

Goodness and Truth

An Essay on

Ralph Hancock's *The Responsibility of Reason*

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Since Plato at least, the destiny of Western thought has been to make sense of the relationship between the ideal and the real, between the formal and the material, between the intelligible and the physical, between theory and practice.¹ One way to understand the fracturing event that, half a millennium ago, inaugurated modernity and effectively divided Western history in two, would be to see in it a shift: from widespread belief that the formal is primary and the material derivative, to widespread belief that the material is primary and the formal derivative. On the whole (but not without important exceptions), premoderns took the ideal to be metaphysically fundamental. And on the whole (but, again, not without important exceptions), moderns take the physical to be metaphysically fundamental. The shift from premodernism to modernism did not happen all at once, of course. Modernity's beginnings are difficult to establish, and its progress has been erratic and complex. Nonetheless, it makes sense to understand the past five centuries as the era in which some form of metaphysical materialism increasingly presented itself as a more natural option than its alternative.

For important reasons, the Latter-day Saint will not be satisfied with any suggestion that the premodern and the modern worldviews must amount to dichotomous options. There is no mistaking that certain Latter-day Saints see themselves as defenders of either the premodern or the modern; this situation is almost always because of what these

1. For an analysis of the history of philosophy in these terms, see Donald Davidson, *Truth and Predication* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

persons take to be the ethical or moral consequences of espousing the one position or the other. Nevertheless, any strict taking of sides in this debate is problematic from a Mormon point of view.

On the one hand, Mormonism's founding scripture, the Book of Mormon, announced from its first appearance in the nineteenth century that one of its principal purposes was to contest modernity by insisting that God is the same today as yesterday, and that God remains a God of miracles.² To that extent, Mormonism would seem to have been aimed from the very beginning at giving premodern Christianity new life. On the other hand, Mormonism's founding prophet, Joseph Smith, provocatively preached a theological materialism so thoroughgoing—with an embodied God, even—that his religion would have a difficult time fitting comfortably into a premodern context.³ To that extent, Mormonism would seem to have been aimed from the very beginning at organizing a distinctly modern form of Christianity. At once modern and premodern, the Mormon religion troubles the traditional categories that organize what remains the core of philosophical discussion in the West.

The intellectual history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can be recounted broadly in terms of distinct attitudes toward what I have just outlined. Much of the nineteenth century—up through Brigham Young's death and into the decade or so of serious struggle with the federal government over plural marriage—witnessed remarkable and often varying attempts to explore the implications of Joseph Smith's complex reframing of the relationship between the formal and the material (especially in the writings and teachings of Brigham Young and the Pratt brothers).⁴ In the years of transition into the twentieth century, and especially as the so-called Progressive Era dawned, the balance between Mormonism's premodern and modern elements tipped in favor of the modern, and a more emphatically materialist Mormon theology emerged (especially visible in the writings of B. H. Roberts, James E. Talmage, and John A. Widtsoe).⁵ As assimilation into American

2. This is clear especially in the earliest and latest parts of the book: the writings of Nephi, son of Lehi, and the writings of Moroni, son of Mormon.

3. These teachings are most conspicuously on display in a few canonized texts, now sections 129–31 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

4. For examples of this speculative endeavor, see Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1854–86), 1:46–53; and Orson Pratt, *Great First Cause, or the Self-Moving Forces of the Universe* (Liverpool: R. James, 1851).

5. The most representative works from this period are James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith: A Series of Lectures on the Principal Doctrines of The Church*

culture came to a kind of completion between the two world wars, the balance shifted largely in favor of the premodern, and a more distinctly spiritualist Mormon theology developed (made prominent especially by the writings of Joseph Fielding Smith and Bruce R. McConkie).⁶

Beginning in the 1960s and growing stronger in subsequent decades, theological speculation (largely undertaken by ecclesiastical leaders) was replaced by historical and textual study (largely undertaken by trained academics), with the result that the very question of the balance between modern and premodern elements in Mormonism's theological self-understanding largely retreated.⁷ This last era has matured over the past decade or so with the rise of the academic discipline of Mormon studies, while theological questions have continued to be largely ignored. Theological reflection *has* begun to make a return, but it remains principally on the margins—the work of a few academically trained theologians hoping for an opportunity to speak to a broader audience than those in their own circles.⁸ At any rate, recent theological reflection has begun again to turn its attention—perhaps more explicitly and directly than ever before—to the question of how the scriptures, presented by Joseph Smith to the world, might speak to the philosophical debates central to Western thought.

Deeply engaged with this reemergent theological conversation is Ralph Hancock, professor of political science at Brigham Young University. For anyone seriously committed to assessing the stakes of contemporary Mormon theology, Hancock's recent book, *The Responsibility of Reason*, is essential reading.⁹ Although the book is written in

of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1899); and John A. Widtsoe, *Rational Theology as Taught by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1915).

6. The most important works to emerge from this era were unquestionably Joseph Fielding Smith, *Man, His Origin and Destiny* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954); and Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine: A Compendium of the Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958).

7. It is generally agreed that this era was launched by the publication of Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958).

8. The most monumental theological work of recent years is Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2001–8). Announcing an important alternative approach to Mormon theology—which approach characterizes my own work as well—is James E. Faulconer, *Faith, Philosophy, Scripture* (Provo: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2010).

9. See Ralph C. Hancock, *The Responsibility of Reason: Theory and Practice in a Liberal-Democratic Age* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011).

a non-Mormon voice for a non-Mormon audience, it can speak quite directly to Latter-day Saints about relevant theological issues. It articulates in full rigor (1) the basic stakes of the philosophical question concerning the formal and the material and (2) Hancock's own crucial response to that question. In what follows, I both present a summary of Hancock's arguments in the book and engage with them critically in light of Mormon scripture and theology.

Reason's Responsibility

Hancock frames his approach to the question of theory and practice by considering the contrast between two often-compared experiments in modern democracy. For Hancock, the French Revolution and its aftermath were predicated on a rationalist extremism, that is, on a privileging of the theoretical over the practical. In this way, the French experiment distinguished itself from the American experiment, in which a certain balance between the theoretical and the practical was attained from the beginning. The emblems of these experiments are thus the French insistence on "absolute legislative sovereignty" and the American "doctrine of separation of powers."¹⁰ According to Hancock, the French democratic project had as its principal aim an exclusively theoretical undertaking—"to address with full clarity the question of the essence of law"—while the American democratic project was grounded by attention to practical realities—hence the latter's preoccupation with "specific legal forms and limitations."¹¹ On Hancock's interpretation, this contrast suggests that the French project was built on a radical redefinition of what it means to be human, while the American project attempted nothing of the sort, effectively retaining the received Western conception of human nature. For Hancock, the latter move was by far the better, since "the human nature upon which the French founded their political theories was a nature stripped of all inherently social and transcendent dimensions."¹² Entirely divorced from practice and concrete material conditions, the merely formal or theoretical "man" of French democratic thought was ultimately without responsibility.

Guiding Hancock through his argument is Alexis de Tocqueville, whose observations in *Democracy in America* highlight the contrast just

10. Hancock, *Responsibility of Reason*, 12.

11. Hancock, *Responsibility of Reason*, 12.

12. Hancock, *Responsibility of Reason*, 13.

summarized.¹³ Still more, though, Hancock draws from Tocqueville a further point of contention: that the *ultimate* consequence of every radical rationalism, every exaltation of the theoretical undertaken while ignoring the practical, is an ironic and perhaps paradoxical privileging of the material—albeit a privileging of the material as fully unformed and chaotic: brute nature.¹⁴ In short, the idealism represented by the French Revolution amounted at the same time to the basest sort of materialism, with the consequence that its theoretical absolutism effectively undercut the value of theory itself.¹⁵ The Tocquevillean solution to this problem was to give attention anew to the “laws of moral analogy,” that is, to the startling fittedness of material realities with formal ideas.¹⁶ In other words, the solution proposed by Tocqueville was to recognize that the apparent problems of the French experiment were rooted specifically in the rationalists’ insistence on a strict divorce between the theoretical and the practical, in their insistence that there is no natural fittedness that at once distinguishes form from matter and yet allows form and matter to relate or interact. Wherever the formal and the material are taken to be fundamentally unrelated—form without material consequence, matter inherently unformed—form and matter end up being conflated in a disastrous way.

Hancock both complicates and clarifies the question of fittedness by revisiting Plato’s allegory of the sun from book VI of *The Republic*.¹⁷ Just as sunlight serves to fit objects in the world to human eyes, allowing eyes and objects to relate to one another, the form of the good fits the concepts and categories informing objects in the world to the individual intellect or mind, allowing mind and concepts to relate to one another. The good thus organizes a *primal* fittedness, one that exists between ideas and the mind—a fittedness necessary for the possibility of knowledge. On Hancock’s account, however, this primal fittedness is insufficient for human knowledge, since human beings only encounter concepts and categories as they are incarnated in concrete material objects. Thus, according to Hancock, *the good* is inevitably experienced only indirectly, always in the form of derivative *goods*, emphatically in the plural.

13. See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence (New York: HarperPerennial, 2000).

14. See Hancock, *Responsibility of Reason*, 33–34.

15. See Hancock, *Responsibility of Reason*, 39.

16. Hancock, *Responsibility of Reason*, 32.

17. For a standard translation, see John M. Cooper, ed., *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 1127–30.

Such goods are incarnations of the form of the good, just as worldly entities of various sorts are incarnations of relevant concepts and categories. Incarnations of the form of the good are, however, inherently distinct from other incarnations of formal concepts and categories, because the form of the good plays the unique role in the intelligible realm of fitting together disparate things (specifically, connecting concepts and categories with individual minds). Hence goods, incarnations of the form of the good, serve to fit together disparate things as well. Whereas the good itself fits together minds and concepts, concrete goods fit together the formal and the material, the theoretical and the practical.¹⁸

For Hancock, then, to avoid the problems bound up with the French democratic experiment—and to imitate appropriately the insight bound up with the American democratic experiment—it is necessary to recognize that there are knowable goods. Hancock explains: “The elusive cosmic good can be thought only as both other than and continuous with the goods a speaking, reasoning human being seeks to attain or preserve in the practical, political realm. To articulate this otherness and this continuity is to take theoretical and practical responsibility for what Tocqueville names ‘moral analogy.’”¹⁹ One must wonder at the fittedness between mind and concepts, and between the conceptual and the material—a knowable whole that bespeaks a fundamental, stable orderedness in things. As Hancock says, “the beginning of reason’s responsibility is this reflexive awareness of wonder of the very possibility of knowing.”²⁰

The Form of the Good

In light of these Platonic developments of the basic Tocquevillean picture, it is possible to put a finer point on Hancock’s purposes in *The Responsibility of Reason*. He argues that America’s founders glimpsed, in both theory and practice, the real knowability of goods *as goods*—that is, the goods are points in material reality where matter marks its inextricability from form, where practice itself calls for theoretical reflection, where the real illustrates the ideal, and where the physical bears within itself a kind of ready intelligibility. Extreme rationalism of the sort that developed in the two centuries leading up to the French Revolution, on the other hand, conceives of material reality as inherently formless—manipulable for every rational purpose. For the rationalist, pure form

18. See Hancock, *Responsibility of Reason*, 60–63.

19. Hancock, *Responsibility of Reason*, 62.

20. Hancock, *Responsibility of Reason*, 60.

can only come into relation to pure matter through a kind of violent imposition, a technological employment of undifferentiated matter for strictly independent formal aims. For Hancock, such rationalism is not only extreme, but extremely dangerous. Ignoring the formal texture of the material world, reason without responsibility almost inevitably reshapes matter in a way that renders impotent the real forms that give it real texture.

But this is only the first moment in Hancock's argument. If he meant to argue only that the rationalist reduction of materiality to an undifferentiated store of manipulable stuff leads to existential disaster and a host of irresolvable philosophical puzzles, he would have merely reproduced his interpretation of the basic position taken by Martin Heidegger, the towering (and controversial) twentieth-century German thinker whose name still dominates European thought.²¹ Instead Hancock takes Heidegger as one of his opponents, dedicating an entire chapter of *The Responsibility of Reason* to criticizing him.²² Hancock's Heidegger fails to recognize the role played in fully formed practical reality by the form of the good. That is, if one must acknowledge that matter intrinsically bears within itself its own formal features, one does not yet confess that those formal features are organized according to a discernible moral map. In other words, to say that one must acknowledge that matter is ordered for experience by a set of concepts, one does not yet confess that organized matter amounts not simply to experienceable objects but also to real goods. Hence Hancock's verdict on Heidegger's project is that "he cannot articulate the goodness of his own activity, he cannot trace any connections between the activity of thought and the goodness of life."²³ According to Hancock, on the other hand, it is necessary to recognize both that the world of concrete practices bears within itself a set of organizing forms *and* that those organizing forms are in turn organized by the good, such that the material world bears a moral topography.

For this reason, Hancock sets himself up as an opponent of modernity (as I have defined it above). The first moment of his argument has a kind of modern cast, or at least an echo in the work of the most important materialist thinkers. The sorts of materialism that took their rise in

21. No one of Heidegger's many books and essays captures his thought, but a helpful collection of relevant excerpts and essays has been published as Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).

22. See Hancock, *Responsibility of Reason*, 115–76.

23. Hancock, *Responsibility of Reason*, 152.

the nineteenth century and have grown only stronger and more sophisticated since—all of them definitively modern—have worked tirelessly to establish a concrete reality that is anything but an undifferentiated mass of manipulable material. This is especially clear in the writings of the two most influential nineteenth-century materialists, Charles Darwin and Karl Marx, each of whom argued in his own way that nothing external to matter need be imposed on it to produce the variety of forms characteristic of it in human experience.²⁴ Whatever might in the first moment of Hancock's argument appear to side with modern materialism is undercut in crucial ways in the second moment. In his view, although much of nineteenth- and twentieth-century thought has recognized *certain* fundamental problems in extreme rationalism, it has failed to recognize *other* fundamental problems in rationalism, and it has therefore perpetuated some of the more egregious elements of that supposedly defunct worldview.

According to Hancock, then, modern materialists recognize that it was a rationalist mistake to evacuate the formal from the material, leaving the latter void of any formal content; nonetheless, they follow the rationalists in evacuating the moral from the material, leaving the inherently formed material world bereft of its inherent moral topography. Because he makes *this* critique of recent materialisms, Hancock sets himself up as a direct opponent of modernity. Indeed, the manner in which he traces his own project to Plato's allegory of the sun aligns him closely with the premodern conception of a morally ordered cosmos. By granting the form of the good both existence and sovereignty, Hancock directly contests the modern materialist predilection for ontological pluralism. The morally ordered cosmos for which Hancock contends is a unity, total and consistent. In philosophical terms, he operates within an ontology of the one. His reasoning, presumably, is that only such an ontology can allow for a robust conception of morality. Ultimately, it would have to be said that Hancock accuses a thinker like Heidegger of being unable to articulate a conception of the goodness of life because Heidegger is an ontological pluralist. For Hancock, a pluralistic ontology simply *cannot* adequately ground a moral topography. If morality is to be salvaged, it is necessary to espouse a host of essentially premodern commitments.

24. See Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (New York: Signet Classics, 2003); and Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977).

The Idea of the True

There is much to be admired in Hancock's argument, which is obviously worked out at greater length and in more rigor than I can reproduce in this brief essay. In chapters I have not mentioned, Hancock provides illuminating engagements with a host of thinkers, ranging from John Calvin and Martin Luther to John Rawls and Charles Taylor. Of special interest to those invested in political theory is a prolonged and extremely nuanced critique of Leo Strauss.²⁵ And even within the chapters to which I have given more direct attention here, Hancock provides a crucial sketch of what remains the central problem of Western thought—the problem of the relation between the formal and the material.

What is more, he simultaneously provides a sketch of at least three positions generally assumed with respect to that problem, more often implicitly or even unconsciously than explicitly or deliberately. He clarifies in helpful ways the nature of and the deep problems inherent in the rationalist position—ascendant during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and arguably reemergent in important and startlingly popular ways in recent decades (under the guise of “postmodernism”). He also convincingly argues that there are salient and troubling points of continuity between rationalism and the prevailing forms of materialism that have dominated Western thought for the past two centuries. Finally, he sketches the outlines of a revitalized pre- or nonmodern conception of a consistent morally ordered cosmos. All of this, I think, is done quite well.

I would nonetheless like to conclude this essay by raising a point of criticism. In the course of his arguments, Hancock seems never to envisage the possibility of a *fourth* position: one that recognizes with Hancock (and therefore against both rationalism and materialism of a certain stripe) the need for a certain moral ordering of the material world, but one that at the same time explores the possibility that such a moral ordering need not be predicated on premodern ontological commitments.

To put the point more polemically, Hancock seems to assume that it is impossible for a pluralist ontology to provide an adequate account of the good, but there is good reason to question that assumption. He is right that rationalism cannot provide an adequate account of the good (reducing goodness to a kind of abstract justice, an impracticable ideal,

25. See Hancock, *Responsibility of Reason*, 177–252.

ultimately realized only in the elimination of every conceptual distinction). He is right that certain materialisms never even attempt to provide an account of the good (either presuming that morality is always an ideological affair or reproducing an essentially rationalist and therefore inadequate account). But he is perhaps mistaken to assume that because *certain* materialists (in particular, Heidegger) do not produce an account of the goodness of life, *all* materialisms cannot account for the moral fabric of the world.²⁶ Indeed, at the very least, Mormonism itself is a materialism that can account for the moral fabric of the world, ontologically modern and yet fully committed to a world in which the God of premodern times remains operative.

By so directly contesting modernity, Hancock seems motivated first and foremost by the notion that the moral order is *total* and *consistent*. I find this an undesirable commitment for at least two reasons. First, Mormonism itself seems committed to the idea that the moral order is in fact inconsistent (but it should be made clear that inconsistency does not in any way imply relativism). There are too many instances in Mormon scripture of God reserving for himself the right to make exceptions, and Joseph Smith himself insisted that God will command one thing in certain circumstances but the opposite in other circumstances.²⁷ The desire to secure an absolutely consistent moral order seems out of line with a Mormon cosmology that speaks of unorganized matter and intelligent beings that reject God's will. I do not mean here, however, to implicate Mormons who believe that God himself *is* the perfect moral order, but only to remind them that *other* materialist commitments exist, and from these commitments arise interpretations that make room for inconsistency.

26. Philosophers more dedicated to Heidegger than I am would likely disagree with important points of the interpretation set forth in *The Responsibility of Reason*. There is a growing literature on the possibility of finding a robust ethics—and hence a robust conception of the good—in Heidegger's thought. It would be fruitful to see the particulars of Hancock's interpretation engaged by a defender of the Heideggerian project.

27. The most exemplary passages from both Mormon scripture and the teachings of Joseph Smith concern, somewhat uncomfortably, plural marriage. They are, nonetheless, crucial passages that have played a crucial role in the development of Mormonism's ethics. See, on the one hand, Jacob 2:29–30 and, on the other hand, Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 5:134–36.

Second, one of the great discoveries of twentieth-century thought—and this discovery has deeply informed the most interesting materialisms of the past five decades or so—is the effective impossibility that any genuinely complex system can be at once complete (or total) and consistent.²⁸ Consistency is local and contrived, the product of careful construction that succeeds only because it leaves out of account what would reveal points of inconsistency. Thus, for reasons both of faith and of knowledge, it seems best to forge ahead in search of a way to conceive of the world as having an inherent moral ordering, but in a way that does not ultimately rest on coupling the totality of the world with its (supposed) consistency.

Is it possible to conceive of such a thing? I believe it is. In order to sketch its possibility, I will draw on the recent philosophy of Alain Badiou, a thinker who has played an important role in one circle of contemporary Mormon theologians (among whom I find my own place; Adam Miller was unmistakably the first Mormon theologian to draw seriously on Badiou's work).²⁹ Actually, Badiou is perhaps especially appropriate to use here, since he has recently produced what he calls a "hyper-translation" of Plato's *Republic*—a modernization of the book and a reconfiguration of some of its key positions, undertaken nonetheless as a translation of the original Greek text.³⁰ In his reworking of Plato's allegory of the sun, Badiou retranslates Plato's *agathon*, "good," as *vérité*, "truth."

Thus, in Badiou's *Republic*, what governs the realm of the forms (and thereby establishes the possibility of real relations between the formal and the material) is not the form of the good, but the idea of the true—Truth with a capital T. Badiou therefore discerns among those forms intrinsically assumed by matter in the world of experience not as *goods* but *truths*. Thus, rather than recommending the pursuit of a moral order governed

28. See Kurt Gödel, "Some Metamathematical Results on Completeness and Consistency," "On Formally Undecidable Propositions of *Principia Mathematica* and Related Systems I," and "On Completeness and Consistency," in *From Frege to Gödel: A Source Book in Mathematical Logic, 1879–1931*, ed. Jean van Heijenoort (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 592–617.

29. See Adam Miller, *Badiou, Marion, and St Paul: Immanent Grace* (New York: Continuum, 2008). I have drawn on Badiou's work for Mormon theological purposes in an essay published in this journal; see Joseph M. Spencer, "The Four Discourses of Mormonism," *BYU Studies* 50, no. 1 (2011): 4–24.

30. See Alain Badiou, *Plato's "Republic": A Dialogue in 16 Chapters*, trans. Susan Spitzer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

by inherently discernible goods, Badiou's *Republic* recommends the pursuit of an ethics of truths—an ethics predicated on an account of being that (as with Heidegger) posits its inherent multiplicity and resists the idea that the moral order of the world is consistent or forms a ready unity. Of course, Badiou employs language that might seem to distance himself from religious thought. The lexicon of Mormonism is unmistakably saturated with words like *good* and *moral*. Certainly, it might sound a bit strange in a Mormon setting to argue that truth somehow transcends goodness—despite Joseph Smith's claim that "Mormonism is truth."³¹

Aside from these expected differences, I find most of this Badiouian picture more convincing—and more consonant with the Restoration—than a revitalized premodern conception of a unified and consistent cosmos. Of course, what makes Badiou's account convincing is the complicated philosophical machinery he has deployed in his writings: a detailed account of the multiplicity of being, a provocative investigation of how being is interrupted by occasional revelatory events, a robust theory of what it means to demonstrate real faithfulness to such events, and a rigorous formalization of the strict invariance of the truths revealed through such faithfulness.³²

Obviously, I lack the space here to provide even a cursory overview of Badiou's project and its relevance to Mormon theology. While Badiou's account of things is not populated with any traditional conception of God, his framework remains and thus provides an important way to flesh out Mormonism's double commitment: to a strictly materialist metaphysics and to a strictly biblical faith.³³ Since Badiou is not unique in having provided what might be called a *fourth* possible position eclipsed in Hancock's book, there is no need to give attention exclusively to Badiou on this score. He serves here only as one example of the sort of account that might be provided to break the deadlock between the modern and the premodern, and in a way that looks startlingly like it would serve Mormonism well.

31. Joseph Smith to Isaac Galland, March 22, 1839, *Times and Seasons* 1, no. 4 (February 1840): 53–54.

32. See especially Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2007); and Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II*, trans. Alberto Toscano (New York: Continuum, 2009).

33. Although Badiou is himself an atheist, he has been forthcoming about the religious relevance of his work. See Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

In the end, Hancock has productively and successively provided an account of the basic stakes of what remains the central question of Western thought. In my view, however, he has not provided a full account of the possible positions one might assume with respect to that question. As a result, his defense of a very premodern conception of the world, mobilized by an attempt to reveal real problems in certain modern conceptions of the world, proves to be limiting. The Restoration not only took its rise in the modern world, but it also unmistakably positions itself as a proponent of materialism in some form. To understand what Mormonism has to say in the history of thought, it will be necessary to decide how to conceive of a materialism that nonetheless affirms (whether within consistent or inconsistent realms) the existence of a moral order.

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