her to describe agency as existing on a spectrum between the extremes of resistance and acceptance of structural norms.[84] But as I noted in chapter one, I see Hoyt's depiction of LDS women's agency as attributing to them a more philosophically liberal rendering of agency than is warranted, given the structurated nature of subjectivity she supposedly leans on for her own claims. In her reaction against the political liberalism of some feminists who, according to her, denigrate women like Latter-day Saints as lacking agency precisely because of the traditional views they hold, she uses Giddens' depiction of producing and reproducing agency more as a political tool and less as a jumping off point to think more deeply about subjectivity. Still, that she describes

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[83] Giddens, 91.
[84] Hoyt, "Agency," 195-99.

motherhood as a pious practice that helps to shape a particular type of Mormon subjectivity is a helpful beginning point to illustrate Giddens' theory of power as social rules and allocation of certain social resources.

In terms of rules, parenthood in LDS discourse is a lifestyle choice that is strongly encouraged through institutionally authoritative sources, from articles in Church periodicals to curriculum materials used to aid members in their voluntary teaching roles to sermons given from authoritative pulpits. The most powerful "rule"-based sources come from prophetic figures who are understood to speak God's will to the LDS community. For example, one particular text that has reached near canonical status is *The Family: A Proclamation to the World*, a document that was issued by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in 1995 and was read over the pulpit by then-president of the Church, Gordon B. Hinckley. It states that the first commandment God gave to Adam and Eve concerned their responsibility to have children. It further states that fathers and mothers will be "held accountable before God" for how they approach and perform parenthood. Regarding mothers in particular, the document states that "by divine design, . . . mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children," as opposed to fathers who are to "preside over their families in love and righteousness," while also having the responsibility to "provide the necessities of life and protection for their families."[85] This document serves as a basic doctrinal text that lays out the institutional expectations for men and women in their role as parents.

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[85] First Presidency and Council of Twelve Apostles, *The Family: A Proclamation*. The full text can be accessed on the Church's website: https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/the-family-a-proclamation-to-the-world/the-family-a-proclamation-to-the-world?lang=eng

The *Proclamation* has been a controversial document within the Mormon community because it so clearly crystallizes, with the invocation of "divine design," traditional gender roles within a heteronormative family structure. But its sentiments have been repeated and entrenched within LDS discourse in various subtle ways, such that for many Latter-day Saints (although not all), to "go on" within the community is to attribute to women and men just such gender roles, identities, and responsibilities. One example of how such gender social rules seem to substantively shape subjectivity is when unmarried women with no children depict themselves as mother-figures by virtue of the fact that they are women. Sherri Dew, a former general leader of the Church's women's organization who is herself unmarried and childless, wrote, "Motherhood is more than bearing children, . . . It is the essence of who we are as women. Motherhood defines our very identity, our divine stature and nature, and the unique traits, talents, and tendencies with which our Father endowed us."[86]

Even if all LDS women do not agree with such sentiments, Dew's own subjectivity appears to have been shaped by the kind of sentiments represented in the *Proclamation*. Additionally, such authoritative texts also seem to have had a strong influence over the LDS women Hoyt studied who see motherhood as a pious practice of self-formation, that is, who see the act of bearing and rearing children as a religious act.[87] It is possible to see texts like the *Proclamation* as a means of coercing women to act and to think in ways they would not otherwise, and thus as operating as a source of domination on LDS women, particularly since the document was issued by a body made up entirely of men in positions of power within the

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[86] Dew, *Women and Priesthood*, 142.
[87] Hoyt, "Maternal Practices," 311-13.

community. However, taking Hoyt's ethnographic research as an example, these texts clearly

also have the potential, as most structural principles do, to inform the very desires of those

women. In this case, such desires are formed within the context of a communal ethos to revere

Church prophets as a source for revealing divine will. As such, the relationship these women

have with such texts is more complex than can be explained by assessing them as simple tools

of domination.

Because such rules regarding motherhood come from figures in the community who

wield cultural power, they are dispersed over time and space and thus become, in Giddens'

terms, institutional features of the community. Spatially, the *Proclamation* and its ideas,

including books written by influential women like Dew, travel the globe wherever the Church

has a congregational presence. Temporally, documents such as this that are attached to

prophetic figures might never fully disappear from the community's discourse and thus are

included in its theological history. Once a prophet-figure speaks a sermon in an official capacity,

such as Hinckley's public reading of the *Proclamation*, it is considered within the community as

revelation from God and as such is not easily ignored or dismissed. This dispersal through time

and space of the ideas found in the *Proclamation* mark it as a candidate for an institutional

vehicle for structural rules that operate within the social system of Mormonism. As a vehicle for

institutionalizing such principles within this community, it participates in the operations that

structurate individual subjectivities.

In terms of social resources associated with Giddens' theory of power, mothers are

situated in an interesting place in terms of their ability to control resources. Recall that Giddens

divides resources into two categories: first, material resources in which objects can be

controlled through allocation and, second, authoritative resources in which persons can control

material, temporal, and spatial features within collectivities, as well as the resources to control

bodies and self-expression. LDS mothers are embedded within a community in which female

subjectivities are shaped within the context of patriarchal hierarchies that exist both within the

institutional church structure and within the ideal version of the home organized according to

traditional gender roles.[88] Such a position means that there are many contexts in which LDS

women are subordinates in terms of both authoritative and allocative power.

However, within certain other contexts, for example, in the running of their household

and in caring for their children, they do control a certain measure of both allocative and

authoritative resources. When Giddens describes those who control authoritative resources as

being in a position to affect "life chances," in terms of not just the means for basic survival but

in terms of how bodies are shaped and how persons develop and express themselves, he

perhaps had in mind larger social forces such as governmental entities and other large-scale

institutions within broad collectivities. But such a description of power can apply just as well to

the dynamics of mothering children in a home environment. Mothers have direct control over

the bodies of their children, not only in providing the food and material comforts they need to

survive and flourish, but in directing how their children develop self-awareness, and how

children might desire to express themselves. Although mothers are also formed in their

subjectivity by the actions of their children, such that the processes of subject-formation are

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[88] LDS women are barred from ultimate decision-making positions within the Church by virtue of its all-male priesthood. In the home, men are encouraged to "preside," as the *Proclamation* states, even though that document also encourages, perhaps paradoxically, that husband and wife are to "help one another as equal partners."

reciprocal and dynamic, mothers and children still exist in asymmetrical positions of power in relation to each other.[89]

It's worth noting that mothers, as an authoritative figure, bring to the practice of childrearing certain structural principles that are taken for granted by them and their children as they "go on" with living their lives. Although subject to larger structures of power, both explicitly and implicitly, mothers themselves often wield authoritative power as they contribute to the habituation of their children to communal thought structures. Mothers are themselves habituated as they perform their role that in many ways is derived from the theological rules of the community, but they also contribute significantly to the habituation of their children to these same communal structural principles. In all of this, mothers are situated in a stacking structure of institutional formation and social sanctioning: they are subject to institutional pressure for communal legibility in terms of practices that reveal commitment to a certain identity, and they are also subject to internal family dynamics, which, granted, may or may not conform to such institutional pressures. But within the family unit, they certainly wield their own sources of power within that stacking formation.

In another significant way, the very position of mothers within a family structure awards them a certain position within the community at large. Their success at achieving social legibility according to the norms laid out by such structural principles as found in texts like the

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[89] This example of mothers and children illustrates that there are cases in which asymmetries in power relations are not only not problematic but at times entirely necessary, unlike the asymmetries that exist for trivial reasons, such as patriarchal subordination of women in relation to men because of biological gender characteristics. Foucault himself states something similar in *Ethics*: in terms of a "pedagogical institution," he sees "nothing wrong in the practice of a person who, knowing more than others in a specific game of truth, tells those others what to do, teaches them, and transmits knowledge and techniques to them." The problem, he states, is when teachers, and presumably parents too, abuse their authority over a child (298-299).

Proclamation situates them at a social station within the community that offers greater social capital relative to others who have not achieved such legibility, such as single and childless women. Perhaps this relative distance between women who are positioned differently within the community in terms of motherhood is one factor for why someone like Sherri Dew would want to claim the identity of mother, so that she might equalize herself and other women like her according to such social capital. Dew's move to claim the identity of mother for herself might be interpreted, at least in part, as an attempt to claim a certain level of authoritative power that single and childless women might not otherwise possess within the LDS community.

In the end, such descriptions of the social forces at play in the shaping of subjectivity according to certain features that obtain in relations of power does not discount the idea that subjects are fundamentally agentive beings. They possess the capacity for getting things done, for making a difference in the world, and for refraining from acting when they so choose. However, the theory of structuration offers explanatory power concerning the social and structural bases upon which certain mindsets and value-sets that inform decision-making are both shaped and performed. These formulations regarding structuration and power relations do not discount the fact that the persons embedded in LDS communities are agentive beings, just as they do not lead to a view of the human subject who is capable of making decisions outside of the social relations and structures that constitute its very capacity for action. Structures of domination certainly exist within Mormonism, as they are certainly present in the inevitable power relations that organize any social system. But by virtue of the fact that humans are reflective beings who have the capacity to produce certain iterations of social practices anew, their subjection to structures of domination are fundamentally dynamic processes. They

never remain as static and docile entities, merely acted upon. They participate in the dialectic between autonomy and dependency and in the dialectic between individual agency and fundamental sociality.

Governmentality of the Subject

The use of the word "docile" above is meant to invoke the work of Michel Foucault regarding power and subjectivity. Indeed, Foucault's thinking on this topic has come to have a preponderant influence on the theoretical conversation regarding power and agency, whether those engaging with his ideas find his conclusions compelling or problematic. I find that many scholars who are troubled by Foucault's ideas on power tend to focus on his earlier work, particularly *Discipline and Punish*, and less or not at all with his later work on technologies of the self.[90] He has indicated that he sees the disciplining of bodies into docility as operating through both the technologies of domination and the technologies aimed at the self by the self. He labels both sets of techniques under the rubric of "governmentality," which he defines generally as "techniques and procedures for directing human behavior."[91] But he also, perhaps surprisingly, associates governmentality with the concept of freedom within the context of relationships, that is, it points to the freedom that is a basic feature of subjects to wield the resources available to them as they govern themselves and others.[92]

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[90] Such a statement is certainly true of Giddens. Hays also cites Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, Volume 1 as a source that focuses on the "constraining nature" of structure and "fail[s] to recognize its empowering aspects" (59). Catherine Brekus, in "Problem of Historical Agency," another important source for introducing the idea of a social self to Mormon historians, also cites Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and *The Order of Things* as examples of how postmodernists "have often overstated the limits on human agency," although she also acknowledges that such theorists remind us (helpfully, in her view) that "freedom is never absolute" (74).

[91] Foucault, *Ethics*, 81.

[92] Foucault, 299-300.

The use of disciplinary techniques of power that he describes in *Discipline and Punish* do indeed posit a rather chilling scenario in which those who were incarcerated within penal institutions modeled after Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon were controlled both physically and mentally by the dynamics of such a system. Within the context of this penal system, the actions and behavior of inmates were controlled through strategies like enforcing rigid time schedules that was comprised of repetitious exercises and work, physical isolation within cells, and verbal examinations by prison guards in which inmates had to account for their behavior. But the circular layout of the Panopticon prison further meant that inmates were constantly subjected to a normalizing gaze in which they felt their every move was watched and measured against a standard of conformity. Such constant surveillance imposed on subjects a "principle of compulsory visibility,"[93] which led to, in conjunction with the other strategies, their very minds and bodies being inscribed with the norms that were imposed upon them.

In this case, the very knowledge that subjects come to possess is invested with the norms of power that surround them, such that the inmates come willingly to conform their own behavior according to the discourses of power that they have absorbed. Foucault thus describes control of both bodies and minds, indeed of minds through bodies, such that the end result is "submission of bodies through the control of ideas."[94] Such mechanics of power thus produce, according to Foucault, "docile bodies," in which coercive power is transcribed into the "aptitude and capacity" that subjects themselves come to feel they possess.[95] Such mechanisms of creating docile bodies in a penal context are effected through the use of two "simple

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[93] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 187.
[94] Foucault, 102.
[95] Foucault, 138.

instruments": "hierarchical observation" and "normalizing judgment," which combine together in the technique of subjecting individuals to examination. Both instruments are made possible in this case through a particular architecture.[96] Foucault extends the locations where such mechanisms of power might operate to mental asylums, hospitals, and schools.[97]

Although Foucault brings to his theories a view of subjectivity that is socially made and thus non-foundationalistic and non-liberal, the picture he paints of relations of power in his earlier work does indeed posit a challenge to agency if subjects' bodies and minds are understood to be fundamentally controlled by those who hold positions of power. As such, his earlier work might indeed suggest a scenario in which societal structures have such a dominating effect on human behavior that the existence of human agency then becomes a problem that needs to be solved rather than something to be taken for granted.

Anthony Giddens pushes back against the rendering of such domination on human agency by helpfully reminding us that the scenario Foucault lays out in *Discipline and Punish* and elsewhere is a scenario that does not necessarily obtain in everyday life. He draws on Erving Goffman's construct of "total institutions," institutions which impose such a totalizing discipline on subjects that they experience an extreme level of self-degradation and loss of basic autonomy, to make the point that such institutions are the exception rather than the rule for ordinary modern life.[98] While certain features of discipline that exist in total institutions might exist in moderate form in certain realms of ordinary life, such as work or school environments, they do not encompass the entirety of a person's life. "Capable agents," Giddens

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[96] Foucault, 170-94.
[97] Foucault, 138.
[98] Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 154-55.

tells us, "are likely to submit to discipline for [only] parts of the day," a sacrifice that can be

willingly met in exchange for benefits that are applied to life outside of disciplinary spaces.[99] For

example, many individuals submit to the disciplines of a corporate office environment for a

portion of their day in order to provide the means to pay for their physical and emotional needs

and wants.

Of course, some subjects might be deprived in extreme ways of ordinary resources that

underwrite autonomy, such as persons who are subjected to slavery. In addition, the levels of

deprivation and willingness to submit to discipline exists on a spectrum, such that a person

does not have to be subjected to outright slavery, or to total institutions for that matter, in

order to be subjected to oppressive and manipulative environments. But it is also possible to

image scenarios in which such extremes are not the normative case, in which agents possess

the resources necessary to enable some level of autonomy even within the confines of the

structural principles, including structures of domination, that obtain within every social system.

Indeed, a worthy goal of liberatory projects is to make the greatest degree of the latter scenario

a reality for as many people as possible.

Granted, it is not hard to imagine a variety of contexts in ordinary day-to-day life in

which a communal social gaze subjects individuals to a "compulsory visibility" that regulates

mindsets and behavior. And it would be naïve to deny that such social mechanisms exist within

a community like Mormonism, or to ignore them and their implications when what is needed is

an understanding of how the power relations that do exist within its communities and

congregations operate. But when placed within the context of a dialectic of individual

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[99] Giddens, 154.

209

autonomy and social dependency, domination associated with subjections of such a social gaze are not the end of the story.

I see Foucault himself being interested in the problem of how agency might operate within power relations, which led him to some of his formulations regarding technologies of the self. According to his own telling, his work took a shift with volume two of *The History of Sexuality*, when he began to analyze techniques of the self. He wanted to analyze the "forms and modalities of a relation to the self by which an individual constitutes and recognizes himself qua subject."[100] In this analytical project, Foucault does not abandon his earlier ideas regarding power, in that certain mechanisms of normativity and what he calls "games of truth" that shape a subject's knowledge of the world are still at play, including how a subject's desires are formulated within the context of social discourse.[101] But he voices interest in understanding how an individual's own subjectivity becomes visible to himself through work on the self. While he uses the theme of sexuality as the analytical lens that drives this study as a whole, we may extract, from his introduction to volume two especially, certain precepts that are relevant to a broader understanding of how he sees the possibility that a subject might be able to exercise freedom through self-critical thought.

Foucault uses the concept of thought in a particular way. He sees it as a critical activity that is directed at the self—that is, as an action that has the potential to make the social discourse that flows through subjects visible enough that it can become an object of study. For example, in *Ethics* he explains that thought "allows one to step back from . . . acting or reacting"

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[100] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 2:6.
[101] Indeed, Foucault describes his theoretical shift in *History of Sexuality*, Volume 2 as a recentering toward a "genealogy of desiring man" (12).

in order to present to oneself "objects of thought." Once these objects of thought are

presented to oneself, it becomes possible to question their meaning, conditions, and goals.[102]

Thought thus allows for a certain detachment from one's actions so that one can then reflect

on one's own behavior as a problematic. This detachment and reflective criticism of one's own

knowledge and practices can then lead to a transformation of the self as thought works upon

itself. According to Paul Rabinow, this act of transformative self-criticism leads Foucault to

associate thought with "freedom in relation to what one does."[103] Rabinow also makes the

connection that for Foucault, the construct that thought is an "exercise of freedom" belongs

under the broader rubric of governmentality of the self.[104]

     I want to be careful here not to attribute a liberal kind of freedom of thought to

Foucault. His subject who engages in self-criticism is never detached from social discourse,

which itself never becomes entirely transparent to the thinking self. Instead, governance of the

self is always undertaken within discursive formations in which modes of subjection and

strategies of power operate. The knowledge that is produced within discursive formations

provides a socially derived telos towards which work on the self is aimed and thus serves as a

constituting and enabling factor for desire and the actions that follow from it. Still, Foucault

makes clear that he sees the work of philosophical activity as such to be comprised of "critical

work that thought brings to bear on itself." The result of such activity is the possibility to "think

differently instead of legitimating what is already known."[105] Without calling such philosophical

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[102] Foucault, *Ethics*, 117.
[103] Rabinow, "Introduction," xxxv.
[104] Rabinow, "Introduction," xvii.
[105] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 2:9.

activity agency or autonomy explicitly, what Foucault proposes here sounds similar to the reflexivity associated with those two terms in the work of both Giddens and the feminists who theorize about autonomy for a social self.[106]

In terms of the specifics regarding techniques of the self, Foucault presents the example of ancient philosophical practices of morality to illustrate how certain socially formed "truths" that constituted the moral world of many Greek and Roman historical figures served as the telos that guided their efforts to craft themselves as a subject. Foucault specifically studies what he calls the "prescriptive texts" from Greek and Roman philosophy, particularly Stoicism, texts which offer suggestions and advice on how to shape the self according to certain codes of conduct. These texts were meant to establish a practice of reflecting on and testing out the suggestions within the texts themselves and as such became a tool for the practice of self-formation.[107] Readers would ponder, memorize, learn from, and assimilate the texts' precepts; they would do regular check-ups of their behavior in order to measure how closely they conform to the rules suggested in the texts.[108] Through such practice, the self became a project to work on akin to the activity of creating a piece of art. Foucault describes these techniques as "arts of existence" which were employed in order to "make life into an oeuvre" with individual aesthetics and styles.[109]

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[106] In the introduction to *History of Sexuality*, Volume 2, Foucault seems to make a distinction between an "agent," presumably understood along Cartesian lines, and the "ethical subject" (26). The ethical subject is one who chooses actions as any agent does but does so within the confines of moral codes that leads one to be enmeshed in modes of subjection. Foucault defines modes of subjection as "the way in which the individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put it into practice." These obligations lead the ethical subject to "acknowledge oneself to be a member of the group" that accepts certain moral codes, to "silently preserve" the groups customs, and to "regard oneself as heir to a spiritual tradition that one has responsibility of maintaining or reviving" (27). The ethical subject thus acts to place himself in a position of group belonging.

[107] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 2:12-13.

[108] Foucault, 2:27.

[109] Foucault, 2:10-11.

The techniques of the self that Foucault describes for these ancient philosophers in some ways overlaps with the techniques of discipline he describes in *Discipline and Punish*. They include "precise recipes" for moral action, "specific forms of examination," and "codified exercises." The difference between these ancient figures and those incarcerated in a penal institution, however, is that for the former, such techniques were undertaken by the self for purposes of self-examination as an "art of self-knowledge,"[110] not, as in the latter case, for the purpose of controlling the mind and body of others. Although modes of subjection were still involved in techniques of the self, it was an appropriation of social codes aimed at the self for the express purpose of self-formation. It is the subject who ultimately defines desirable precepts to follow and who "decides on a certain mode of being" to aim for.[111] As the subject approaches such practices with a critical and reflective mind, it was possible for a certain level of autonomy to be activated relative to the style of the techniques employed, an autonomy that, Foucault argues, was lost to some degree when similar techniques were assimilated by early Christian priests and later by institutions of learning, medicine, and psychology.[112]

Since Foucault sees this history of sexuality as just "one of the first chapters of a general history of the 'techniques of the self,'"[113] we may presume that the general parameters for such techniques that he lays out here could be relevant in other contexts where the formation of subjectivity can be studied. Saba Mahmood's study of the pious practices of Muslim women

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[110] Foucault, 3:58.
[111] Foucault, 2:28.
[112] Foucault, 2:10-11. Creative autonomy was likely possible in part because, as Foucault explains, there was no institutional orthodoxy established in the ancient Greco-Roman world in which strict rules of conduct were enforced (30-31). This situation presumably changed when these later institutions appropriated certain technologies of the self.
[113] Foucault, 2:11.

is one such context, for she appropriates a Foucauldian approach to her own analysis of habitus

creation. Mahmood has been cited by many feminists, including Hoyt and other scholars of

Mormon women, as offering a more expansive view of agency by denying that only resistant

behavior counts as agentive. But, as mentioned in chapter one, Mahmood has expressed

disappointment that her reformulation of agency has been given more attention than the

theory of subjectivity that she saw as underwriting it. Her primary preoccupation has been to

understand how subjects are made in the first place, such that their use of agency arises out of

certain imaginaries that are formed through the authoritative discourses that they are

embedded within. As such, subjectivity is understood by her as entirely implicated in a

Foucauldian model of power and agency.

But rather than seeing Foucault's theories as positing a problematic determinism,

Mahmood rather casts Foucault's view of the subject's agency as holding to a sort of middle

path. On one hand, his subjected subject is not "voluntaristic [and] autonomous" to the extent

that it may fashion itself in a "protean manner." But on the other hand, his subject is not

"overdetermined" in that it does not "simply comply" with social codes.[114] Foucault's subject

exists within a "paradox of subjectivation," which is just another way of stating Giddens' theory

of structuration: "the very processes and conditions that secure a subject's subordination,"

Mahmood states, "are also the means by which [the subject] becomes a self-conscious identity

and agent."[115] Mahmood, along with both Foucault and Giddens, argues that subjects are

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[114] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 28. Nor, she adds, does the subject simply resist social codes, either.
[115] Mahmood, 17.

indeed subjected subjects, but they are also agentive beings who are enabled to perform their agency through the social constructs that create their very self-understanding.

Mahmood's Foucauldian view of the subject thus tracks with what Giddens describes as the dialectic of autonomy and dependence. Such a dialectic is in essence the position she attributes to the Muslim women she studied. Like the ancient men Foucault describes who enacted a personal regime of conduct in which they examined, measured, and refined their behavior to conform to the precepts of authoritative texts, these mosque women also labored on themselves in order to craft a self that conforms to the standards of piety they learned to be appropriate through their own reading of religious texts and mosque instruction. Just as Foucault notes that the regime of conduct undertaken anciently was enabled by socially shared codes of morality, Mahmood notes that the mosque women came to be subjects who desired to conform to socially authoritative discourse.[116] In fact, the whole point of laboring on the self was so they would willingly submit themselves to socially prescribed truths.[117] By highlighting the activity of learning techniques through the study of "prescriptive texts" and then applying them to the self, Mahmood posits a subject who is a combination of Foucauldian and Aristotelian ethics. From each, she arrives at a pedagogical understanding of subject formation. And from each, she grounds the bodily acts of self-cultivation as the analytical beginning point for understanding how the internal processes of subjection come to operate.

In contrast to the view that Mormon subjects are endowed with an unfettered, libertarian freedom by virtue of a primordial pre-existence, I find the model of agency

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[116] Mahmood, 112-13.
[117] Mahmood, *Docile Agent*, 210; *Politics of Piety*, 30-31.

formulated by Mahmood, Foucault, and Giddens to offer greater explanatory power for an LDS

doctrine of agency. Mormonism is indeed a religious tradition in which agentive action and

subjection are brought to bear in a complex interaction within its subjects. In Mormonism,

there is no doubt that the authoritative discourse that runs through the community acts as a

subjectivating force on its adherents. But as a vehicle of structural principles, such discourse

also serves to establish the very codes and rules that make it possible to organize a Mormon life

with not only social legibility but with a deeply felt personal meaning. An LDS subject is not only

a subjected being, and it is not only a free agent. It is a combination of both, with the effect that

we may move the theological boundaries away from any radical extremes and into a moderate

agentive space, where an intermingled and distributed soul, embedded in sociality, is actually

located.

Conclusion

The view of the subject that I have argued for in this dissertation is indeed a theological

re-envisioning of a Mormon anthropology. While it provides a deep contrast to the most

predominant theological views of the subject within Mormonism, it is still grounded, I argue, in

viable interpretations of the tradition's texts and teachings. One especially new point to

consider is that such a view of subjectivity calls for anthropology and ecclesiology to be studied

together, for the Mormon subject cannot be understood fully unless the ecclesiological

dimension of Mormonism is taken into consideration. Accordingly, it is appropriate to describe

a theological project that examines the intersectionality of anthropology and ecclesiology as

theology as ethics: a constructive project that is attuned to how a communal character, an

ethos, is formed within the community and how such an ethos operates as an integral

ingredient in the shaping of a subject's religious self-understanding and bodily habitus.

I have tried to show how the ethical dimension of subjectivity within the LDS community

is deeply informed by the theological formulations and recommended practices that come from

ecclesiastical sources. Of course, such formulations and practices are not only "handed down"

by those in positions of ecclesiastical authority but from a variety of avenues that contribute to

the process of creating communal theological institutions, that is, to the creation of stabilized

thought patterns and routinized practices that are sedimented features of the community's

structures. To be clear, the ethical subject must be understood as an individual who not only

partakes of and is formed by the communal character of the religious tradition, but who also

contributes to the shape of the community and the institution. Such is the case especially for a

community that relies as heavily on the labor and ideas of lay members as Mormonism does. A

full understanding of ecclesiology must point to the view of the church as encompassing all who

participate in making the community what it is, not merely the narrow view of the church as

represented by its leaders.

Still, a theology as ethics project must inevitably take into consideration the

asymmetries of resources that are a built-in feature of a hierarchical organization, such as The

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints explicitly is, and that lead to structures of

domination, both subtle and obvious. It is important to understand how subjects are formed in

the context of asymmetries in power relations because theologians may then clarify how

subjects may be *mis*-formed through such asymmetries. However, as the feminist project of re-

envisioning the concept of agency has shown, any effort that seeks to examine the mis-

formation of subjects must critically examine the very concept of mis-formation and not take

for granted any one theoretical or political framework.

I will end on one last note having to do with the perceived role of theology in the LDS

community and with my own view on why the work of theology is valuable for that community.

The status of theology and the work that theology purports to do is contested in some

influential quarters of Mormon studies, something I gestured to in chapter one. When theology

is portrayed as that which is in competition with the official pronouncements of prophets and

apostles, or as that which requires members to adhere to logical principles over religious

practice, it does not tend to fare well in Latter-day Saint circles. But theology need not be

construed as principally the creation of rational propositions packaged up in a neat systematic

box that exists at a remove from religious experience or as a threat to the presence of

charismatic revelation.

Taking a comparative view of the theological tradition within Christianity, even in its

systematic form, Christian theology has consistently striven to meet the demands of a

particular time and place in order to create a living body of narratives and understandings that

seek to make sense of revelation and its implications that then channel into specific beliefs and

practices—that is, into the life of the religious community. From Augustine's *City of God* to

Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* to Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre* to Troeltsch's historical-critical

methods for church dogmatics and to Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, theologians have not sought

to create a pristine space of rational propositions separate from the life of religious experience

and the church community. Although there has indeed existed a tension in Christianity between

high rational forms of theology (such as some forms of scholasticism) and religious experience,

many theologians through time have consciously and explicitly sought to minimize the real or perceived bifurcation between the formulation of theological propositions and systems that strive to make sense of revelation and the actual religious life of particular Christian communities.

Mormonism, like any other religious tradition, faces serious questions and complexities that are intimately tied up with its theological claims. In the best of circumstances, the relationship between revelation and situated demands can be complex and nuanced, and with high stakes because it has to do with what people hold as their ultimate concern. But when a religious community such as Mormonism faces serious discussion, and even at times controversy, that touches deep into the heart of its doctrines of revelation and the church's role to direct the most intimate aspects of people's lives, theology, thoughtfully done, can meaningfully add to those conversations and aide the community as it makes sense of the dynamics at play.

Simply put, the questions raised by such conversations are fundamentally theological. The "doing" of theology should then be available as a substantive resource to address these questions. Theology as ethics, I suggest, is one method of theological analysis that might indeed offer substantive tools to address the theological complexities involved in the formation of a Mormon subject.

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