

How to Deal With Inherited Irrationality

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February 11, 2006

<http://mccue.cc/bob/spirituality.htm>

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Tradition becomes our security, and when the mind is secure it is in decay. Krishnamurti

Science and technology revolutionize our lives, but memory, tradition and myth frame our response. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

Introduction

Rational forces have consistently throughout human history overcome magical thinking and other forms of irrationality. However, it often takes a depressingly long time for the majority of even the best informed human groups to accept what with the benefit of hindsight appears to be an obvious best practise, and humans are particularly obtuse when it comes to seeing the irrationality in ideas or behaviors that are foundational to their own social groups (see <http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/rs.does%20mormonism%20cause%20irrational%20belief.pdf>). Both history and current social reality relative to this point provide eloquent testimony to how the individual perception of reality tends to bend to group opinion. Our evolutionary history as small group animals who were dependant on a safe place within a social group for our survival is likely responsible for this (see <http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/rs.denial.pdf>, under the heading "What Causes Denial - A Synthesis" at page 119).

The struggle between rational and irrational forces in the religious world has been nicely chronicled by many scholars (see Karen Armstrong, "The Battle for God" for a particularly compelling read), and we find in the Mormon group a microcosm of this conflict. Many Mormons are at a tipping point with regard to this issue as a result of the ongoing collision between irrational Mormon beliefs and the information rich perspective provided by the Internet. The experience of other groups throughout history suggests that the direction those who remain faithful to Mormonism take on this issue will largely determine the richness of life their descendants will enjoy for generations to come.

I will conclude that individual Mormons who become aware of these issues have a choice to make of unprecedented importance as a result of what we know about how individual decision making behaviour tends to be largely determined by the behaviour supported by our dominant social group, and how slowly the behaviour of social groups tend to upgrade toward best available practises in this regard.

History

It is hard to sort out some aspects of early science from magic since science to a large degree emerged from magic, and the same people practiced both (see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alchemy>). For example, when we look back on even fairly recent medical practises they often seem more magical than scientific. Think of bloodletting, for example, a practise that was common well into the 1800s (see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloodletting>, and see John Brooke's "The Refiner's Fire" for a review of how the magical/alchemical tradition influenced early Mormonism).

Ideas such as bloodletting represented the best science of their day and we should assume that some of our science based practices will be regarded by future generations much as we regard bloodletting. This is because the scientific method has built into it a number of mechanisms that over time tend to winnow out inaccurate ideas while encouraging the adoption and use of accurate ones. That is, due to the diversity of opinion and competition among a huge group of people with different interests within the scientific community, it is by far the best source of accurate information about reality that humankind has ever seen. However, the scientific community's self-correcting mechanism is far slower than most of us realize, and worse than that, it takes enormous amounts of time for even the most important, demonstrably accurate scientific ideas to penetrate the popular consciousness.

For example, in the mid-1800s Ignaz Semmelweis (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ignaz_Semmelweis), a Viennese obstetrician, carefully observed and reported that deaths after certain medical procedures declined from above 10% to below 1% after a hand and instrument washing program was instituted in various hospitals. The medical community viciously attacked him for taking this position. If he was right, they had been killing a significant percentage of their patients. Few ideas could be more abhorrent to medical practitioners and so their resistance was understandable to an extent. It took years in some places and decades in others for Semmelweis' innovation to be adopted in the most educated corners of human civilization and in the meantime doctors and nurses continued to kill a significant percentage of their patients.

This and countless other examples from the history of science can be marshalled to show that it takes a lot more time what we assume to change minds that have formed around a way of doing things, regardless of how wrong. As both Max Planck and Thomas Kuhn have been reported to observe (with tongues no doubt only partly in cheek), "Science progresses on funeral at a time". While this may be true, Einstein's insight is more useful. He said that the theory we believe largely determines what we can see. Semmelweis' observation was inconsistent with the general medical theory of his day. However, when the germ theory of disease was eventually developed (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germ_theory) hand washing and other forms of hygienic practise began to dominate hospital procedure and Semmelweis was recognized as a visionary.

If easily demonstrable, life-saving concepts like post-surgical hygienic practises are resisted, we should expect that ideas that run against the social norm and have more remote connections to our well-being should take much longer to be accepted. These, however, are often of immense importance and since they are not noticed can cripple entire civilizations.

For example, in the early 1600s Galileo used the newly invented telescope to revolutionize our understanding of Earth's place in the Universe. It took at least a couple of centuries for his ideas to be widely accepted, and in 1992 the Catholic Church officially acknowledged its error in suppressing his work and in effect killing him. The Catholic Church's tardiness in acknowledging its error is likely responsible in part for the staggering 1996 poll which reported that 20% of adult Americans believed the Sun to revolve around the Earth (see <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/1996/05/24/MN67867.DTL&hw>).

Another of our most important innovators, Charles Darwin, has also been poorly received. Recent polls (see <http://www.arachnoid.com/opinion/religion.html>) have found that:

- 35% of US adults believe that evolutionary theory is well supported by the evidence.
- 35% believed evolutionary theory is not well supported by the evidence.
- 29% reported that they did know enough about evolutionary theory to respond.
- 38% said that human beings have developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life, but God guided this process.
- 13% said that human beings have developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life, but God had no part in this process.
- 45% said God created human beings pretty much in their present form at one time within the last 10,000 years or so.

And lest we think that beliefs of this kind don't really matter, recall that for centuries leading up to about 1100 CE the Muslim/Arab peoples led humankind with regard to secular studies such as math and science, and they were also the wealthiest and in many ways the most cultured group on Earth at the same time. At that point, religious forces gained the upper hand within Muslim society and they began to emphasize "spiritual" studies over secular, quickly lost their scientific, wealth and cultural advantages and began down the road that now has Muslims rioting and killing each other over cartoons published in Denmark and other parts of Europe (see http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4684652.stm). The triumph of irrationality in many parts of the Muslim is a temporary setback that has lasted, to this point, almost 1000 years.

The struggle between rational and irrational forces in the religious world has been nicely chronicled by many scholars (see Karen Armstrong, "The Battle for God" for a particularly compelling read), and we find in Mormon history a microcosm of this conflict. The direction those who remain faithful to Mormonism take on this issue will likely determine much regarding the diversity and richness of life their descendants enjoy for generations to come.

When we criticize any group (including the Mormons) for the use of "magical thinking" that impairs their decision making, what we are often saying is that they are using an outmoded kind of science. This is often the result of religious beliefs that formed during a particular period of time that were consistent with at least some of the scientific and historical data then available. However, once those beliefs form they become foundational to claims religious leaders make to God's authority, and hence will be resisted because if they are found to be false it will undermine the authority of a group's leaders and hence the stability of the group. Most humans unconsciously fear such destabilizing forces, and hence will resist information that tends in that direction. This means that they have ridden science's train so far, have gotten off and refuse to acknowledge that the train has moved from that spot even as they stare at empty tracks. The forces that impel this are the same as those that caused surgeons around the world to refuse for a long time to wash their hands in spite of what Semmelweis' careful measurement of what happened in his hospitals showed.

Many aspects of Mormon belief and practise leap into focus when considered in light of the social and scientific ideas that were dominant during the late 1700s and early 1800s. The idea that Amerindians were Hebrew descendants; the Victorian idea of progress ("eternal progress"); the roles of men and women; what it means to have individual freedom (see <http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/rs.are%20mormons%20free.pdf>); all fall into this category.

Mormon Irrationality

I am regularly (such as last night) in conversation with well-educated Mormons who struggle when trying to deal with rational concepts related to things like science, investment strategies, politics and other purely secular matters. And I see in their struggles infections likely attributable to the magical thinking at the heart of what is required these days to be a literally believing Mormon. The conversation in which I participated last night that caused this essay had to do with an investment opportunity that a bright, successful young Mormon had been offered. Some Mormons still respect my judgement regarding investments that seem not to require "the Spirit", and he wanted to run by me what had been proposed to him. I was happy to listen for a few minutes and tell him what I thought.

Five seconds into my friend's explanation, I gave him a thumbs down. He has been offered the chance to get in on the ground floor of a "perpetual motion machine" that is going to revolutionize the energy and automotive industries. I summarized

the many similar "opportunities" I have encountered during my career and how each of them caused a lot of investors to lose their money while usually also being sincerely believed in by a "genius" inventor who the scientific community "did not understand". I explained how humans are congenitally (it seems) unable to resist huge upside propositions like this that have little to no support in the scientific theory that ultimately must explain how they work. That is, the speculative stock and real estate "investment" industries and Las Vegas are kept in business by the human inability to assess with reasonable accuracy what a small chance to win a large amount of money is worth. Our greed consistently causes us to pay more for chances like this than we should. And promoters of various types have from time immemorial taken advantage of this human weakness. It is far better to be a seller of chances to invest of this type than a buyer. At least, I told him, the people in Las Vegas are upfront about how they make their money. Everyone knows that most gamblers lose money and the "house" gets rich. And so most people who gamble treat the cost of gambling as the price of entertainment. Those invest in speculative stocks or real estate or multi-level marketing schemes are often sucked into the same game on the basis that they really do have a reasonable chance to make money.

And, I noted, when an idea has been around for a while and the people who have the most expertise in related fields have passed on it, you can be pretty certain that the idea does not work. We are far better off following the advice of the people with the greatest experience and expertise in a give field instead of trusting our instincts. This is because we are relatively ignorant; the experts are relatively wise and their collective judgement is likely to be the most accurate evidence available as to what will work and what will not; and humans (like us) have a proven tendency to each be overconfident in their own judgement (see James Surowiecki, "The Wisdom of Crowds"). Again, this is what shady and incompetent investment promoters have intuited forever, and why our securities laws require a certain amount of "due diligence" of such promoters. This constrains their natural tendency to exaggerate while not having done the work required to know what real scientists say about their investment proposal, or worse yet, suppressing that knowledge because it contradicts what the "know" to be "true". Does that approach to reality ring a bell, by the way?.

My friend was unconvinced. He told me that NASA and other branches of the US government were "looking at this concept seriously". I said that if the concept had any material chance of success, there were countless big companies that would have already snapped it up. I referenced (without using its name) the Ballard Battery organization (see http://www.ballard.com/be_a_customer/transportation/electric_drives) as an example of a relatively modest technology that has attracted investment capital from some of the world's largest corporations. A perpetual motion machine would make Ballard look like peanuts and so if it were any good there would be no need to present this idea to people like him who have no means to assess the technology's merits. I thought later that I should have told my friend that if I had the details of the investment proposal I could reverse engineer the value the inventor is putting on this technology, and I am willing to bet that it is far less than

the value the market places on inferior technologies (like Ballard's) that have only been proven to have a reasonable chance of success. This approach would sound a warning bell of another kind.

My friend cited (no doubt using information the "inventor" had given him) planetary motion and the movement of electrons etc. around the nucleus of atoms as "proof" that perpetual motion machines were possible. I explained a little about the big bang theory of cosmology, what happens in black holes and how the laws of entropy work to explain that the analogies he was using did not support the idea his inventor was selling. I could tell that he remained unconvinced, and heard him later in the evening planning a trip to meet the inventor in person.

In short, my young friend did not take seriously the judgement of the scientific community or of wealthy investors (like General Motors or NASA) who rely upon the judgement of scientists to make billion dollar investment decisions. I suggested to him the places he should look to assess the merits of this invention on a scientific basis, how perpetual motion machines have been an inventors' Holy Grail forever and how credible scientists long ago abandoned the idea and have focused instead on converting energy from one form (atomic, fossil fuel, sun, wind, etc.) into another that is more convenient for us to use. But he did not seem interested in this. He had heard about something that "felt good" to him, and that feeling was more important (at this point at least) than anything he might find in a science book. Where would a well educated young Mormon get an idea like that?

I have run into similar attitudes in the Mormon community related to much more important issues.

- The world overpopulated? Don't be silly. Science will be able to continue to expand our ability to support life on Earth indefinitely.
- Global warming? What is all the fuss about? There is not enough evidence yet that humankind has anything to do with global warming for us to be concerned.
- Godless Europeans (and particularly the REALLY godless Scandinavians) have fewer social problems than Middle America? Don't be ridiculous. That is impossible. And no I don't want to read anything about this.
- Young Mormons marry too early, have children too soon and hence have marital experiences that lead to an increased incidence of depression? That could not be further from the truth. The surveys the Church does show that active Mormons are among the happiest people on Earth.

Across a broad range of critical issues Mormons tend to be ignorant of the relevant science, and when the science is presented to them they tend to accept even the fringe minority positions as solid support for their dogmatic beliefs. You can always find a minority position based in science to support your view, including that alien abductions are real, the Earth is 10,000 years old and the Holocaust did not

occur. The rational thing for us non-scientists to do is govern ourselves by what the majority of well informed scientists have to say on any given topic.

My young friend is one of those Mormons who has struggled through the evidence related to the Book of Mormon and other aspects of Mormonism, and has decided that despite the fact that he doesn't like a lot of what Mormon leaders do and have done in the past, that his experience with Mormonism overall (and most importantly how he feels when "The Spirit" moves him) is more important than anything else. So, he has decided against the evidence that the God Joseph Smith taught about is real and gave Joseph Smith special authority that was passed on to Gordon Hinckley, etc. For example, the scientific evidence regarding DNA relative to the Book of Mormon's historicity (see http://www.postmormon.org/exp_e/index.php/magazine/feature_article/2004/09/2) is interesting, but does not prove anything. Again, how we feel is more important than any evidence of this kind.

Is it surprising that the same mind that would justify Mormonism against the scientific and historical evidence in the manner just noted would also:

- be prepared to invest in a perpetual motion machine that has not scientific support,
- spend time developing a Muti-Level Marketing "business" (Amway, for example) when the statistics regarding it show that 99+ percent of those who get involved lose money, not to mention creating painful false expectations and wasting years of time in many cases,
- not care about global overpopulation or ecological issues,
- get married at age 21 right after returning from his mission because "the Lord revealed to him on his first date with XXXX that she was to be his wife",
- encourage his wife to quit her job and start having babies "because that is the Lord's will" even though he does not have a reliable means of supporting their family and she has a great job,
- move from one city to another because he feels like the Lord has something for him to do there, even though job prospects there are inferior to those where he already lives, the cost of living is higher there, commuting distances are worse there, etc.,
- start taking anti-depressants instead of seeing a counselor who would help him to understand that his day to day pattern of living is virtually guaranteed to cause depression,
- when asked a question about the legitimacy of evolutionary theory, pull out books written decades ago by "prophets of god" who know virtually nothing about science,

- when asked a question about the appropriateness of certain sexual acts within marriage, look for writings by the prophets of god on that topic, and finding none, book an appointment with the Bishop because you can remember that the Church has an “official” position on this topic,
- tell his gay son that it would be best if all the gay people in the world were put on an island and blown up.

I have run into each of these situations during the past little while.

Non-Mormons do silly things too of course, and as noted above, ignorance with regard to science is far from a uniquely Mormon problem. However, Mormon beliefs create one of the many worldviews that encourage some kinds of science to be denied. And this should be expected to encourage the denial of science in other similar situations, such as where emotional experience (including all kinds of greed and fear) or social trends conflict with the best advice science has to offer. Interestingly, Buddha said greed and fear should be resisted because they are the source of most human trouble. Scientific knowledge generally helps us to do this, while belief systems like Mormonism supercharge these emotion based forces.

I therefore think it is fair to suggest a causal relationship between the Mormon need to deny science in order to maintain their religious beliefs and the Mormon tendency I observe toward making other kinds of bad decisions. If Mormons begin to pay more attention to the wisdom science has produced, their decision making will improve.

In general, I subscribe to the division or labor between science, philosophy and religion described at http://progressiveliving.org/religion/culture_war.htm. And, there is no reason to believe that giving science precedence in its sphere of influence as this and many other books and articles define it will erode the moral fabric of society. In fact, there is good reason to believe that the attempt to retain Mormon belief and a connection to the Mormon social group in light of science will produce immoral behaviour. This is one of the reasons for which Mormon leaders in the early 1900s abandoned their institutionalized lying about polygamy. They became concerned that this endemic deception would canker their people. The only thing surprising to me about this conclusion is that they took so long to reach it.

In Which Direction Will Mormons Turn?

Time will tell whether Mormons will continue to turn inward, as the Muslims did 1000 years ago, or whether they will jettison their literal beliefs that are producing the mind virus I just described. What makes this particularly interesting is that a process that occurred in the Muslim world over centuries will be compressed into a few years within North American Mormonism as a result of the average Mormon educational level and access to information through the internet. This will supercharge the move toward either ignorance and the continued denial of science, or rationality.

I expect to see a polarization within Mormonism quickly develop. The vast majority of the old guard do not have the perspective to recognize that their worldview is deficient, and will not be prepared to absorb the information required to see that they may be a problem, so their behavior will not change. The real battle for hearts and minds will occur in the generation that is now under 30 years of age, and even more importantly, for their children. Some will stay with their parents' paradigm and others will either leave Mormonism or radically redefine the role of religion in their lives.

A friend told me recently about the radical changes that have occurred during the last decade on some Hutterite (like the Old Order Amish) colonies in Alberta (see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hutterite> - this article does not capture the extent of this change as it was described to me).

Thirty years ago when I lived near these people many of them still did not have televisions, radio, and had virtually no contact with the outside world. Now many of them are almost indistinguishable from other rural folk. And many others still dress differently but have television, Internet access and degrees of intellectual and behavioral freedom that would have been unthinkable a few years ago. That is, their worldview and culture has radically changed within a short time. And, a small number of hardcore traditionalists have gone the other way (see for example <http://www.perefound.org/towhom.html>).

My bet is that during the next two decades we will see something similar occur within Mormonism as the current generation of Mormon Internet children reach maturity. This is likely to strengthen Mormon fundamentalist groups and see the creation of new ones as some adults flee what they perceive to be chaos and gathering evil of society and attempt to shelter their children from it. M. Night Shyamalan's "The Village" (see <http://movies.about.com/library/weekly/aaavillage072904.htm>) provides a compelling look at this psychological space. The same forces will increase the trend toward Mormon home schooling. Mormon programmed Internet filters and portals, and Mormon sponsored university or trade schools (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Virginia_University).

On the other hand, an increasing number of Mormons in the developed world will simply terminate their affiliation with the Mormon Church, or begin to participate on their terms instead of those dictated by Mormon leaders. This trend is evident across much of the religious spectrum where we see organizations like Rick Warren's megachurch flourish on the basis of offering a wide choice of worship and communal experience wrapped within the same amorphous dogma (see http://www.gladwell.com/2005/2005_09_12_a_warren.html), New Age belief of many kinds rising in popularity, and the decline of non-democratic institutions of most kinds across the developed world (see <http://wvs.isr.umich.edu/papers/postmod.shtml>).

The Mormon institutional structure should be expected to remain largely unchanged due to its paralysing conservative decision making mechanism. All significant changes must be unanimously approved by the 15 top leaders, all of whom are old and male. This means that little if any formal change will occur for decades unless some kind of fundamental tipping point is reached as occurred with the Community of Christ (see <http://mccue.cc/bob/documents/undecption.pdf>). I think it highly unlikely that this will occur within my lifetime.

However, an increasing degree of individual flexibility will be permitted to members as a matter of practical necessity as Stake Presidents and Bishops are faced with more and more people like me. As I was told, it does not matter what I believed as long as I keep my mouth shut and so didn't disturb the orthodoxy of others. As long as I kept that rule, I was free to participate on whatever terms I choose. This approach has become common, and will lead increasing numbers of Mormons to lead double lives. They will attend at least some Mormon services and often hold responsible leadership positions while participating anonymously on Internet bulletin boards and email lists where they can express their real beliefs and develop a sense of community with others and clarity of self perception that can only be achieved within this mode of expression.

This will cause increasing numbers of Mormons to justifying lying (or such creative use of language that the difference between it and lying is immaterial) during temple recommend interviews when asked to confirm their beliefs. It will cause increasing number of Mormon young people to enter a baffling world of grey as they begin to understand their parents' ambivalent position regarding religious belief, practise, what it means to keep a promise and answers questions honestly, etc. This should be expected to cause a continued erosion Mormon community's moral fabric.

On a lighter note, these same forces will continue to cause ironies like currently serving Mormon Bishops who consult with people like me regarding how they should counsel faithful Mormons about issues related to sexual morality, sexual practises within marriage, masturbation, whether young people or mature couples should serve missions, etc. These Bishops tell me that they don't dare discuss these questions with their Stake Presidents or other Mormon file leaders because they are out of touch with the reality related to these issues, and in any event discussions of that kind would require the revelation of the Bishop's heterodox beliefs. Bishops of this kind are usually closet heretics who believe that they can do more good "from the inside" walking what one such man eloquently labelled the "path of inner darkness", then they can from the outside.

The Choice

The concept that the theory and data summarized above brings into sharp focus for me can be summarized as follows:

- The influence of the group is over each individual member's perception of reality is far more powerful that most of us realize.

- Social groups tend to take much longer than we assume to accept even easily understandable realities.
- Social groups can take centuries to grasp things like the importance of science in general while suffering terrible deteriorations in their standard of living and imposing particularly cruel and arbitrary hardships on the weaker members of their group such as women, gay persons, etc.
- Those who reject the majority scientific view tend to make worse decisions with regard to a host of important issues than those who accept science on this basis.
- The world is increasingly divided into groups that choose to accept the best wisdom science has to offer, and those who don't.
- Once socialized to a particular worldview (science accepting or science rejecting), many people are unable to change and the influence of parents on this process declines radically once children reach their teens.

Accordingly, I should expect that two decisions I make will echo for generations in my family. The first is how openly I will teach my children about how find wisdom and make decisions. That is, when should we give science primacy over religious dogma; where do we find the foundations of moral reasoning; etc. And the second, and by far the most important, is my choice of a social group or groups with which I choose to associate and cause my children to associate and how that group either supports or contradicts what I teach my children about how to find wisdom and make decisions.

The decision to distance oneself from Mormonism is hard. Great sacrifices are required of many who go that route. I have attempted to outline above what is at stake and why great sacrifices are usually justified. While I could never know enough about another person's circumstances to weigh the costs and benefits in her case, I think it is reasonable to say that in most cases the benefits easily justify the costs; that our fears are overblown; that we do not know enough about what awaits us on the outside to understand how much we and our loved ones have to gain by starting a new life; and that most talk of "letting the kids make up their own minds" and "making personal sacrifices to avoid hurting my wife, my parents, etc." are rationalizations for avoiding the personal discomfort required to take arrows in the back while leaving the Mormon community and facing the uncertainty of forming new relationships (see Lee Kirkpatrick, "Attachment, Evolution and the Psychology of Religion" or Steven Hassan, "Releasing the Bonds", for a summary of why leaving a close-knit religious group should be expected to be extremely difficult).

I will conclude with a note that I received last week from someone with whom I started to correspond last summer.

"February 7, 2006

Bob,

Just going through some of my old email and came across this one [a note I sent to him in the summer of 2006 answering some questions for him and trying to put an obviously anxious person at ease by sharing my experience with him].

So much has changed since then. Life is like a whole different reality since leaving the LDS Church. I am so much happier and have found a relationship with God that I never knew possible. It continues to grow and develop each day. I continue to search and learn of spiritual truth and hope to one day completely understand it all. However, I know now to seek God in trying to understand God. I certainly value the opinions of others but I never take for granted what they are saying and always seek to verify or dispel what they are telling me.

I just wanted to take a moment and let you know how much your writings and common sentiments gave me the courage to explore what I needed to.

Again, thank you and I hope this note finds you in good spirits and God's blessings.

Bill"

Sharing this kind of thing is useful in my view because it illustrates how quickly the world can move from dark to light when one has the courage to press ahead at a time when it is terrifying to do that.

I note that I do not necessarily agree with the beliefs this fellow now has, but do not generally do more in email exchanges than you see here. I make my thoughts available for what they are worth, and if that is useful to someone, great.

Conclusion

Well-informed Mormons have to tough choice to make that should be expected to profoundly influence their families for generations to come. If they remain within a conservative, irrational social group, ignorance and difficulty for their family are likely to follow for a long time. And if they leave that group, they are likely to experience significant discomfort but more importantly, they must face the terrifying prospect of disagreeing with their dominant social group. Throughout most of human history, it usually meant death to do this and our biology was set up on that basis.

As is the case with most decisions, perspective is often what is required to overcome fear and make good decisions. I hope the perspective in this essay is useful to some who read it.