

Open Readings of Genesis: Jacob Boehme's *Mysterium Magnum* and Joseph Smith's *Books of Moses, Abraham, and The Book of Mormon*

Vincent Sherman's 1948 *The Adventures of Don Juan* begins with some memorable seduction lines as Don Juan (played by Errol Flynn) climbs the trellis toward his next conquest, a Lady Catharine. He says, "I've loved you since the beginning of time." To which she semi-skeptically replies, "But you only met me yesterday." And he comes back with the knee weakening zinger. "My Lady, that was when time began." We know that Don Juan will not remain true to the lady and in fact, will never love any one. But we are not surprised that the line works on Lady Catharine because she wants to be seduced and is therefore open to his lies. The line is also appealing to us as the audience, because we want the choice to be made that pulls us out of the dizzying multiplicity of choices and gives us forever to another person. Don Juan actually reveals his egoistic pursuit in his next line of seductions. Catharine asks him "But you have loved so many women" to which he replies "An artist can paint a thousand canvases before achieving a single masterpiece, would you deny a lover the same privilege." Here love is reduced to an aesthetic and egoistic pursuit of personal satisfaction and fulfillment. Don Juan loves the ideal of women but doesn't particularly care for any flesh and blood women except as she participates in the ideal. Though Don Juan is lying, his two seduction lines can be used as metaphors for interaction with the divine. In the latter the feminine idea is conceived aesthetically as the masterpiece that steps out of the vicissitudes of time, while in the former, time begins with the relational commitment to another.

Consider a passage on love from Plato's *Symposium*. Plato defines an *eros* in which there is no risk and no attachment to a particular, finite person. The

philosopher as he moves toward the love of perfect beauty, loves that fair youth only for the eternal form of beauty imprinted in him, and loves not the youth himself. One moves from the appreciation of the eternal, unchanging, form behind the changing, physical body to appreciation of the eternal form represented in the character of the individual. Finally, the lover of wisdom looks past all finite forms to contemplate the eternal One. Plato's desire for the eternal absolute purity beyond individuals clogged with the pollutions of mortality illustrate an ultimate disdain for the finite and earthly.

Quote 1

Here we don't love another for the other themselves but for the eternal within them.¹

We escape the pollutions of mortality in the immaculate beauty of eternity. Nietzsche

¹The Russian religious existentialist Lev Shestov saw the history of Greek and finally European philosophy as an assault on the many by the desire to reduce the many to the One. He sees this most clearly stated in a fragment by the pre-Socratic philosopher Anaximander in which the existence of the many is an impiety.

By a strange whim of fate the first fragment of the writings of the ancient Greek philosophers that has come down to us reads as follows: The origin of all things is the boundless *and this very thing that gives birth to them is necessarily also the cause of their destruction, for at an ordained time they must undergo punishment and retribution by each other for the impiety.* . . . What is striking is the fact that the thought in contains has determined in large measure the character and direction of the searchings of all later philosophy, not only Greek but European. . . . Anaximander believes that *things* by being born, i.e., by detaching themselves from the original *universal* and *divine* unity in order to attain their present particular being, have committed an act that is impious to the highest degree, and act for which they must in all justice undergo the supreme punishment—death and destruction. Things means all visible objects: stones, trees, animals, men. Neither the stone nor the camel, neither the eagle nor man, has any right to aspire to the freedom of individual existence.

This pattern is echoed in all negative versions of the Fall in the Christian tradition. The desire to be an independent being, to be free, and to love other beings than God, or independently of God, is an impiety.

Lev Shestov, *Potestas Clavium* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1968) 147-148.

famously called Christianity Platonism for the Masses because of this disdain for the physical and individual, a theism wherein God stands apart from the world, eternal, unchanging and unaffected. Having created the world from nothing God is the only real Being on which creation, the world depends and derives its finite being. It has no independent existence and thus is completely predestined by God just as a movie in which the writers and directors have already determined the screenplay and will allow no modification by actors. This is Augustine=s aesthetic solution to the problem of evil. God who sees the whole outside of time and space sees that it is all good, the light and the darkness together complete the beauty of the composition.

We are like people ignorant of painting who complain that the colours are not beautiful everywhere in the picture: but the Artist has laid on the appropriate tint to every spot. (*The Enchiridian on Faith Hope and Love* iii, 2, II)²

2 Error! Main Document Only. From God's point of view there is no such thing as evil. All that we perceive as evil contributes to the goodness of the whole. God perceives the drama of the whole in one continuous glimpse. We in the story don't quite see how it will end.

To thee there is no such thing as evil, and even in thy whole creation taken as a

whole, there is not; because there is nothing from beyond it that can burst in and destroy the order which thou hast appointed for it. But in the parts of creation, some things, because they do not harmonize with others, are considered evil. Yet, those same things harmonize with others and are good, and in themselves are good. . . . I no longer desired a better world, because my thoughts ranged over all , and with sounder judgment I reflected that the things above were better than those below, yet that all creation together was better than the higher things alone. (*Confessions* vii. 13)

Both Jacob Boehme and Joseph Smith offered what they claimed were divinely inspired expansions on the creation story of Genesis. Both offer open readings of the creation account in Genesis. Boehme in his massive two volume *Mysterium Magnum* and Smith in the Books of *Moses* and *Abraham* the account of Genesis in 2 Nephi 2 in *The Book of Mormon*. Both stand outside the main Platonic traditions of Western theism. Both are naturalists for whom God is within and affected by the creation which is open to the future. It is difficult to outline their intellectual genealogies. Boehme seems influenced by the esoteric writings of the alchemists but he is not one of them. He is also in some ways close to the Christian Kabbalah but his innovations set him apart from this tradition as well. Smith is related to the American religion of both revivals and the popular magical traditions of the region and perhaps even Boehme but was an innovator who freed himself from both.³ Both Boehme and Smith create readings of Genesis that point to the openness of God in doing so both reject doctrines of predestination and *creatio ex nihilo* both create radically new interpretations of omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience and have strong affirmations of freedom and relationality⁴

³John L Brooke has even argued from a line of influence between Boehme and Smith but it is impossible to demonstrate. In this paper I will not attempt to show historical connections between Boehme and Smith. John L. Brooke, *The Refiner=s Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644-1844* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

⁴Though the rejection of creation ex nihilo is implicit in The Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith explicitly rejected it in The King Follett Discourse in 1844

Now, the word create came from the *baurau* which does not mean to create out of nothing; it means to organize; the same as a man would organize materials and build a ship. Hence, we infer that God had materials to organize the world out of chaos chaotic matter, which is element, and in which dwells all the glory.

Element had an existence from the time he had. The pure principles of element are principles which can never be destroyed; they may be organized and re-organized, but not destroyed. They had no beginning, and can have no end.

Boehme's dialectical voluntarism is based on the image of groundlessness which is the beginning of the development of Being. As the absolute God is the Eternal Nothing, the eternal One. There are contradictions inherent in the very notion of the absolute. Which precedes the personal God

When I consider what God is, then I say, He is the One; in reference to the creature, as an eternal Nothing; as an eternal Nothing; he hath neither foundation, beginning, no abode; he posesseth nothing, save only himself: he is the will of the abyss; he is in himself only one; he needeth neither space, no place; he begetteth himself in himself, from eternity to eternity; he is neither like no resembleth anything; and hath no peculiar place where he dwelleth; he is the will of the wisdom; the wisdom is his manifestation.(MM 1:2)

As nothing, without the creature, without nature there is no determination about God, there is nothing to say about God. God is not will, not body, not space. (God is not even God=s own foundation. In his magesterial *Le Philosophie de Jacob Boehme* Alexandre Koyre writes that AGod, in Himself is neither being nor becoming, He is absolutely nothing, He is not even kind or cruel, not good or evil.@(320)⁵ The only name that can

⁵Boehme says later in the *Mysterium Magnum* that God without nature and creature has no name.

For God, without nature and creature, has no name, but is called only the eternal GOOD, vix, the eternal ONE, the abyss and profundity of all beings, There is no place found for him, therefore can no creature rightly name him; for all names and in the formed Word of power. But God is himself the root of all power, without beginning and names, therefore saith he to Jacob, Wherefore askest thou what is my name? And blessed him.(MM 60, 38)

be given to it is the Absolute, *The Ungrund*, the abyss without bottom. An abyss in which one can find neither foundation or a reason for things. Where not even God finds his foundation In creating the world God creates God as well. Whatever the influences on Boehme may have been it is important to note, that Boehme's thought was an important new departure in the history of Western thought. Boehme's ideas came into this tradition as mainly original creations of an independent and non-academic mind, largely uninfluenced by the Greek and Latin traditions. The basic difference between Boehme and the previous Christian mystics of the Neo-Platonic tradition is that he did not regard the Absolute primarily as Being but as will. In the beginning is pure undetermined will; this gives Boehme's thinking a voluntaristic character new in Western thought. Boehme's innovations are part of the foundation of relational theologies in German Romanticism and Idealism.⁶ For Hegel it is Boehme and not Meister Eckhart who is the forerunner of German idealism precisely because Boehme envisages a advance away from the primal one, the Ungrund and not a return to it, the Gottheit. Alexandre Koyre writes in his magisterial *Le Philosophie de Jacob Boehme* that A. . . all of Boehme's theology is an analysis of the Aconditions of the possibility of the absolute

⁶Hegel called his thought barbarous but also thought he was the founder of German Idealism because the principle of the notion was living in Boehme. [G.W.F. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. III, trans. E.S. Haldane (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), p. 188.] In his study on Boehme, Alexandre Koyré also calls attention to his influence on Fichte and Hegel as well as the second philosophy of Schelling and Boehme's disciple Franz von Baader. [Alexandre Koyré, *La philosophie de Jacob Boehme* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), p. 506-508.] Koyré also points out that Boehme was read by such divergent minds as Newton, Comenius, Milton, Leibniz, Oetinger and Blake. [See also Andrew Weeks, *Boehme: An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991).

person. (Boutroux 16-17) Personalism is the essential character of Boehme's doctrine. (K314) Koyre thinks the majority of Boehme's mystical commentators have missed this fact. (K314) But it is Boehme's key intuition from which he develops in his philosophy. An instinct, intuition the name is not important, what Boehme believes prior to any doctrine, what he searches, what his thought is destined to justify, is that God is a personal being, even more, that he is a *person*, a living person, conscious of himself, an acting person, a perfect person. (K315)

Boehme is thus different from the neo-Platonic mysticism of Meister Eckhart. Eckhart seeks the non difference of the mystical *Divinity* which is even superior to the manifested God. Divinity is immutable and unmovable in eternity. For Eckhart the personal God is still limited for it exists in relation to another. *God becomes and unbecomes* says Eckhart, and is thus inferior to Divinity that does not become. (*Gott wird and entwird*) (K 316) Boehme's God on the other hand lives, develops and evolves. Koyre says he is exactly the god who *wird and enwird* eternally. This God is not outside movement. He is not outside time in the immutability of non-being. (Six Theosophical Points I 19, K 317) In *The Six Theosophic Points* Boehme writes

Thus the essence of the Deity is everywhere in the deep of the unground, like as a wheel or eye, where the beginning has always the end; and there is no place found for it, for it is itself the place of all beings and the fulness of all things, and yet is apprehended or seen by nothing. For it is an eye in itself, as Ezekiel the prophet saw this in a figure at the introduction of the spirit of his will into God,

when his spiritual figure was introduced into the wisdom of God by the Spirit of God; there he attained the vision, and in no other way can that be. (STP 1:19)

Joseph Smith, like Boehme, was a non-academic also largely free from the Greek and Latin traditions. His reading of Genesis, like Boehme=s rejects *ex nihilo* in favor of a type of dialectical voluntarism in which the world emerges from the *∆*opposition of all things.@ Like Boehme, God creates the world in relation to already existing chaos. Unlike Boehme however Smith does not develop this groundless infinite at the base of God. Still Smith=s very personal God should be read in terms of will on not Being.

To illustrate this difference in orientation toward the world consider the passages we=ve just read from Plato and Augustine and this one from *The Book of Mormon* discussion of the creation and fall and one from Jacob Boehme=s revelatory commentary on Genesis, *Mysterium Magnum*.

This Book of Mormon passage from 2 Nephi 2 gives an outline of the basic eschatology of Mormonism. It reflects a movement from an unconscious or dead unity in either Eden, or the pre-mortal existence humans in the presence of God, or the unity of the primal chaos before God=s creative acts, to an alienated conflictual multiplicity of this world, and finally a freely chosen conscious unity in multiplicity or sociality of love in both this world and the world to come. But it is clearly the case that the plurality of the world, with all its conflict, is superior to the serenity of the One.

11 For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, my first-born in the wilderness, 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.¹² Wherefore, it must needs have been created for a thing of naught; wherefore there would have been no purpose in the end of its creation. Wherefore, this thing must needs destroy the wisdom of God and his eternal purposes, and also the power, and the mercy, and the justice of God.. . 19 And after Adam and Eve had partaken of the forbidden fruit they were driven out of the garden of Eden, to till the earth.. . . 22 And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end. 23 And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin.. . . 25 Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.⁷

⁷The world has pain but also love. A wonderful example of the renunciation of the immaculate for the pain and love is the world is the speech made by the monk LibMu Bai in Ang Lee=s *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. As he is dying Yu Shu Lien tells him not to waste his energy but to save it for meditation. He declare his entire life has been a waste because his quest for *nirvana* made it impossible for him to declare his love for Yu Shu Lien.

I've already wasted my whole life. I want to tell you with my last breath that I have always loved you. I would rather be a ghost, drifting by your side as a condemned soul, than enter heaven without you. Because of your love, I will never be a lonely spirit.(Internet Movie Database,

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0190332/quotes>)

In all these cases passion can only be fulfilled through the renunciation of immaculateness, by entering the world(Zizek 1996, 87n64).

The problem with the eternal bliss of the One is that it is dead. Thus it may be unified but it is not something to which one would want to return. It is the opposition of all things that makes joy, indeed persons themselves, possible. The drama of the relation between God and humanity only begins after the fall that brings with it pain and suffering. In Smith=s revelatory retelling of the creation through the flood *The Book of Moses*. Moses says that Adam=s children taste the bitter that they may know and prize the good. They are independent subjects worthy of communion with God.

55 And the Lord spake unto Adam, saying: Inasmuch as thy children are conceived in sin, even so when they begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts, and they taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good. 56 And it is given unto them to know good from evil; wherefore they are agents unto themselves, and I have given unto you another law and commandment.(Moses 6: 55-56)

This movement from the serenity of oneness to the difficulties and richness of the world is also found in the Jacob Boehme commentary on Genesis. Boehme wrote in his commentary of Geneisis, *Mysterium Magnum*. First about the original state of God and creation as the dialectic gets moving. (K333)

For in the eternal speaking Word, which is beyond or without all nature or beginning, is only the divine understanding or sound; in it there is neither darkness not light, neither thick not thin, neither joy nor sorrow; moreover, no sensibility or perceivancy; but it is barely a power of the understanding in one source, will and dominion; there is neither friend nor foe unto it, for it is the

eternal good, and nothing else. (*Mysterium Magnum* I:3)

And with the Fall the dialectic begins for humanity

the eternal free will has introduced itself into the darkness, pain, and source; and so also through the darkness into the fire and light, even into a kingdom of joy; in order that the Nothing might be known in the Something, and that might have sport with its contra-will, that the free will of the abyss might be manifest to itself in the byss, for without even and good there could not be any byss [ground or foundation. (*Mysterium Magnum* 26:37)

This passage is located in the section of *Mysterium Magnum* where Adam falls and is driven from the garden, the Book of Mormon passage moves from the creation of the world to the eviction of the apple stealers from the garden. Each interprets the Genesis narrative as a Δ positive fall \textcircled{a} that opens a future richer relation with God and others as it also opens the possibility of greater suffering.

Further into the Book of Mormon the theme of the positive fall which leads toward the creation of person in relation with God continues in The Book of Alma where the prophet Alma explains that through the fall humans become subjects, it is because they are cut off from the Lord, they can follow their own will. The independent development of subjects is necessary to the drama between God and humanity

3 Now, we see that the man had become as God, knowing good and evil; and lest he should put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live forever, the Lord God placed cherubim and the flaming sword, that he should not partake of the fruit^c4 And thus we see, that there was a time granted unto man

to repent, yea, a probationary time, a time to repent and serve God. 5 For behold, if Adam had put forth his hand immediately, and partaken of the tree of life, he would have lived forever, according to the word of God, having no space for repentance; yea, and also the word of God would have been void, and the great plan of salvation would have been frustrated. 7 And now, ye see by this that our first parents were cut off both temporally and spiritually from the presence of the Lord; and thus we see **they became subjects** (my emphasis) to follow after their own will. 8 Now behold, it was not expedient that man should be reclaimed from this temporal death, for that would destroy the great plan of happiness.

As the passage continues Alma emphasizes the non coercive character of divine omnipotence. The subjects are real subjects who at least participate in the determination of the open future. In this respect the *Book of Mormon* rejects universalism for were God through His mercy to save humanity despite themselves [Ⓐ]God would cease to be God.[@] Which is of course something that can only be conceived abstractly for God the person would not violate human freedom.⁸

⁸ 12 And now, there was no means to reclaim men from this fallen state, which man had brought upon himself because of his own disobedience; 13 Therefore,

according to justice, the plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on conditions of repentance of men in this probationary state, yea, this preparatory state; for except it were for these conditions, mercy could not take effect except it should destroy the work of justice. Now the work of justice could not be destroyed; if so, God would cease to be God.

The basic differences between Boehme, Smith, and Christian mystics of the Neo-Platonic tradition is that they did not regard the Absolute primarily as Being but as will.⁹ In addition, as Terryl Givens has noted, each sees the attachment to the plural, physical, world as necessary to the divine to the point of a use of language that is almost, for some commentators, embarrassing concrete. In Boehme=s case some commentators cleanse Boehme=s work of its embarrassing literalisms like the sexuality of Adam or the geography of heaven and hell. This is what Hegel called Boehme=s barbarism. Commentators like Stephen Hobbhouse contends Givens, claim that Boehme conveys great truths in imaginative poetry and pleasant mythology.¹⁰ Givens claims that such cleansing is more difficult to pull of for Joseph Smith who claimed not only visions but to have found golden plates, interpreters, and breast plates.

⁹Boehme is not the first voluntarist in Western thought but the manner of his voluntarism is quite new. Unlike Duns Scotus and Medieval voluntarists Boehme's voluntarism more closely resembles the *Vedas* and extends volutarism to more beings than God. The primal beginning is not a personal God but the nothingness.

¹⁰Givens thinks that two factors in Stephen Hobbhouse=s treatment of Boehme play roles in the process by which Boehme=s writings are validated as legitimate as mystical epiphanies yet at the same yet at the same time undercut it and make non-threatening to orthodoxy in ways that Boehme=s Lutheran minister could have found helpful. Givens claims Boehme=s writings are thus susceptible to creative refashioning in a way that Joseph Smith=s are not, thus Hobbhouse can claim that Boehme gives us a *Atrue mythology@ with Asymbolic value.@* The language employed must reaffirm its own limitedness, it must assert its inability to reveal the divine mystery that it approaches but never can capture. This dismisses Boehme to the extent are only related to reality *Asymbolically@ or Amythically.@* Any literal reading is considered too absurd to even consider. Boehme himself claimed that though our language is limited our experience of freedom brings us into contact with the divine freedom. Terryl Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched at New World Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) pp. 74-75.

But it may be that the literalness of Boehme and Smith=s revelations is tied to to the notion that the concrete physical realm in which we live is an advance on the sterile eternity of the beginning. The beginning is only the development of Being. Like the dead unity of the "opposition of all things" in 2 Nephi 2 Boehme=s Ungrund contains all of the antinomies, but they are unrealized and only potential: Boehme calls the Ungrund the "eternal silence." It is the actualization in Being of these potentialities that is life..

For Boehme God and the world presuppose each other. The world is the mirror of God and God only comes to know himself through the world. Creativity is not reserved exclusively to God. God does not create unilaterally, but calls others to create themselves and in turn God is created in relation to them. The eternal cosmic ideal entails God=s reciprocal relation to creatures which means that God is capable of change and growth. God is the ultimate example of a relational being drawing persons toward self-creation. This creativity is the *imago dei*. God and creatures are mutually dependent. God is in the universe and not ontologically different from creatures. God=s glory is increased through his relation with human persons. This is a way to understand what God tells Moses in Smith=s visionary expansion on Genesis "And as one earth shall pass away, and the heavens thereof even so shall another come; and there is no end to my works, neither to my words. For behold, this is my work and my glory--to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:38-39). God=s very purpose in existence can only be fulfilled in relation to others. The ultimate purpose of creation is the creation of real relationships. God, as a person, presupposes his

other. But the other can choose not to respond or to rebel. Love is a free response, it cannot be forced. Boehme was fond of saying "God wanted children, not serfs."¹¹

¹¹ "God is the eternal Nothing that is the eternal One." (K323) "The eternal one is the eternal Good." But the eternal unity is love. Love is even greater than God. Boehme proclaims this in a great hymn to love. (*De Vita Mentali* I, cap. I, 9) "Der Juenger sprach: Was is die Liebe in Ihrer Kraft und Tugent, in ihrer Hohe und Grosse? Der Meister sprach: Ihre Tugent is das Nichts and Ihre Kraft is durch alles: Ihre Hohe is so hoch als Gott un ihre Grosse is grosser als God: wer sid findet der findet Nichts und Alles." Love is God's *raison d'être*, it is the essence of God. There is in all being a force (the no) that separates, isolates, and breaks the unity, this is Schellings basis. The is also the force of love (the yes) that unites, ties together, and overcomes the hostile isolation

of separated beings. AThe absolute, the One, the Eternal Good, is not the supreme Good, it is not God.@(K325) It the one remains one it cannot love, nor know nor even love or know itself.(*Theosphica*, I, 9) (*Questions, Theosphica qu.I 6*)(See 2 Nephi 2)

Creation, Fall, and Evil

Boehme maintains the world or a world is necessary to God.¹² The world is the reflection of God and was made from his own nature.¹³ The world is created in a process much like that in which God himself is created. The world was spiritually created in the mind of God before it received its physical creation. But, as with God, the spiritual creation by the will is insufficient because it is only imagined and not realized. The Divine idea is less rich than reality; the world is richer after its history than at the beginning.¹⁴

¹²Koyré, p. 392. Boehme, *Mystérium*, LXXI: 20.

¹³Boehme, *Mystérium*, II:9. Koyré, pp. 348-349.

¹⁴Boehme, *Mystérium*, I:3.

Since the essence of the world and humanity were determined by God's own being, the world and humanity are made up of the same two centers and seven qualities that formed God's essence. And since God is free, his creatures, though limited by their finitude, are also free.¹⁵ The harmony of Heraclitus's bow is analogous to the in which Boehme sees the condition of the universe before the fall; it was a harmony of opposites. The light center in God is continuously victorious over the dark center. Evil begins with Lucifer's free choice of death and darkness over the light. This choice separated him from God, and represents the destruction of harmony. The willful distortion of reality was an act of complete separation of Lucifer from the totality. Lucifer refusing to return to the harmony of the whole completely denied the light within him and chose the darkness.¹⁶ Because of freedom, the rest of creation also fell out of harmony. The potentiality for evil is in the negative character of freedom that Boehme centers in the passionate nature. But the passionate nature is of positive value because in projecting its nature one realizes individuality.

For Boehme liberty is activity and the possibility of evil is within the possibility of Being itself. Freedom cannot be passive indifference, it is activity and has a tendency to manifest itself. From freedom is born Being, nature, and all reality. This aspiration for creation contains within itself all of the contraries and thus explains the possibility of evil, though not its actuality. Thus it is possible that evil could be destroyed because evil is only a potential reality that exists as an actual but not a necessary part of reality.

¹⁵Boehme, *Signature*, 16: 15-16.

¹⁶Boehme, *Signature*, 16:7.

This necessity of relation to being is also a theme in Smith=s visionary experience of the writings of Moses that is *The Book of Moses* in the writings assembled later in *The Pearl of Great Price*. Here God=s reason for existence is the creation not only of the world but of fellow human beings.

It is the Absoluteness independence any being is the ultimate lie. All are related. In fact Lucifer represents to the will to isolation, cutting off, a selfishness that is in all things. For Boehme his is the key to the power of temptation, ALucifer Acan >imagine= his angry fire into all things and by hardening their will can extinguish the divine light within them.(Walsh 227?)(44). In *The Book of Mormon* hardening is a theme that runs through the book and represents closing off to Others and God. It reveals a lack of openness to the other person and God. In the demonic forms of hardening one imagines himself as God, as transcending the world and in control of all things. In Smith=s revelation of the Book of Moses Cain=s fall is into isolation from his brother in his imagining himself master.

30 And Satan sware unto Cain that he would do according to his commands, And all these things were done in secret. 31 And Cain said: Truly I am Mahan, the master of this secret, that I may murder and get gain. Wherefore Cain was called Master Mahan, and he gloried in his wickedness. 32 And Cain went into the field, and Cain talked with Abel, his brother. And it came to pass that while they were in the field, Cain rose up against Able, his brother and slew him. 33 And Cain gloried in that which he had done, saying: I am free; Cain=s badly imagined freedom leads to his isolation and vagabondism on the

earth. All other beings are his enemies. Lucifer and Cain dwell in what Boehme calls a fantasy which is to say that Lucifer's power rests on a lie, an illusion. There is a parallel between good and evil in that evil is a false image or a bad imagination of the order of being; an infernal counterpart or copy of reality. But none of the images created by evil can sustain itself in being because each turns into itself, it desires permanence but all its efforts at permanence are in vain for it denies the reality of the interdependence of beings. Satan is the deposed rule of force. He is the "prince of hierarchy" (Weeks, 199). He seeks to be God in the sense of an independent being that transcends and controls all of reality. But this is a fantasy that can only take place in the mind and not in the presence of the other, thus for Smith Satan's earthly model Cain must kill his brother to imagine himself free. What fantasy represents is not simply the absence of the truth, but a feverish opposition to it. In Boehme's conception of fantasy, Lucifer's act, if universalized, would return all of creation to the centerless chaos of non-being through the creation of billions of pseudo-centers. The demonic hope is self-destructive--it cannot be realized. The demonic attitude refuses to accept the existence of the Other as another equal and sees itself as the unique center of its world. Whether it is God or man, or devil or angel, the Other is the source of continual pain to the demonic because the demonic imagines the Other as the source of its misery, as the limitation of the possibility of realizing his vision of a private universe. There is a great similarity between Boehme's conception of the demonic and Lucifer's project to be God in *The Pearl of Great Price* where hell is other people because they represent the destruction of "my" project. The Other eliminates the possibility of fulfilling in fantasy my desire to

be God because the other stands before me and calls my imagining into question.

Boehme describes hell as that darkness where each of the damned blames the others for her despair. In *The Six Theosophic Points* Boehme writes of hell

In the Darkness there is in the essence only a perpetual stinging and breaking, each form being enemy to the other--a contrarious essence. Each form is a liar to itself, and one says to the other, that it is evil and adverse to it, that it is a cause of its restlessness and fierceness. Each thinks in itself: If only the other form were not, thou wouldst have rest; and yet each of them is evil and false. Hence it is, that all that is born of the dark property of wrath is lying, and is always lying against the other forms, saying they are evil; and yet it is itself a cause thereof, it maketh them evil by its poisonous infection.¹⁷

This is the culmination of evil. Evil projects its negativity onto the Other and tells the truth about itself in the form of a lie. Even here one knows oneself through relation to the Other but, as a juggler, must immediately deny it.

For Boehme liberty is activity and the possibility of evil is within the possibility of Being itself. Freedom cannot be passive indifference, it is activity and has a tendency to manifest itself. From freedom is born Being, nature, and all reality. This aspiration for creation contains within itself all of the contraries and thus explains the possibility of evil, though not its actuality. Thus it is possible that evil could be destroyed because evil is only a potential reality that exists as an actual but not a necessary part of reality.

Boehme=s *Ungrund* and the description of the theogonic process that follows

¹⁷Jacob Boehme, *Six Theosophical Points and Other Writings*, trans. John Rolleston Earle (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1958), 9:2, p. 89.

could be used to interpret such passages concerning intelligence in Section 93 of the Doctrine and Covenants and Lehi=s discussion of opposition in 2 Nephi 2. Boehme=s *Ungrund* provides a potential solution to the continual debate among Mormons as to whether we existed as independent persons from eternity or were created from a primal soup. Boehme=s position synthesizes both positions. Everything that Ais@ has its basis in freedom or creativity. We are called to higher degrees of perfection and eventually to personhood and even Godhood by God. We are not persons from eternity but become such in relation to responsiveness to God=s call. But neither are we an inert substance that God mixes together to produce spirit children. But free response presupposes the possibility of refusal.

But evil is not just the radical evil of pride and greed it can also be tragic as in God=s own acceptance of the possibility of evil in creating others who also have real freedom, enough to rebel against God=s intention. It is the movement from eternity to time. In both Boehme and The Book of Mormon time is seen as superior to eternity if eternity is described as changeless. Lehi says that without opposition A. . .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 sensibility.@(verse 11) This is the movement from pure potentiality which exists only as the chaos of possibility to being but the tragedy and the joy of existence is that the possibility of good brings with it the possibility of evil. All things become possible including the natural evils that come along with opposition; disease, earthquakes, the fact that one creature is food for another. It also brings the possibility of radical evil, of rebellion against God. This is not

a Manichean dualism however. Neither Lehi nor Boehme posit evil as an eternally existing actuality vis a vis good. Only as a possibility that is actualized through the choice for liberty which is the recognition of the relationality and creation of relation through love to God and others or bondage following the father of lies who tells us that in order to be God we must attain power for ourselves over others. This is the hell Jean-Paul Sartre describes in *À No Exit* the place where *À hell is others.* Hell is others because they constantly interfere with my project to be God, to make it to the top of the food chain. Godhood for Satan (2 Nephi 2:29) is the chaos of billions of would be god/liars who see themselves as the unmoving center of all existence.

Conclusion: But is it Biblical?

I have come to the end of my paper without really dealing with the basic question of the session. *À Is it Biblical?* Jacob Boehme and Joseph Smith have created highly dramatic expansions of the genesis creation story and carried through in the drama of the and ongoing relations between God and humanity. But one could say that Cecil B. Demil created a highly entertaining spectacle in *The Ten Commandments* that permanently implanted Big Chuck Heston and his fake beard as Moses in the minds of most Americans, even the younger ones that never saw the movie. But then it wasn't biblical either. I must basically admit that everyone, on the SBL side of this room is better equipped to answer this question than I. But following Jon Levenson, Terence Fretheim the dramatic interpretation of creation and history may be more clearly in line

with the Biblical story and this is clearly essential to both Smith=s and Boehme=s open readings of Genesis. If we see the struggle with evil in the Bible as a dramatic struggle in which human beings really participate through ritual and action then Smith and Boehme=s open readings of the Genesis story are indeed biblical.