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The Mormon God, Omniscience, And Eternal Progression: A Philosophical Analysis

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There is no theological system on the popular level which is attracting more adherents in America than Mormonism, yet Christian philosophers remain relatively ignorant of its unique concept of finite theism. It has followed from this that virtually no Christian critiques of Mormon finite theism have been written on a philosophical level. The purpose of this paper is to inform the Christian public of the Mormon concept of God and to present a brief critique.

The Mormon concept of God is probably the most unique among religious sects that claim to be within the Christian tradition. Most traditional Christians who have written critical appraisals of Mormon theism have done so from a perspective best described as biblical.¹ They have attempted to show why the Mormon concept of God is inconsistent with the concept of God which Christians have traditionally believed is portrayed in the Bible. Although this move has its theological merits, we believe that the Mormon concept of God also merits inspection from the standpoint of Christian philosophy. For one reason, the Mormon concept of God denies nearly all the traditional theistic attributes, but unlike the deity defended by such movements as process theology, it is grounded in a supposed divine revelation. And also unlike process theism, Mormon theism is connected with a religious body which is having tremendous growth, influence, and appeal among those who once occupied the pews of traditional Christian churches and have since become Mormons.² Hence, we believe that Christian philosophers have an ecclesiastical, as well

¹ For example, see W. R. Martin, *The Maze of Mormonism* (rev. ed.; Santa Ana, CA: Vision House, 1978); H. Ropp, *The Mormon Papers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980).

² As of 1982 the Utah Mormons had 3,521,000 members and 7,839 congregations worldwide. The second largest Mormon group, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as of 1982 had 201,480 members and 1061 congregations. (J. G. Melton, *The Encyclopedia of American Religions* (2d ed.; Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1987) 710, 726–27). It should be noted that most converts to Mormonism come from mainline Christian denominations.

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as an intellectual, obligation to take seriously the philosophical aspects of the Mormon concept of God.

The purpose of this paper, then, is two-fold: (1) to describe the Mormon concept of God; and (2) to offer at least four ways the Mormon concept of God can be criticized in terms of two of Mormonism's primary doctrines: eternal progression and divine omniscience.³

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I. The Mormon Concept Of God

In addition to the *Book of Mormon (BM)*, Joseph Smith, founding prophet of the Mormon Church, claimed to have received other alleged revelatory works from God: the *Doctrine and Covenants (DC)* and *Pearl of Great Price (PGP)*. Because most non-Mormons usually think of *BM* when they think of Mormonism, it comes as a surprise to them when they discover that it is really these latter two works, Smith's statements in his *History of the Church*, and the sayings and writings of the presidents of the church (Smith's successors, who are thought to be divinely inspired) from which Mormonism derives most of the unique aspects of its view of God.

Because of so many divergent sources of doctrine, there is a problem in affirming precisely what the Mormons believe. For example, because *BM* (1830, first edition) seems to teach a strongly Judaic monotheism with modalistic overtones (see Alma 11:26–31, 38, 39; Moroni 8:18; Mosiah 3:5–8; 7:27; 15:1–5) and *PGP* (1851, first edition) clearly teaches polytheism (see Abraham 4–5), a number of scholars have argued that Mormon theology evolved from a traditional monotheism to a uniquely American polytheism.⁴ For these

³ For a critique of other aspects of the Mormon concept, see F. J. Beckwith, "The Mormon Concept of God: Two Philosophical Difficulties?" *Sunstone*, forthcoming; S. E. Parrish, "Finitistic Theism and Teleology," M.A. Thesis, Wayne State University, 1984; and F. J. Beckwith and S. E. Parrish, *The Mormon Concept of God: A Philosophical Analysis* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1991).

It should be noted that Mormon philosophers have written a number of works defending their concept of God vis-à-vis the classical concept of God. For example, see K. E. Robson, "Omnipotence, Omnipresence, and Omniscience in Mormon Theology," B. T. Ostler, "The Concept of a Finite God as an Adequate Object of Worship," and P. C. Appleby, "Finitistic Theology and the Problem of Evil," all in *Line Upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine* (ed. G. J. Bergera; Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989); S. McMurrin, *The Philosophical Foundations of Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1959); idem, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1965); B. T. Ostler, "The Mormon Concept of God," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17 (Summer, 1984) 65–93; D. L. Paulsen, *The Comparative Coherency of Mormon (Finitistic) and Classical Theism* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1975); K. Robson, "Omnis on the Horizon," *Sunstone* 8 (July-August 1983) 21–23; idem, "Time and Omniscience in Mormon Theology," *Sunstone* 5 (May-June 1980) 17–23; and O. K. White, Jr., *Mormon Neo-orthodoxy: A Crisis Theology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987).

⁴ See J. B. Allen, "Emergence of a Fundamental: The Expanding Role of Joseph Smith's First Vision in Mormon Religious Thought," *Journal of Mormon History* 7 (1980) 43–61; and T.G. Alexander, "The

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reasons, our chief concern will be the concept of God which we believe is *currently* held by the Mormon church. This concept, the church's leaders believe, is accurately derived from the above cited sources of Mormon theological authority. There is disagreement among Mormon scholars about some precise points of doctrine. But we would argue that the basic concept of God currently taught by the Mormon Church includes the beliefs that God is (1) a contingent being, who was at one time not God; (2) a finite being; (3) one of many gods; (4) a corporeal being, who lives at a particular spatio-temporal location (although his influence is all-pervasive); and (5) a being who is subject to the laws and principles of a beginningless universe with an infinite number of entities in it. And although there are undoubtedly individual Mormons who may hold to views of God which conflict with one or more of these five points, they no doubt would be out of step with the latter writings of the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith (which we presume take precedence over his earlier, and more classically orthodox, writings), which clearly assert these five points. Let us now carefully explain them.

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Mormonism teaches that God is a being who has not always been God. God was once a man on another planet who, by the laws of eternal progression and through obedience to the precepts of his God, eventually attained Godhood himself. One of the attributes which God attained when he reached Godhood is omniscience, an attribute which will play a large part in our critique below. When it comes to this attribute, Mormons appear to be divided. Some Mormons have a concept of omniscience that is consistent with the classical view: God has no false beliefs about the past, present, and future.⁵ On the other hand, there is a much more dominant tradition in Mormonism which teaches that God knows everything that can possibly be known, but only that which is actually occurring (the present) or has occurred (the past) can possibly be known.⁶ And since the future is

Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine: From Joseph Smith to Progressive Theology," *Sunstone* 5 (July-August 1980) 32–39.

⁵ See N. A. Maxwell, "A More Determined Discipleship," *Ensign* (February 1979) 69–73; and idem, *All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books, 1979).

Maxwell writes: "The past, present, and future are before God *ssimultaneously*... Therefore, God's omniscience is not solely a function of prolonged and discerning familiarity with us—but of the stunning reality that the past, present, and future are part of an 'eternal now' with God" (Maxwell, 95–96).

However, Ostler seeks to minimize Maxwell's statements (Maxwell is a member of the LDS Quorum of the Twelve Apostles): "In fairness to Elder Maxwell, we must recognize that his observations are meant as rhetorical expressions to inspire worship rather than as an exacting philosophical analysis of the idea of timelessness. Furthermore, in a private conversation in January, 1984, Elder Maxwell told me that he is unfamiliar with the classical idea of timelessness and the problems it entails" (Ostler, "The Mormon Concept of God," 75).

⁶ There are several Christian philosophers who hold to a similar position. See C. Pinnock, "God Limits His Knowledge," in *Predestination and Free Will* (ed. D. Basinger and R. Basinger; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986) 141–62; R. Rice, "Divine Knowledge and Free-Will Theism," in *The Grace of God, The Will of Man* (ed. C. H. Pinnock; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989) 121–39; R. Rice, *God's Foreknowledge and*

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not and has never been *actual* and hence cannot possibly be known, God does not know the future. Therefore, God is omniscient because he knows everything that can possibly be known, yet he increases in knowledge as the future unfolds and becomes the present.⁷ At any rate, regardless of which view of omniscience the Mormon holds, it follows that the Mormon believes that God at least has complete and total knowledge of *everything* that has occurred in the past and is currently occurring in the present.

Once God became God he in turn “created” this world out of both pre-existent inorganic matter and pre-existent primal intelligences from which human spirits are organized. As Mormon scholar Hiram L. Andrus writes:

Though man’s spirit is organized from a pure and fine substance which possesses certain properties of life, Joseph Smith seems to have taught that within each individual spirit there is a central primal intelligence (a central directing principle of life), and that man’s central primal intelligence is a personal entity possessing some degree of life and certain rudimentary cognitive powers before the time the human spirit was organized.⁸

This is why the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith wrote that “Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be” (DC 93:29). That is to say, man’s basic essence or primal intelligence is as eternal as God’s.

By organizing this world out of pre-existent matter, the Mormon God gives these organized spirits the opportunity to possess bodies and eventually to attain godhood, as he did. And like God, all earthly persons can attain godhood if they follow the precepts of Mormonism. Some Mormon scholars contend that a spirit is organized by God by the process of “spirit-birth.” That is, as a result of literal sexual relations between Father-god and Mother-god, human spirits are organized when conceived and born as spirit-children. This takes place prior to entering the mortal realm of earth and being born with physical bodies, although all of us have always existed as intelligences in some primal state of cognitive personal existence.⁹ In sum, the God of Mormonism was organized (or

Man’s Free Will (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985); and R. Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977) 167–78.

⁷ Ostler cites four Mormon leaders who have held views consistent with this view of omniscience: Brigham Young, Wilford Woodruff, Lorenzo Snow, and B. H. Roberts. For references, see Ostler, “The Mormon Concept of God,” 76–78.

⁸ H. L. Andrus, *God, Man and the Universe* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968) 175.

⁹ See B. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (2d ed.; Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979) 386–87, 516–17, 750–751. For an excellent historical summary of the internal church controversy surrounding the correct interpretation

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spirit-birthered) by his God who himself is a “creature” of another God and so on and so on, *ad infinitum*. Therefore, since Mormonism teaches that God is a contingent being in an infinite lineage of Gods,¹⁰ it is fundamentally polytheistic.¹¹

In order to clarify what we mean when we say that the Mormon God is “contingent,” we want briefly to address the claim that the Mormon God is not contingent. This claim must be considered since Mormonism teaches that the ultimate constituents of the universe are *necessary* beings, *not* contingent ones. For example, Blake Ostler writes

In contrast to the self-sufficient and solitary absolute who creates *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), the Mormon God did not bring into being the ultimate constituents of the cosmos—neither its fundamental matter nor the space/time matrix which defines it. Hence, unlike the Necessary Being of classical theology who alone could not *not* exist and on which all else is contingent for existence, the personal God of Mormonism confronts uncreated realities which exist of metaphysical necessity. Such realities include inherently self-directing selves (intelligences), primordial elements (mass/energy), the natural laws which structure reality, and moral principles grounded in the intrinsic value of selves and the requirements for growth and happiness.¹²

It is apparent that Mormonism teaches a metaphysical pluralism in which certain basic realities exist necessarily, i.e., they are indestructible and have always existed. But this is not what traditional theists mean when they say that God exists necessarily. They either mean that he is *factually* necessary, in the sense that he is the being on which everything else depends for its existence, or they mean that he is *logically* necessary, in the sense that

of this doctrine, see B. Ostler, “The Idea of Pre-existence in the Development of Mormon Thought,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15 (Spring 1982) 59–78.

¹⁰ For a full presentation of these points, see J. Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints* (7 vols., intro. and notes B. H. Roberts; 2d ed. rev.; Salt Lake City: The Deseret Book Company, 1978) 6.305–12. (HC from now on).

¹¹ Mormon thinker Van Hale writes that although technically Mormonism is *polytheistic*, in the literal sense of believing in the existence of many gods, it is not *polytheistic* in the sense in which ancient Greek religion was polytheistic: there exist many rival gods, who engage in all sorts of immorality. For this reason, Hale writes that “a term acceptable to Mormons is *plurality of gods*. This phrase conveys the doctrine of many gods without polytheism’s connotations of many sordid beings” (V. Hale, “Defining the Mormon Doctrine of God,” *Sunstone* 10 [January 1985] 25). Although we use the term “polytheism” in this paper to describe the Mormon view of deity, it should be taken in the most literal sense of simply the belief that there exist many gods, and not in the sense of the belief in morally fallen deities, such as in Greek and Roman mythology.

¹² Ostler, “The Mormon Concept of God,” 67.

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he is the only being who exists in every possible world.¹³ In both cases, God is thought of as existing independently of everything else; that is, if everything dependent ceased to exist, God would still exist. But the fact is that in the Mormon scheme of things each “necessary” existent cannot exist on its own, but is metaphysically dependent on the other “necessary” existents. For example, if the space/time matrix did not exist, none of the self-directing selves would exist. Furthermore, if God had not obeyed certain moral principles prior to his attaining Godhood, he would have never become God. Hence, God could not exist unless certain other basic realities existed. And it is in this sense that we say the Mormon God is contingent. Therefore, if one recognizes what Mormon scholars mean when they refer to God as “necessary” and what we mean by “contingent,” there is no real dispute.

Finally, it follows from the above that Mormonism holds to a belief that the universe contains an infinite number of entities, such as gods and pre-existent intelligences. Of course, if the Mormon denies that there exists an infinite number of gods and pre-existent intelligences, then he has the problem of reconciling a finite number of these beings with an infinite past. For if these gods are a finite number and the past is infinite, then it follows that there was a time when no gods existed—which Joseph Smith denies.¹⁴ And this in turn means that the repeated scenario of a God organizing intelligences so that they can begin their journey to godhood would have never begun, since in Mormonism one needs a god in order to become a god and no being has always been a god. Furthermore, if the intelligences are a finite number and the past is infinite, then there will be or has been a time when no more pre-existent intelligences can become gods, since they would all be “used up.” At any rate, in order for Mormonism to remain consistent it seems that it must teach that there is something infinite in an infinitely large universe.

In this paper we want to focus on four philosophical problems with the Mormon concept of God which arise from the Mormon view of eternal progression and its relationship to God’s omniscience.

¹³ For our present purposes this distinction between a logically and a factually necessary being should suffice. For a clear and concise presentation of the problem of necessary being, see R. Nash, *The Concept of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) 107–12.

¹⁴ Joseph Smith seems to teach an infinite lineage of gods when he writes, “Hence, if Jesus had a Father, can we not believe that *He* had a Father also?” (HC 6.476). Confirming this interpretation, a successor of Smith, President Joseph Fielding Smith, writes that the “Prophet (Joseph Smith) taught that *our Father had a Father and so on*” (J. F. Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* [3 vols.; Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1959] 1.12). See also, McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 577.

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II. Four Philosophical Problems With The Mormon Concept Of God

Mormonism teaches that God *achieves* omniscience sometime in his progression to godhood. Therefore, the God of Mormonism is subject to the limits of time and space, and the Mormon universe must have an infinite series of events in its past in order to remain consistent with the doctrine of eternal progression. Furthermore, Mormonism teaches that there currently exists an infinite number of things, such as gods and intelligences, in time and space. We will argue in this section that God's achieving of omniscience is inconsistent with God being subject to the limits of time and space and with the existence of an infinite number of things in time and space. We will also argue that there is an inconsistency in affirming the Mormon doctrine of eternal progression while also affirming that there exists an infinite number of gods and intelligences. And, finally, we will argue that it is insufficient to appeal to an infinite regress for explanation.

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A. Omniscience and the Limits of Time and Space

We are arguing here that if God is limited in time and space, it would be impossible for him to know everything instantly and simultaneously without transcending time and space. Our argument can be put in the following form:

1. The Mormon God is limited by time and space.
2. What is limited by time and space cannot transcend time and space.
3. Therefore, the Mormon God cannot transcend time and space.
4. Knowing everything instantly and simultaneously involves exceeding the limits of time and space.
5. The Mormon God knows everything instantly and simultaneously.
6. Therefore, the Mormon God exceeds (i.e., transcends) the limits of time and space.
7. Therefore, given 3 and 6, the Mormon God both transcends and cannot transcend the limits of time and space.
8. Therefore, the Mormon concept of God is internally inconsistent and incoherent.

Premises 4 and 5 may be disputed by Mormon scholars. But if they are both true, then everything else seems to follow. And we don't know of any good arguments that would

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overturn either premise. For instance, Mormon scholars teach that God currently knows everything. And this clearly entails premise 5: God knows everything that is going on everywhere in the infinite universe at this moment, i.e., he knows everything instantly and simultaneously. Yet this would involve God exceeding the limits of the physical universe, a possibility clearly denied by Mormon theology.

A Mormon scholar could deny premise 4 by arguing that it is conceivable for a being to know everything instantly and simultaneously without exceeding the limits of time and space. He could argue that it is possible for God's thoughts naturally to exceed the speed of light, but it would be a natural speed of which we are presently ignorant. Therefore, it is possible that God can know everything instantly and simultaneously. But there are at least two problems with this argument. First, it still does not follow from these newly constructed premises that God knows everything instantly and simultaneously. For even if God's thought processes naturally exceed the speed of light, they must have *some* speed. Hence, no matter how fast God's thoughts are, there would still be a period of time between an event occurring on the furthest edges of the universe and God knowing that the event has occurred. Therefore, for some period of time, God would not be omniscient in the sense of knowing everything that is currently occurring or has occurred. Second, suppose the Mormon further clarifies this point by arguing that there is no process by which God attains knowledge of all events; he simply knows things *immediately* in the sense that there is no time between an event occurring in the furthest regions of the universe and God knowing it. But how does this differ from the classical view of God, which teaches that God knows everything immediately and simultaneously precisely because he is not limited by time and space? Therefore, only if the Mormon incorporates the classical view of God's knowledge can his view be rescued.

B. Achieving Omniscience of an Infinite Number of Things in Time and Space

We have seen that Mormon theology teaches that becoming a god involves an eternal *progression*. Explaining the process of eternal progression in the life of an individual, McConkie writes that "during his earth life he gains a mortal body, receives experience in earthly things, and prepares for a future eternity after the resurrection when he will continue to gain knowledge and intelligence.(DC 130:18–19)."¹⁵ The god of this world went through the same process until he reached a point at which he was "not progressing in knowledge, truth, virtue, wisdom, or any of the attributes of godliness."¹⁶ In other words, God's progress entails an increase from finite knowledge until he reaches the

¹⁵ McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 238.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 239. But McConkie does admit that God "is progressing in the sense that his creations increase, his dominions expand, his spirit offspring multiply, and more kingdoms are added to his domains."

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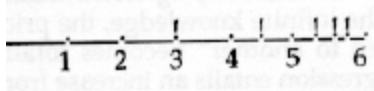
point of omniscience, infinite knowledge. We believe, however, that this notion is incoherent. Our argument can be put in the following way:

1. A being of limited knowledge gaining in knowledge entails the increasing of a finite number.
2. Starting from a finite number it is impossible to count to infinity.
3. The Mormon view of eternal progression entails that a being of limited knowledge gains in knowledge until his knowledge is infinite (remember, the Mormon universe contains an infinite number of things).
4. Therefore, the Mormon view is impossible, for it is impossible, given 1, 2, and 3, for eternal progression to entail that a being of limited knowledge gains knowledge until his knowledge is infinite.
5. The Mormon doctrine of eternal progression is entailed by the Mormon concept of God.
6. Therefore, the Mormon concept of God is incoherent.

Let us examine each of these premises. According to the Mormon view, all beings, prior to attaining godhood, are limited in knowledge (see *DC 130:18–19*). Hence every being, prior to achieving godhood, regardless of how much each knows in comparison to the other, possesses a finite amount of knowledge. And every piece of knowledge gained by any one of these beings amounts to an increase of a finite number. Therefore, premise one seems correct: a being of limited knowledge gaining in knowledge entails the increasing of a finite number.

Premise two states that, starting from a finite number, it is impossible to count to infinity. For one can never arrive at infinity by adding one member after another; one can always add one more member. Thus, for instance, one can never travel an infinite distance. If one were to drive on Interstate 15 from Las Vegas to Salt Lake City, with 450 miles to cross, there is no doubt, all things being equal, that one would eventually arrive in Salt Lake. However, if one were to drive on the interstate from Vegas to Salt Lake with an infinite number of miles to cross, one would never arrive in Salt Lake. This is because it is impossible to complete an infinite by adding one member (or one mile, or one bit of knowledge) after another. For if you did arrive in Salt Lake it would only prove that your journey was finite, not infinite; you can always drive further north to Ogden or Pocatello, Idaho. To use another example, consider the following line:

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The vertical lines represent each journey taken half-way to the end. If one covers only half the distance to the end every time one moves on one's way in trying to reach the end, one will never reach the end of the line. For this reason, we say that this line is potentially infinitely divisible. This example serves to illustrate why one can never count to infinity. For to count to infinity is like covering only half the distance to the end every time one moves on one's way in trying to reach the end of the line. No matter how many times one travels halfway, one will never reach the end. In like manner, no matter how long one counts, one will never count to infinity. Therefore, it is impossible to count to infinity when starting from a finite number.

The third premise—the Mormon view of eternal progression entails that a being of limited knowledge gains in knowledge until his knowledge is infinite—is clearly taught in the Mormon writings. This view is succinctly put by Joseph Smith:

Here, then, is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you have to learn how to be gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all gods have done before you, namely, by going from *one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain the resurrection of the dead and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and to sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power...* When you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step, until you arrive at the top; and so it is with the principles of the gospel—you must begin with the first, and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation (DC 6:306–7; emphasis ours).

Therefore, premise 4 follows from premises 1, 2 and 3, and linking premise 4 with premise 5 (a foundational belief of Mormon theism), our final conclusion follows: the Mormon concept of God is incoherent.

Someone may respond to this argument by arguing that the Mormon God receives his infinite knowledge from his God all at once when he reaches a particular point in his progression. Hence, there is no problem in starting from finite knowledge and arriving at infinite knowledge. There are at least two problems with this response. First, there is no evidence that this is the Mormon view of eternal progression. As we have seen, the Mormon literature seems to teach that one progresses from “one small degree to another.” Second, even if one did receive one's infinite knowledge all at once, an embarrassing problem would remain: eternal *progression* makes no progress. For once one receives the infinite knowledge, the prior progression from “one small degree to another”

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becomes totally unnecessary. Since the notion of progression entails an increase from one state to another (e.g., “After driving one hundred miles in ninety minutes, it is accurate to say that we have made progress in our trip to Salt Lake City.”), and we know that one cannot progress to infinity by starting from a finite point, this view of eternal progression makes any “progression” unessential to the achieving of infinite knowledge. In other words, one’s “progress” prior to the reception of infinite knowledge was getting one nowhere. But since eternal progression is essential to achieving Godhood, this view runs counter to accepted Mormon teaching.

C. On an Infinite Number of Intelligences and an Infinite Number of Gods

In this objection we are arguing that the Mormon doctrine of eternal progression is fundamentally incoherent, since at any point in the infinite past all the intelligences should be “used up.” Consider the following. The Mormon must admit that there currently exists an infinite number of gods—primal intelligences who have reached their fullest maturity—since once a being becomes a god he never ceases to exist. For if any god, X, had a cause which was another god, W, and that god had a cause which was another god, V, etc., and if the past series of events is infinite (which the Mormons believe), then an infinite series is generated and all its parts are still in existence. Hence, there currently exists an infinite number of gods.

From this analysis it follows that at any point in the timeline there would exist an infinite number of gods, since at any point in the infinitely distant timeline the same analysis could be performed. And since according to Mormon metaphysics one of the duties of being a god is to take primal intelligences and put them on the path of eternal progression (i.e., organization or spirit-birth),¹⁷ it follows that at any time each existing god has already started a primal intelligence on the path of eternal progression. But since all infinities are equal, if there are an infinite number of intelligences and an infinite number of gods, each god could be matched with a primal intelligence; and this means that all the primal intelligences would be “used up.” In other words, since each one of the gods in the infinite set of gods would be matched with each one of the intelligences in the infinite set of intelligences, there never was a point on the infinitely distant timeline when there was a remaining intelligence which could be put on the path of eternal progression. Therefore, the Mormon view of eternal progression is fundamentally incoherent.

¹⁷ See BC 6.305–12. That a Mormon god’s natural duty is to produce spirit-children is confirmed by McConkie, who writes: “In a future eternity, *spirit children* will be born to exalted, perfected, glorified couples for whom the family unit continues. The very glory of exalted beings is to have ‘fulness and continuation of their *seeds* forever and ever.’ (D. & C. 132:19–25, 29–32; 131:1–4.)” (McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 751).

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D. The Insufficiency of Appealing to an Infinite Regress for Explanation

This objection follows from the last one. As we have noted, Mormon theology teaches that there is an infinite number of gods, each one caused by a previous one, going back in an infinite regress of time. But there is a serious problem in appealing to an endless series of contingent beings as an explanation for all contingent beings. If being A does not have the sufficient reason for his existence in the being who formed him, being B, but requires other prior conditions (the former of B, C, and the former of C, D, *ad infinitum*) and so on forever, then the conditions for the existence of any one of the beings in the series are never fulfilled and can never be fulfilled in principle. It follows from this that none of the beings in the Mormon universe could ever actually come into being, since the necessary conditions for their existence could never be fulfilled. One way out of this problem is to argue, as did Thomas Aquinas,¹⁸ that the universe is eternally contingent upon a self-existent necessary being. But this concession is certainly no option for the Mormon theist, for it would undermine Mormon metaphysics and establish classical theism.¹⁹

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¹⁸ See Thomas Aquinas, "On the Eternity of the World against the Grumblers," in *An Aquinas Reader* (ed. and intro. M. T. Clark; Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1972) 178–85; and T. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.46 (cf. *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas* [ed. and intro. A. C. Pegis; New York: The Modern Library, 1948] 246–58). It should be noted that Aquinas himself did not believe in eternal creation. He merely asserted that since there is no clear philosophical proof against it, the Christian can only believe in a beginning of time on the basis of faith, as he does with the doctrine of the Trinity. See *Summa Theologica* 1.46.2. For a critique of Aquinas's arguments, see F. J. Beckwith, *David Hume's Argument Against Miracles: A Critical Analysis* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989) chap. 5; and Beckwith and Parrish, *The Mormon Concept of God*, chap. 3.

¹⁹ *Trinity Journal* 12:2 (Fall 1991), 126-130.