

"I Know The Church Is True!"
The Origins of Mormon Monism and Its Defence Against Pluralism

October 28, 2004
bob mccue

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

Table of Contents

Introduction 2

Monism 2

 Monism and Philosopher Kings 4

 Monism and Intellectual Monopoly 7

Pluralism 7

How to Use Logic to Trump Reality and so Remain Monist in a Pluralistic World 11

 How Monist Are Most Mormons? 11

 "Formal" v. "Empirical" Systems 12

 Logic in Formal and Empirical Settings 13

 How Logic Works 14

 The Evolution of Formal Systems that Describe the Reality of the Universe 16

 Other More Mundane Examples of Formal Systems 18

 The Use of Logic and Empirical Data to Understand Reality – A Confucian Example 21

 The Importance of Examining Premises 23

The Sacred – That Which Cannot be Questioned 28

Mormon Testimony Bearing – The Ultimate Bulwark Against Pluralism 32

 Russell Ballard's Recent "Bear Your Testimony" Address 32

 "Doubt and Fear are Tools of Satan" 33

 Saying Is Believing – An Application of the Principle of Insufficient Justification 34

 Denial in General 39

Postmodern Mormons – Pluralism Infiltrates the "Faithful"? 39

 Mormon Epistemology - How Different Mormons "Know" 39

 Postmodern Theory 40

 Post-modernism and Mormon History 41

Why Do So Many Post-Mormons Discard Literalistic Christian Beliefs? 44

Conclusion 44

"I Know The Church Is True!"

The Origins of Mormon Monism and Its Defence Against Pluralism

October 28, 2004

bob mccue

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

The historian must not try to know what is truth, if he values his honesty; for if he cares for his truths, he is certain to falsify his facts.

Henry Adams

Nothing falsifies history more than logic.

Guizot

Introduction

I continue to try to understand how I managed to be a practising Mormon for over 25 adult years and have such a poor understanding of how my religious beliefs worked. And, I am fascinated by the way in which I was so certain of my beliefs for so long, and then watched in horror as that certainty came completely undone in a matter of weeks. What follows is part of my continuing effort to understand what happened to me, and what I now see around me, writ large, in the lives of members of many religious communities.

A belief that is critical to orthodox Mormonism as it is now structured is that the Mormon Church is God's one and only true church on the face of the Earth. That is, Mormon leaders and only Mormon leaders communicate with God in such a way that they hear and understand His will, so only they are able to provide His guidance to human beings. All people who do not follow the dictates of Mormon leaders live in various degrees of ignorance, innocent error or sin. And it is the duty of all Mormons to spread the message I just outlined so that others can come to know "the truth", and enjoy all of the blessings God wishes to confer upon His children. God can only give these blessings to people who believe as Mormons believe and obey the dictates of God, as communicated by Mormon leaders.

This belief is something philosophers have termed "monist". That is, there one and only one "true" or "right" way to live. While reading about how monist belief systems are created and maintained, I learned a number of things that were helpful to me as I continue to try to understand my Mormon roots while deciding which parts of them to keep and which to attempt to get rid of.

Monism

Monism has been defined as follows:

'Monism' is a very broad term, applicable to any doctrine which maintains either that there is ultimately only one thing, or only one kind of thing; it is has also been used of [sic] the view that there is only set of true beliefs. In these senses it is opposed to the equally broad term 'pluralism'. But it is also often contrasted with 'dualism', since so much philosophical debate is focused on the question whether there are two different kinds of thing, mind and matter, or only one. (Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, p.589)

As noted above, I am using the term "monist" to refer to "the view that there is only one set of true beliefs".

Monists generally posit an unyielding, if hard to understand, source of truth. For Plato it was mathematics for the most part. For Aristotle it appears to have been biology. For religious people it is usually sacred texts, the words of living "prophets", or "ineffable" communication from God himself. Some monists looked to the scientific method. Others, like Rousseau, thought they found truth in the unpolluted wisdom of simple peasants.

Consider in this regard a statement from the extreme liberal end of Mormon thought. J. Rueben Clark, justly considered to be one of Mormonism's most open minded leaders, said:

If we have the truth, [it] cannot be harmed by investigation. If we have not the truth, it ought to be harmed. (Michael Quinn, "J. Rueben Clark: The Church Years", page 24)

Even in this explosion of liberalism (from a Mormon point of view), the underlying premise is that there is one truth, and Mormons either have it or not. The idea that Mormonism might be one "right" way, or partly right and partly wrong way, is foreign to this approach to life. Joseph Smith either did, or did not, speak with God and receive his exclusive authority, etc. And as recently as April of 2003, the Mormon prophet Gordon Hinckley indicated in an address considered by Mormons to have greater importance than any scripture, that the question of Mormonism's truth is "black or white". Mormonism is either 100% truth, or 100% fraud. And God will spew those who are lukewarm (that is, less than 100% committed) out of his mouth at the last day. (See <http://home.mccue.cc:10000/bob/documents/rs.should%20i%20join1004226v2.pdf> at p. 27) Again, undiluted monism.

The philosopher and historian of ideas Isaiah Berlin provides a fine summary of monism. He describes how some Enlightenment thinkers (mid-1600s to early 1800s, approximately) felt that Newton's identification of a few laws that explained so much of physical reality proved that similar discoveries would be made regarding social reality that would lead to a clear understanding of the "true" way to live similar to what Newton had provided as to the "true" way in which certain aspects of physical reality interact. Rousseau, who is often said to be one of mankind's most influential thinkers, reached a similar conclusion regarding the existence of a "true" way to live that would solve all social problems, but believed that introspection rather than science would lead us to it. Many agreed with him.

In reference to monists of the scientific and other types, Berlin says:

A wider thesis underlay this: namely, that to all true questions there must be one true answer and one only, all the other answers being false, for otherwise the questions cannot be genuine questions. There must exist a path which leads clear thinkers to the correct answers to these questions, as much in the moral, social and political worlds as in that of the natural sciences, whether it is the same method or not; and once all the correct answers to the deepest moral, social and political questions that occupy (or should occupy) mankind are put together, the result will present the final solution to all the problems of existence" (See Isaiah Berlin, "The Power of Ideas", p. 5)

Berlin goes on to acknowledge that monists often doubted as to when or even whether this would happen to mankind. But there was no doubt that the answers did exist, even if only God knew them. This was, and continues to be, the monist view.

Monists also believed that once a truth is known, man would inexorably follow it. That was caused by the nature of both man and truth. And so, while a perfect life might not be practically speaking attainable, in principle it must be so. Berlin sums up as follows:

This is the *philosophia perennis* – what men, thinkers, have believed from the pre-Socratics to all of the reformers and revolutionaries of our own age. It is the central belief on which human thought has rested for two millennia. For if no true answer to questions exist, how can knowledge ever be attainable in any province? This was the heart of the European rational, and indeed spiritual, thought for many ages. No matter that people differ so widely, that cultures differ, moral and political views differ; no matter that there is a vast variety of doctrines, religions, moralities, ideas – all the same there must somewhere be a true answer to the deepest questions that preoccupy mankind. (See "The Power of Ideas", pp. 6, 7)

Anyone familiar with Mormonism or any other fundamentalist leaning religious tradition will hear in Berlin's statement the tinkling of familiar bells.

Monism and Philosopher Kings

Monism is closely allied with Plato's philosopher king idea, which many others (including Rousseau) used to justify their actions. The philosopher kings were the wise few who Plato felt were justified in deceiving the masses when it was necessary to do so, since the masses were incapable of understanding what was in their best interest. That is, the philosopher kings were presumed to have understood the "truth", and when the masses were not capable of reaching the same understanding, the philosopher kings would do what they had to (including deceiving, using fear, etc.) on the masses so that they would do what was "best" for them.

Rousseau took this idea a big step further, and got there in an interesting way. He argued passionately for freedom – and not just any freedom, but an absolute kind of freedom. One could not give up an iota of freedom without dying to the extent of that which was given up. However, he also recognized the importance of authority, and struggled with the paradox that both freedom and authority were necessary to human happiness. He resolved this paradox with his famous idea – the "Social Contract". That is, that by surrendering his will to the group through the social contract that holds the group together, man becomes perfectly free. Chains are not chains if they are voluntarily taken up and locked in place. Self-control is perfect freedom.

Rousseau believed that nature is harmonious, as Newton showed. Hence, as noted above, Rousseau believed that there is only one "true" or "right" way to do things, and only one "true" answer to any question. All men are rational, and wish to do things in the right way. Hence, once the right way has been discovered it does a service to those who are too uneducated, misinformed etc. to see it if they are "helped" (forced, tricked etc.) into acting in accordance with what is right. That is, Rousseau advocated classic philosopher king behaviour. But, he did not stop there.

Berlin summarizes Rousseau's key doctrine as follows:

...Rousseau develops the notion of the general will. It begins in the harmless notion of a contract, which after all is a semi-commercial affair, merely a kind of undertaking voluntarily entered into, and ultimately revocable also, an act performed by human

beings who come together and agree to do certain things intended to lead to their common happiness; but is only an arrangement of convenience which, if it leads to common misery, they can abandon. This is how it begins; but from the notion of a social contract as a perfectly voluntary act on the part of individuals who remain individual and who pursue each his own good, Rousseau gradually moves toward the notion of the general will as almost the personified will of a large super-personal entity, of something called the State, which is no longer the crushing leviathan of Hobbes, but something rather more like a team, something like a Church, a unity in diversity, a greater-than-I, something in which I sink my personality only in order to find it again. (See Isaiah Berlin, "Freedom and Its Betrayal", pp. 44, 45)

Berlin says that Rousseau's worst perversion is the idea of the "real" or "true" or "higher" self. Once we accept that such a self exists, and that the leaders "know" what that self would do were it only in control of the individual in question, the high road to despotism is wide open. In the final essay of his illustrious career, Berlin develops this idea further by indicating the following:

The notion of positive freedom has led, historically, to even more frightful perversions. Who orders my life? I do. I? Ignorant, confused, driven hither and thither by uncontrolled passions and drives – is that all there is to me? Is there not within me a higher, more rational, freer self, able to understand and dominate passions, ignorance and other defects, which I can attain to only by a process of education or understanding, a process which can be managed only by those who are wiser than myself, who make me aware of my true, "real", deepest self, of what I am at my best? This is a well known metaphysical view, according to which I can be truly free and self-controlled only if I am truly rational – a belief which goes back to Plato – and since I am not perhaps sufficiently rational myself, I must obey those who are indeed rational, and who therefore know what is best not only for themselves but also for me, and who can guide me along lines which will ultimately awaken my true rational self and put it in charge, where it truly belongs. I may feel hemmed in – indeed, crushed – by these authorities, but that is an illusion: when I have grown up and have attained to a fully mature, "real" self, I shall understand that I would have done for myself what has been done for me if it I had been as wise, when I was in an inferior condition, as they are now.

In short, they are acting on my behalf, in the interest of my higher self, in controlling my lower self; so that true liberty for the lower self consists in total obedience to them the wise, those who know the truth, the elite of sages; or perhaps my obedience must be to those who understand how human destiny is made – for if Marx is right, then it is the Party which alone grasps the demands of the rational goals of history which must shape and guide me, whichever way my poor empirical self may wish to go; and the party itself must be guided by its far-seeing leaders, and in the end by the greatest and wisest leader of all.

There is no despot in the world who cannot use this method of argument for the vilest oppression, in the name of an ideal self which is seeking to bring to fruition by his own, perhaps somewhat brutal and *prima facie* morally odious, means (*prima facie* only for the lower empirical self). The "engineer of human souls", to use Stalin's phrase, knows best; he does what he does not simply to do his best for his nation, but in the name of the nation itself, in the name of what the nation would be doing itself if only it had attained to this level of historical understanding. That is the great perversion which the positive notion of liberty has been liable to: whether the tyranny issues from a Marxist

leader, a king, a Fascist dictator, the masters of an authoritarian Church or class or State, it seeks for the imprisoned, "real" self within men, and "liberates" it, so that this self can attain to the level of those who give the orders.

This goes back to the naïve notion that there is only one true answer to every question: if I know the true answer and you do not, and you disagree with me, it is because you are ignorant; if you seek to disobey me, this can be so only because you are wrong, because the truth has not been revealed to you as it has been to me. This justifies some of the most frightful forms of oppression and enslavement in human history, and it is truly the most dangerous, and in our century in particular, the most violent, interpretation of the notion of positive liberty. (See "The Power of Ideas", pp. 17 and 18).

Berlin indicates that this attitude leads to idol worship and a form of sacrifice as follows:

Someone once remarked that in the old days men and women were brought as sacrifices to a variety of gods; for these, the modern age has substituted new idols: -isms. To cause pain, to kill, to torture are in general rightly condemned; but if these things are done not for my personal benefit but for an -ism - socialism, nationalism, Fascism, Communism, fanatically held religious belief, or progress, or the fulfillment of the laws of history - then they are in order. Most revolutionaries believe, covertly or overtly, that in order to create the ideal world eggs must be broken, or otherwise one cannot obtain the omelette. Eggs are certainly broken - never more violently or ubiquitously than in our times - but the omelette is far to seek, it recedes into the infinite distance. That is one of the corollaries of unbridled monism, as I call it - some call it fanaticism, but monism is at the root of every extremism. ("See "The Power of Ideas", page 14)

And so we are back to monism. That "naïve notion", as Berlin put it, "that there is only one true answer to every question". This was, and in my view continues to be, the main problem with both Mormonism and literalist religion in general.

Mormon leaders are, in my view, classic philosopher kings. Here is what historian Michael Quinn has to say about Joseph Smith in this regard:

Smith remained aloof from civil office, but in November 1835 he announced a doctrine I call 'theocratic ethics'. He used this theology to justify his violation of Ohio's marriage laws by performing a marriage for Newel Knight and the undivorced Lydia Goldthwaithe without legal authority to do so... In addition to the bigamous character of this marriage, Smith had no license to perform marriages in Ohio. "

Although that was the first statement of this concept, Smith and his associates put that theology into practice long before 1835, and long after. Two months later Smith performed marriage ceremonies for which neither he nor the couples had marriage licenses, and he issued marriage certificates "agreeable to the rules and regulations of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." Theocratic ethics justified LDS leaders and (by extension) regular Mormons in actions which were contrary to conventional ethics and sometimes in violation of criminal laws.

This ethical independence is essential for understanding certain seemingly inconsistent manifestations in Mormonism. Some had already occurred - reversals in doctrine and divinely revealed procedures, and the publication of unannounced changes in written

revelations and historical texts. The Knight marriage was a public example of Joseph Smith's violation of laws and cultural norms regarding marriage and sexual behavior - the performance of civil marriages by legally unauthorized officiators, monogamous marriage ceremonies in which one or both partners were undivorced from legal spouses, polygamous marriage of a man with more than one living wife, his marriage proposals to females as young as twelve, his sexual relationships with polygamous wives as young as fourteen, polyandry of women with more than one husband, marriage and cohabitation with foster daughters, and Mormon marriages of first cousins, brother-sister, and uncle-niece. Other manifestations of Mormonism's theocratic ethics would soon begin in Kirkland and continue intermittently for decades - the official denials of actual events, the alternating condemnation and tolerance for counterfeiting and stealing from non-Mormons, threats and physical attacks against dissenters or other alleged enemies, the killing and castration of sex offenders, the killing of anti-Mormons, the bribery of government officials, and business ethics at odds with church standards. (See Michael Quinn, "The Mormon Hierarchy – Origins of Power", p. 88).

The philosopher king nature of Mormon leaders is explored in depth at <http://home.mccue.cc:10000/bob/documents/rs.should%20i%20join1004226v2.pdf> starting at page 5, and at <http://home.mccue.cc:10000/bob/documents/rs.the%20mormon%20concept%20of%20freedom.pdf> and <http://home.mccue.cc:10000/bob/documents/rs.religious%20faith%20-%20enlightening%20or%20blinding.pdf>

Monism and Intellectual Monopoly

Joseph Smith came along shortly after the Enlightenment. He was a monist – there was one "true" way to live as far as he was concerned. He persuaded a few people that God's stamp of approval was on his particular brand of monism. Then he died, and Brigham Young took those Mormons who would come with him to Utah, where in isolation he was able to forge the cultural and mental walls that still exist today and make Mormonism the relatively cohesive group that it is. Many who study religion say that without such a period of isolation and the mental monopoly it provides that it is very unlikely that a new religion will reach critical mass.

The primary purpose of erecting the kind of social and mental walls Mormonism does is to impede any changes that threaten the power of those who lead the group. This manifests itself as an extreme form of conservatism in most cases. So, Smith showed up when the social pendulum was swinging in the monist direction as a result of people like Rousseau, incorporated monist ideas into his religious ideology, and then put God's stamp of approval on it which by the time Young got through with things, created a durable culture that to this day has resisted the pluralizing forces that have changed much of society around it. Mormonism, hence, continues to be an island of 19th century monism in an increasingly pluralistic world.

Pluralism

Pluralism is an outgrowth of the empowerment of the common man that has been caused by the invention of the printing press, democracy, and more recently the Internet. Pluralism has been defined as follows:

'Pluralism' is a broad term, applicable to any doctrine which maintains that there are ultimately many things, or many kinds of thing; in both these senses it is opposed to 'monism'. Its commonest use in late twentieth-century philosophy is to describe views

which recognize many sets of equally correct beliefs or evaluative standards; and in this sense it is akin to 'relativism'. Societies are sometimes called 'pluralistic', meaning that they incorporate a variety of ways of life, moral standards and religions; one who sees this not as undesirable confusion but a proper state of things, espouses pluralism. (Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, p.683)

Berlin traces the origins of pluralism back to the 1700s and Italian thinker Giambattista Vico (See "The Power of Ideas", pp. 7, 8). His eclectic writings were the first Berlin found that attempted to place the human beings of different times in their social context, and to use that to explain their differing behaviours. And he came to the shocking conclusion that not only was their behaviour different, but so also were the questions they asked, what they valued, what they hoped for, etc. In short, they lived in a very different world than he did. And thus the idea of "culture" was born.

This idea developed up to the "romantic" period (late 1700s to mid-1800s), and in Germany in particular, yielded new concepts. As Berlin puts it, something new and disturbing emerged, the idea that:

... ideals were not objective truths written in heaven and needing to be understood, copied, practised by men; but that they were created by men. Values were not found, but made; not discovered, but generated – that is what some of the German romantics certainly believed, as against the objectivist, universalising tendency of the superficial French. Uniqueness mattered. ("The Power of Ideas", pp. 9, 10)

The collapse of the idea of universal values is resisted by all those whose power depended on it, such as literalist religions including Mormonism, and used by others to create new power bases. For example, the idea of the State, or Church, as the creator of self-justifying values that overrode all others led to the commission of atrocities and caused some of the worst chapters in modern history. This, ironically, led to the even greater loss of individual identity and agency to a group organism of some kind, while the collapse of universal values more generally led to a kind of individualistic pluralism that is somewhere between common and dominant throughout most of contemporary western democratic culture.

To understand how pluralism works today, lets start at relativism and work back toward something that most people regard as more useful. Extreme relativists are those who say that there is no way to distinguish between one way of doing things and other that makes any sense. A relativist might say, "You like to kill people in concentration camps, and I like democracies - those are just two points of view, neither better nor worse than the other. Just different."

Berlin says that his brand of pluralism differs from relativism because his theory is based on the fact, in his view, that there is a range of values that seem to recur over and over again throughout human history. He says that these values are part of our nature; part of what we have inherited as a result of the evolutionary process that gave us our biology. Hence, these values are more "real" or more justifiable than others, and deserve both special status and protection.

My approach is somewhat different, but I reach a conclusion similar to Berlin's. In my view, there is no one "right" or "true" way to live. Each group of people and each individual, consciously or not, forms or inherits values. I agree with Berlin that some are more common than others and likely for the reason he indicates. People more or less effectively take action to maintain or bring into being what they value. There are laws of cause and effect that apply in this regard, and we don't fully understand how these work. But nonetheless, such laws determine whether the

actions taken are effective to bring into being what is valued. As conditions change, different types of values and the individual and community conduct they elicit seem more effective than others in building and sustaining human communities. Consider in that regard the many decades long experiment that pitted capitalism/democracy against communism in a competitive ideological battle. The early returns seem to indicate that capitalism/democracy won that one. Communism so far has not produced the goods and services the people wanted as effectively as did capitalism/democracy, and eventually communications technology etc. spread that message to the point that communist regimes worldwide are collapsing or changing to more capitalist, democratic models.

The basic value of modern pluralistic societies is the equality (in one or more senses – and there is lots of room for debate as to how this works) of each individual human being. Once this model has been adopted, things like Kant's categorical imperative (kind of like the golden rule) are good, and concentration camps are bad. So, we have created a basis on which to say that some things are "bad" and others "good". But among the many ways of doing things that are arguably "good" from one point of view or another in the "all humans are equal" ball park, no one has found a way yet to make a case that will be generally persuasive that any one of them is "the" way all people during all times should live and hence that such is "the true" or "the best" way to live. Hence, we arrive at pluralistic position.

As pluralists, we can debate the merits of different ways of living based on what we value, and the merits of what we value on the basis of the way of life they seem to produce. This seemingly circular process slowly causes values to change, and we are learning more as time passes about how effective various ways of acting are relative to bringing into being what we value.

For example, we are seeing an increasingly regular stream of books like Sam Harris' recent "The End of Faith - Religion, Terror and the Future of Reason", Karen Armstrong's "The Battle for God", Harold Bloom's "The Lucifer Principle" that argue that religious faith causes much more trouble than it is worth, and on our increasingly small, crowded planet where individuals can use things like nuclear warheads and anthrax to wreak mass havoc, that we can no longer afford to simply laugh about those naive people who think God tells them what to do. Those people are, in effect, under the control of other people or an irrational group dynamic that cannot be expected to value life and other things we value in a rational way. Hence, many argue that more resources should be allocated to the task of breaking the back of the remaining large monist groups, such as literal religionists of all stripes.

This entire process just noted is understandable in my view through an evolutionary paradigm. What worked in one stage of human cultural evolution does not work in another. What works in one place given its cultural baggage does not work in another at the same time due to different conditions. Etc. Daniel Dennett's "Freedom Evolves" has some great ideas in this regard, as does Paul Ehrlich's "Human Natures".

For example, the recent movie "Hero" depicts the classic Chinese myth of which Lao-tzu spoke when he said that if the Emperor fell so would the sky. That is, strong leadership concentrated in the person of a wise emperor is essential to restrain chaos. And, the powerful individuals within society who have the ability to overturn the Emperor should not do so. They should sacrifice themselves and their power for the good of the community. Harmony is the dominant value. This myth dominated the west for much of its history too. And, it is at its root a monist myth.

For much of human history, I think there is reasonable argument to be made that this myth was correct. Until a group of people is prepared with things like education, a functioning legal system

that reflects social mores, etc. they are not likely to be able to handle the kind of freedom democracy and a market economy requires be handled (See Thomas Friedman, "The Lexus and the Olive Tree" in this regard). The recent experience of the former USSR testifies to this. Too much power was pushed into an undeveloped grid, and it overloaded, stopped functioning and left a power vacuum. Nature abhors a vacuum, so the criminal element quickly stepped in, resulting in a "kleptocracy" instead of a "democracy".

At the other end of the spectrum, we have the modern western myth captured by the movie trilogy, "The Matrix". That is, individual freedom and agency are the only safe foundation on which to build society because power corrupts, and those who corrupted persons who wield power tend to enslave their fellows. The individuals who were depicted in The Matrix as laying unconscious in their vats to provide energy for the machine city had a stable life, and a life that was not worth living. So, individuals must be encouraged to rise up against the dominant powers in their environment - to create chaos. Those who exercise dominant power should not be trusted - they are likely corrupt. Things are likely not as they appear. However, individuals have the power to break through and find "reality", or at least more reality than they had access to while in their vats. Layer after layer of unreality continues to be peeled away as more "good" choices (as defined by the freedom seeking individuals) are made. And no one - not even the wisest of all - can see the path ahead in more than a hazy way.

As people find new aspects of reality, they should continue to exercise their right to make their own choices based on what they value. As they learn more, their values themselves will evolve. And by the exercise of choice, they can bring what they value from time to time into being.

In the myth at The Matrix's core, nothing explicit is said of a "right" way of doing things. There are, however, a number of ways of doing things that are "bad" because they restrain individual choice and development. That is the value underlying western society - the primacy of individual choice and development based on the principle of human equality. And, given the more long term stable base that western style democracies seem to provide, more chaos seems to be possible within groups that use this system than is the case elsewhere without toppling the system - kind of like a more robust power grid can handle more voltage, making it possible for all those plugged into the grid to do more. This is a fascinating paradox - more conflict produces more stability. Conflict at lower organization levels leads to stability at higher levels. The analogy to biology is hard to resist here. Our bodies operate on the basis of a complex system of lower order conflict of which we are unaware. Our strength is forged by this conflict. We hence eliminate conflict at our peril, as we have done to some extent by overusing antibiotics. Peace, in a very real sense, only comes to our bodies on death. Perhaps to wish for perfect peace is not as wise as it seems. Relative peace, however, is a wonderful thing.

Within the relatively chaotic environment encouraged by pluralistic societies, more individual growth is possible, and this tends to cause a positive spiral of ideas, inventions, etc. that has made western democracies the richest in human history by a number of measures. By other measures it is poorer than many of its predecessors. How you measure depends on what you value. And this approach is decidedly pluralistic in orientation.

What will happen next? Who knows. Perhaps the pendulum will swing too far toward individual freedom, the sky will fall and mankind will take steps back toward autocratic systems of a monistic sort. "Hero" reminds the Chinese people of their harmonic heritage, and warns them against going down the path toward individualistic chaos. In my view, on that side of the Earth the pendulum is just starting to swing in the direction of individual choice and has a long, long way to go before it will likely cause trouble, as long as it does not swing too quickly. That will be

one of the major stories played out during the remainder of my life - the democratization of China, and in lock step, the Chinese increasing domination of international trade and commerce.

At the intellectual end of Mormonism, the same argument is sometimes made – "we need to move slowly from a monistic to a pluralistic position". And so, it would not surprise me to eventually learn that discussions along these lines have been held in the highest Mormon counsels for a long time. In my view, there is no excuse for delay on this front as far as Mormonism is concerned. Mormons are already prepared with infrastructure necessary to handle pluralism, and many Mormons are pluralistic in their thinking in some ways already.

The late member of the Mormon First Presidency and legendary Canadian politician and businessman Eldon Tanner is said to have once asked a visitor, "What do you get when you cross J. Golden Kimball with Spencer W. Kimball?" Upon not receiving a reply, Tanner said, "DO IT! DAMN IT!" I commend that advice to the current leaders of the Mormon Church.

And for the uninitiated, I note that J. Golden was notorious for being the only Mormon General Authority (high ranking leader) to use four letter language from the pulpit and otherwise, and his relative, Mormon prophet Spencer Kimball, was well known for the use of his favorite saying, "Do It!".

How to Use Logic to Trump Reality and so Remain Monist in a Pluralistic World

How Monist Are Most Mormons?

It is a challenge for well educated people, as many Mormons are, to remain monists in a pluralistic world. In fact, many Mormons are not really monists, but would describe themselves using monist language. For example, a family member recently told me that she has never believed that Mormonism was "true" for everyone. Rather, she believed it was "true" for her and other beliefs were "true" for other people. From her point of view, Mormon missionary work was an effort to see if Mormonism was "true" for other people. In some cases it is, and in others not. That is, she was a pluralist.

Our conversation became interesting when I pointed out to her the many Mormon scriptural passages and statements made by Mormon prophets that clearly indicate that Mormonism is the "one true church of God on Earth"; that it is the only organization authorized by God; that the only way to salvation is through Mormonism; etc. After some puzzled reflection, she acknowledged that she had never really thought through the implications of those statements, and that they were inconsistent with what she had believed throughout her entire, very faithful, Mormon life during which she had borne testimony numerous times that she knew that "the Church was true".

As people throughout the world continue to become more aware of how others live, what they believe, etc. pluralistic attitudes such as the one just expressed will become more common within monist cultures such as Mormonism. However, at this point, it is my observation that the vast majority of believing Mormons are not sufficiently aware of other cultures to have developed pluralistic views. They are still monists. Their belief in this regard makes them incline toward obedience to those who lead the Mormon Church. Those leaders will do what they can to preserve their influence, and those who follow will do what they can to remain in the comfortable, secure feeling place in which they have always been. One of the tools I see

misused time and again in this regard is logic. This is not surprising since science and logic are the main paradigms through which Westerners in general perceive reality.

Logic is a tool for organizing thought. As is the case with most tools, it can be used for positive and negative purposes. We will first take a quick look at what logic is, how the simplest forms of logic work, and then apply logic to examine how Mormons deal with the monist v. pluralist issue.

"Formal" v. "Empirical" Systems

The philosopher Hume distinguished between the information produced by "formal" systems such as math or logic, and the "empirical" (based on testing and evidence) study of the real world. Empirical study can do no better than help us understand how probable our interpretation of an aspect of reality seems based on the evidence we have gathered and the theories that we believe help us to accurately interpret that evidence. Formal systems, on the other hand, can produce certainty. And people often mistakenly think that the certainty produced by a formal system means that we can be certain about the nature of reality. We are going to explore how and why this mistake is made.

Formal systems (See <http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/formal%20system>) are based on a precise type of language (such as mathematics) called "formal language" and are used for a variety of purposes, including to describe and model the functioning of real or artificial systems.

A formal system can be designed to produce certainty ($2 + 2 = 4$, every time), but is not capable of telling us anything (let alone anything certain) about the real world unless it is used to model something from the real world and so uses data derived from the real world.

A formal system is like the video camera, film editing system, sound mixing system etc. whereas the real world provides the images and sounds that this equipment records and processes. If we want to understand the real world, we must start with images, sounds etc. from it. And, in the end our ability to describe and understand reality is limited by the quality of our data as recorded and processed by our equipment, whether it be the camera and film we use, a language like English or mathematics, the powerful but in many ways unreliable equipment between our ears, etc. For example, we will not be able to understand much about New York if all we have is film footage or memories from Calgary, no matter how good our equipment is.

So, formal systems are used to describe and analyse the data we have collected, in our almost invariably imprecise ways, as we attempt to describe some aspect of reality. In this way, for example, Newtonian calculus can be used to describe the data we have gathered regarding the motion of the planets in our solar system. In some cases the probability that our interpretation of the data we have gathered is correct seems very high. For example, there is a very high probability that if I stick my hand into what looks like fire and leave it there, that I will feel pain as a result of the process of combustion.

History shows that we are likely to be better off if we make decisions based on what seem to be the most accurate description of reality provided by the various formal systems science uses to record, describe and analyse data about reality. That is why, for example, those of us who have access to western medicine use it instead of, or in addition to, the various forms of naturopathy that are also available. Many use both, but few use only naturopathic remedies.

Formal systems like mathematics or languages are a kind of technology. They are the creation of men, just as is a video camera. And it makes no sense to try to test the "truth" of an image generated randomly by a computer connected to a video screen by checking it against any image from the real world. These images are "incommensurate" – not relevant to each other.

However, often the precision and certainty with which a description of the real world can be repeated or manipulated by a formal system causes people to assume that this certainty applies also to the nature of the thing described. That is, all of our formal systems are based on assumptions about reality and as long as the formal system does what we think it should, this supports our assumption that reality is as the formal systems assumes it to be.

Logic in Formal and Empirical Settings

We use logic consciously and unconsciously all day every day. There are two kinds of logic that are important to this discussion – deductive and inductive.

Deductive logic in formal systems can be used to produce certainty. A proposition is either deductively logical or not. $2 + 2 = 4$, and not 3. However, as noted above, when logic is used in an empirical or scientific setting, it loses its certainty. In that case, deductive logic still works from premises to conclusions, but loses its certainty. For example, an science experiment structured deductively would work from a general theory, to a testable hypothesis, to observations made during testing that either support, or not, the hypothesis. At the end of a deductive process we get an answer that disproves a hypothesis to one degree of probability or another, or alternatively, provides evidence that supports it as an accurate representation of reality to one degree of probability or another. We never get certainty, but by narrowing the questions to be answered by deductively experiments, the perceived level of probability is often quite high. For example, experiments could be designed to deductively test the hypothesis that the Earth is more or less round. The consistency of the evidence produced by these experiments would strongly support that hypothesis.

Inductive reasoning works the other way around, moving from specific observations to broader generalizations and theories. It is more obviously probabilistic in nature. It cannot definitively prove or disprove anything. The best it can do is say, "We have observed A, B and C in D circumstances, and hence on the basis of X theory it appears probable that Y would be observed Z circumstances". And the degree of probability would often be expressed. For example:

"We have observed that when Shaquille O'Neal plays against Tim Duncan he averages 18 points per game. However, Shaquille has just moved to a new team and will now get the ball a lot more. On the other hand, his new team is not as strong as his old team, and this means that Duncan should get more help on defence. But that should not be enough to stop Shaq. All in, we think that Shaquille will score on average 25 points a game against Duncan this season, as long as neither of them is injured or something unexpected happens."

Or:

"We have observed that in North America during the past twenty years two of every three Mormons who are baptized as adults stop attending Mormon meetings within a five year period of time, and in Central and South America eight of every ten do the same. We have not done the same research for Asia, but infer that it will be somewhere in the

neighborhood of these two numbers, and suggest that it is likely to resemble the Latin American numbers more than the North American ones because the infrastructure supporting Mormons in North America is so much stronger than in either Latin America or Asia."

We naturally think in terms of probabilities. We do this before deciding to cross the road (how close is that car?); before eating left overs out of the fridge (when was this put in here and how fast does bacteria grow in refrigerators?) etc.

Inductive reasoning, by its very nature, is more open-ended and exploratory, and therefore more helpful especially at the beginning of any complex research project. Deductive reasoning is narrower in nature and is concerned with testing or confirming hypotheses, and often in social sciences research follows inductive reasoning, on the basis of which a theory or sub-theory has been developed. Deductive reasoning is therefore often used to refine theories that were developed using inductive reasoning. Both approaches are useful in their way, and are part of the scientific method.

How Logic Works

As noted above, logic is a formal system, the fact that something is "logical" does not make it real, and people regularly are tricked into thinking something is real because it seems logical.

Deductive logic works from "premises" to "conclusions". If the premises are correct, the conclusion must be correct. Premises, hence, are the assertions that provide the foundation for a theory. Once the premises are understood, a conclusion can be drawn from them. In the examples that follow, "P" stands for "premise" and "C" for conclusion. Here are a couple of simple examples of how logic works:

P: $A = B$

P: $B = C$

C: Therefore, $A = C$

Or:

P: A is a subset of B

P: B is a subset of C

C: Therefore, A is a subset of C.

A theory expressed in the form of an argument can be shown to be faulty by proving that one of its premises is incorrect. Where the premises are not based on reality there is no way to test them except against their own definitions, which in most common cases (such as with mathematics) are designed to be as precise and easy to use as possible. An argument might also be shown to be faulty if its conclusion is not required as long as its premises are true. The two examples above demonstrate how this works. In each case, we assume that the rules of the system require the conclusion to be correct if the premises are true.

Let's consider another form of the simple logic similar to what was just outlined that brings logic to bear on the real or empirical (measurable) world.

P: All Canadians are humans.

P: All humans are mammals.

C: Therefore, all Canadians are mammals.

As noted above, to prove this argument is invalid we can show with that one or more of the premises are incorrect, or that the conclusion does not flow from the premises. But, rather than consulting a manmade system of definitions that are usually certain and easy to work with, we are now faced with three things – (1) reality; (2) a manmade system of classification for various data based on what has been observed about reality; and (3) the application of another manmade theory – set theory – to the data in question.

Evidence might be brought, for example, to show that some Canadians are androids or otherwise subhuman as each of those terms is defined. I am Canadian, and we have often wondered about some of our politicians and lawyers in this regard. Or, maybe there are people who believe that there is a subcategory within what is considered "human" that is not "mammalian". If so, we might need to debate the merits of that position. However, if these premises are true, and the axioms (rules) of set theory are accepted as a reflection of reality, then the conclusion must be true. And when we look closely at the rules of set theory, we find more premises and they too must be examined, but are highly probable to be accepted. On the whole, most people would accept that the premises that underpin the above argument are almost certainly correct, and that the conclusion is required if the premises are true. So, we have used a combination of logic and empirical evidence to describe an aspect of reality – that all Canadians are mammals.

I note that when testing the reasonableness of premises we often use inductive reasoning. That is, we will weigh the evidence produced by observations and use them to determine on a probabilistic basis how likely it is that a given state is "real", a given event occurred, etc. For example, did Joseph Smith marry and have sex with women who were at the time married to other men? We have journals kept by various women, official records of the Mormon Church, private letters, Smith's own records etc. all of which indicate that he did marry women who were married to other men. However, it is still possible that all of this was either mistaken or forged. That probability is tiny, given the nature of this evidence. But it is still there.

Did Smith have sex with these women. There is less evidence on this point. However, the Mormon Church collected affidavits from some of the women in question that indicate he did have sex with them. Other women indicated to third parties that he did. So the probability that he had sex with some women who were married to other men is also quite high, but not as high as he married them. And in some cases there is no evidence that he had sex with particular women.

Smith's pattern of behaviour suggests that he probably had sex with most of his wives, but absent evidence of the type described above that he had sex with a particular women, we should acknowledge that the probability of this having occurred in her case is lower than in some others. The case of most interest is that of Helen Marr Kimball who was 14 years old when Smith married her. The probability that he had sex with her is lower than that of many of his other wives because of her age, the circumstances under which they married, and other

factors. That being said, I still put the probability at over 50% on the basis of everything else I have read about Smith's sexual practices, including the fact that it is highly probable that he had sex with 16 year old Fanny Alger. Smith's wife Emma recorded having caught him in the act in that case, and there is ample other evidence to support this conclusion.

The Evolution of Formal Systems that Describe the Reality of the Universe

Let's move to some less salacious examples of how the logic used in formal systems of one kind or another have been used to model reality, and how the functioning of a formal system sometimes causes the theory to be mistaken for reality.

The story of how we came, by small steps, to our current understanding of the cosmos illustrates a number of important things about how knowledge is created through the use of formal systems that model reality, and how reliable and at times misleading such knowledge can be (See <http://csep10.phys.utk.edu/astr161/lect/retrograde/aristotle.html> and <http://nineplanets.org/psc/theman.html>).

During most of human history it appears that the Earth was believed to be flat. Based on observations made with the naked eye, that was a reasonable theory. Eventually that theory was rejected and another theory more consistent with what had been observed by watching the stars was adopted – that the earth was round. In about 500 B.C., Pythagoras hypothesized that the Earth was round after observing that the height of stars was different at different locations on Earth, and noticing how approaching ships' masts appeared before the rest of the ship. In 300 B.C., Aristotle noticed that the Earth cast a rounded shadow on the Moon during lunar eclipses. And as noted above, in 150 A.D. Ptolemy worked out a theory of how the solar system worked, and used it to create maps that were curved, indicating his acceptance of the idea of a round Earth. He was also the first to use lines of latitude on maps in order to make locations easier to describe. (See <http://www.studyofplace.com/ModuleContent/CartographyReading.html>)

Ptolemy was a mathematical genius. His system for predicting the positions of the stars in the sky was both accurate, and consistent with the Greek notion that the Earth was at the centre of the Universe. He revolutionized navigation and mapmaking. When the maps he made were lost, it set mapmaking in Europe back over 1,000 years (See <http://www.studyofplace.com/ModuleContent/CartographyReading.html>). And although the predictions his theory yielded were accurate to a degree, and hence valuable, the theory itself was false and helped to persuade over a millennia of humans beings to accept many erroneous notions respecting the nature of God and other aspects of a supposed reality that became associated with this theory.

Ptolemy's formal system took input from the real world in the form of data about the observed position of the stars from different points on Earth and reprocessed that information to create maps and other information that proved to be a more or less accurate representation of reality. This was the result, it now appears, of a number of offsetting errors that Ptolemy had included in his model of the Cosmos. These were likely the result of trial and error. For example, since certain trade routes were already known, it would have been possible for Ptolemy or others to make observations of stellar positions as they followed those trade routes, and then work backwards to a system that would correlate the known routes (and hence known movements of men on land) with the changing pattern of the stars in the sky. Once that had been done, the same correlative pattern could be used in reverse to use the location of stars in the sky to navigate and make maps.

As must noted, Ptolemy's system explained planetary movements with remarkable accuracy despite the fact that Ptolemy assumed the Earth to be at the centre of the solar system. Countless observations confirmed his theory for well over a thousand years. Then Copernicus came along. His theory was that the Sun is the central point of the solar system, and that the Sun, planets and stars are vast distances away from each other instead of moving on crystal spheres a few miles above the Earth, as Ptolemy's theory assumed.

Interestingly, Copernicus' theory did not overturn Ptolemy's. In fact, Copernicus' original calculations produced results that did not predict planetary movement as well as Ptolemy's system did. Therefore, despite the fact that Copernicus' system is now considered to be a much more accurate representation of reality than Ptolemy's, the reliability of Ptolemy's system caused it to continue to be accepted. In this regard as in many others, it is results that count. Something that is theoretically more correct but produces inferior results when compared to what is already available will not usually sell. This, in my view, explains why many Mormons are unlikely to leave Mormonism despite an intellectual understanding that the theory that underlies Mormonism is false. Their lives have been defined in such a way that anything that requires change away from the routine of Mormonism will produce inferior results from their point of view.

Copernicus had missed a crucial point: that planetary orbits are not circles, but rather are ellipses causing the planets to move faster when they are closer to the Sun than when farther away. Kepler discovered this, and when his three "laws" were added to Copernicus' theory it produced significantly more accurate predictions of planetary positions than Ptolemy. This cast doubt on Ptolemy's theory, but there were still many aspects of Copernicus' by then substantially modified theory that did not seem to make sense. For instance, Copernicus' theory implied that there are vast areas of absolutely empty space. Scientists did not accept this as a reasonable possibility. Also, Copernicus' indicated that the Earth is travelling through space at thousands of miles per second as well as rotating at high speed, without being able to explain why we do not feel this motion or even why we can remain on the Earth's surface. Only later did Galileo and others discover the laws that explain these things.

The climax came with Newton, who reduced the whole system to two or three remarkably elegant laws, all operating under a powerful mathematics called "calculus" that is itself a formal system, or language, capable of precisely describing many things about how our physical world works. Newton's extremely accurate predictions of planetary and other orbits convinced most of the scientific world that his theory was correct. This finally falsified Ptolemy's theory. Much of science's objective for the next three centuries was to work out the details of Newton's system. Meanwhile, the Catholic Church and even some of the Protestant churches fought the information this revolution produced and the radical way in which it changed man's view of himself, while contradicting the clear scriptural indication of a geocentric universe. For example, Copernicus and Galileo's work were both listed on the Catholic Church's "Index" of prohibited books until 1825.

Then Einstein came along and showed that Newton's laws suffered from the same trouble as Ptolemy's had in a sense – they both produced relatively accurate data based on a misunderstanding of how reality worked (See <http://csep10.phys.utk.edu/astr161/lect/history/einstein.html>). That being said, Newton's laws worked to predict the functioning of the relevant portions of reality under most of the conditions we usually experience (for example, when gravitational forces are weak) but in many other cases, they broke down. Einstein's laws of general and special relatively explained these other

cases. In a sense, Newton's laws were a good approximation – a rule of thumb – that worked for most practical purposes quite well. And Einstein had finally "nailed" reality.

Or did he? Einstein seemed to get his comeuppance when quantum theory came along and explained the subatomic work in a way his theories could not. Again, this was not a case of one theory completely superceding another (as happened when Newton caused Ptolemy's theory to be discarded) but rather a case of one theory being shown to be an approximation of reality that only held . But this time Einstein's theories were seen as approximations of reality that could not explain what happened in the quantum world. Einstein spent the last years of his career in relative isolation from the rest of the scientific community trying to explain the data that quantum theory was used to explain on the basis of principles that were consistent with this theories of relativity. He was not able to do that. And, there are some scientists who now think he may have been on the right track (See Scientific American Special Edition, September 2004 - Beyond Einstein, "Was Einstein Right" by George Musser, pp. 89 - 91).

The pattern just described is one repeated endlessly throughout the history of science. Observations of some aspect of reality are made. A theory is developed that explains those observations. New observations are gathered usually because mankind's technical ability to gather data has increased. That is, new and bigger telescopes or more powerful microscopes or particle accelerators are developed, and the new data cannot be explained by the old theories. Sometimes the new theories refine the old ones, as Einstein did to Newton. Other times there are fundamental conflicts between theories, as was the case between Ptolemy and Newton. And generally speaking, we find that if a theory works to produce information that is consistent with mankind's experience of reality (maps that work, for example), the theory will be accepted as accurately depicting reality. It generally takes the introduction of evidence – data – that the theory cannot explain to cause a re-evaluation of the theory. And even then, this re-evaluation will take a long time as shown by how persistent Ptolemy's theory was in the face of powerfully disconfirming evidence. Thomas Kuhn, the great philosopher of science, referred to this phenomenon when he said that science progresses "one funeral at a time". Even those most objective of all men – scientists – have a great deal of difficulty letting go of ideas with which they have become comfortable, without any more justification than that.

Other More Mundane Examples of Formal Systems

What if while recording a rock concert a problem occurred with the sound system and for a few moments a radio station overrode the concert on the recording, the fact that the recording could be repeated endlessly with the same result would not change the fact that what was on the recording did not match the reality of the event that was being recorded. That is, the "equipment" was tricked by the data it was attempting to record, and so did not accurately describe part of reality. That data could be replayed, fine tuned, processed, enhanced etc. and nothing could restore the "reality" of the rock concert that had not been recorded. A formal system is not capable of telling us anything about reality

Or what if a radio was hooked up to a recording device that picked up two channels while scanning the airwaves in search of a Pink Floyd concert. One of the channels it simultaneously accessed was broadcasting a rooster crowing and the other an auto race, with the resulting sound being a dead ringer for part of the Pink Floyd concert in question. And then the rooster faded out, seeming to replace "Pink Floyd" with an auto race. That is, some errors in the data we record offset each other so as to produce a confusing impression as to the reality recorded. And new religions have been started on the basis of not much more than what I just indicated. See <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/7.11/persinger.html> for a description of some theories

that explain things of this sort, including Joseph Smith's revelations, on the basis of electromagnetic disturbances and the sensitivity some people have to them. I do not buy this theory, but it has a lot more going for it than many of its alternatives.

Because this is such an important point, and I struggled for a long time to grasp it, and I going to provide a few more illustrations of the difference between reality and manmade devices that area used to and process data about reality. Written languages are a form of manmade technology that record words. Languages do not need to be written to be effective. While I was in Peru I learned some Quechua, the Inca language. It did not become a written language until well after the Spanish arrived in the Americas. A spoken word is a sound made by the human vocal chords as they move and create waves in the air that impact the human ear so as to register what we perceive as sound. The physical phenomenon that is the sound of a spoken word can be measured and recorded in many ways. One way is to code the various sounds that register in the ear of another human in a certain agreed upon fashion so that others who are familiar with the same coding system can look at it and understand something about the nature of the sound the written word represents.

While I lived in South America I learned Spanish. Later, I learned Russian. Both are Latin based languages. However, Russian uses the Cyrillic alphabet and those unfamiliar with that alphabet would likely assume that Russian had nothing in common with a language like Spanish. Nonetheless, many Spanish and Russian words are pronounced in almost exactly the same way. For example, the Spanish words "director" and "musica", the meaning of which most English speakers can guess, have Russian equivalents that are pronounced in close to the same fashion and mean the almost the same thing. However, the Cyrillic alphabet makes this hard to see. That alphabet and the language it is used to create use different symbols to represent the same thing as Spanish does using the letters noted above. The reality (the sound made in each language) is the same; the symbols are different. The fact that the symbols are different does not change the reality of the sound they represent.

Let's go down another level. The sound that comes out of our mouths when we utter a word represents an idea we have in our head. So the spoken word in addition to being a physical thing (sound waves in the air) is an abstract concept. In that sense it is like a word written on a page. It has both physical and abstract dimensions. In its abstract dimension it is a symbol – it means something. Its meaning is defined (with more or less precision) by the language of which it is a part. That language is another form of human technology. It is not reality; it is an attempt to describe reality. So, when we talk about something we saw last week we use a host of technologies. Our eyes and ears received sensory input from our environment. Our brain imprecisely recorded it, and can imprecisely recreate it. And we can verbalize ideas about that recollection, using a language to symbolize what is I our head in a fashion that other humans can imprecisely understand.

As we manipulate the data in our heads about the reality that occurred last week, or transmit that data in one form or another to other people, we are not affecting that reality. It was whatever it was. All we are doing it processing, reprocessing etc. data about that reality.

The slippery concept is all of this is that logic itself is a technology. It is used to describe reality, but is not necessarily a feature of reality.

The \$64 dollar question regarding each system that is presented to us as a means of understanding reality is the extent to which it is rooted in data from the real world, and how well the various formal systems it uses describe that data. Monist systems almost invariably relying

heavily on a formal theories of one kind or another, and create certainty by heavily discouraging the questioning of premises. That is, monist systems are more rooted in the rules of the formal systems they use than in the exploration of the reality those formal systems purport to describe. And once we make the initial assumptions the system asks us to make, it often seems perfectly "logical" from that point forward, as long as the assumptions themselves are not questioned and we don't detect the circular logic (a conclusion that merely repeats one or more premises in a different form) that is often used. The use of circular logic is discussed below.

The easiest way to tell whether we are being presented with a formal system used to protect a monist worldview is to ask if the system offers certain conclusions (formal systems do while empirical or scientific systems do not) and whether it is based on premises that are testable using the scientific method or premises that are non-scientific and hence cannot be disproved.

Any theory of reality that seems to lead logically to something the people desperately want and that cannot be disproven is the classic platform for a dogmatic, monist ideology. For example, "Our nation is destined to take over the world!"; "You will all live a wonderful life after death!"; or "Christ is about to return to the Earth, has selected your people as His people, and has an important role to you to play in His Kingdom!" He whose role is perceived to be required by the idea (the prophet; the Führer; etc.) in this system has enormous power. And, if he can create a theory of reality ("I have received a revelation! Follow me!") that includes a role tailor made for him, life will be grand for him as long as he can persuade enough people that his theory is reality. To do this, the supernatural is generally relied upon, and as many human witnesses as possible to the supernatural are mustered. It has been demonstrated that this is not hard to do. There are countless seemingly credible people lover the ages who have sworn to have seen angels, saints and other heavenly visions. The testimony of early Mormons in this regard was typical of the times. And once these initial testimonies set the ball in motion, the way in which humans manufacture mythology takes care of the rest.

Finally, the philosopher king mentality described above is often used by societal leaders to justify actions that aid the creation of a mythology that will support their power. There is compelling evidence in the Moonie and Jim Jones movements, for example, that miracles were staged to help "weak" followers develop faith in what the experienced followers who helped stage the miracles "knew" was true – that Reverend Moon or Jim Jones, as the case may be, exercised God's power (See Robert Levine, "The Power of Persuasion" pp. *). And there is ample evidence in the Mormon historical record that early Mormon leaders knew that many of the things Joseph Smith said were not true, but did not expose him as a liar in order to accomplish the greater good of which they believed Mormonism was capable. They were likely also influenced by the reality that their positions within the early Mormon community depended on the continued perception that Smith was God's prophet.

In summary, history shows that we regularly make the mistake of thinking that because something seems "logical" it must be "real" or "true". And, monist religions like Mormonism encourage this kind of thinking. They discourage members from thinking about whether the premises of the logic on which their faith is based are correct by making it taboo to question these things (Did Joseph actually speak with God?; Is the Book of Mormon a real historic record?; etc.) and otherwise limiting the flow of disconfirming evidence respecting those premises to the extent possible. The more information rich and pluralistic the world becomes in general, the harder this becomes to do.

The Use of Logic and Empirical Data to Understand Reality – A Confucian Example

While in my experience, it is more often the case that arguments fail as a result of bad premises or circular reasoning, theories that are flawed for other reasons are also a frequent source of trouble. I thank Pete Walters (<http://antaoren.blogspot.com>) for the following example in this regard that I have decided to include here because of how it illustrates a theory that runs off the rails in a fashion similar to post-modern theory as it has been Shanghaied by some Mormons. My summary of that is found below.

In any event, an Eastern legend goes as follows:

Confucius met two boys who were arguing.

One said, "When the sun rises it is closer to the earth, and at midday it is farther away. I know this because it looks bigger when it rises in the morning and smaller at midday, and distance makes objects seem smaller."

The other boy disagreed furiously, insisting, "No, no! When the sun rises, it is cool, but at midday it is hot. Therefore, it must be nearer at midday because near things are warmer than distant things."

The two boys asked Confucius to settle their disagreement. But having thought for a while, Confucius could only admit, "I don't know."

The boys demanded, "Then why do they call you wise?"

Confucius replied, "Because I know that it is possible to prove anything with clever arguments."

The two boys in question presented the following arguments. One says, in effect:

P1: When the sun rises, it appears relatively large.

P2: When the sun reaches midday, it appears relatively small.

P3: Things that seem smaller are further away.

C1: Therefore, the sun is further away from us at midday than when it rises.

The second one says:

P11: The sun is a source of heat.

P22: When the sun rises the air is cool.

P33: When the sun is at midday, the air is warmer.

P44: Sources of the same amount of heat that are closer feel warmer than those that are further away.

C11: Therefore, the sun is closer to us at midday than when it rises.

While I have learned much from Confucius, I must question his wisdom in this case. Instead of attempting to break the arguments down to see where their weak points were, he indicated that anything can be proven with clever arguments and so by implication that we should ignore them all. So, is all of our reasoning in vain? I think not, and for an extended exploration of this issue by someone who holds the same view, see "Theory and Reality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Science" by Peter Godfrey-Smith.

The boys' competing arguments fail for different reasons. Some of the premises are not necessarily true, and at least in the first case, the conclusion is not required by the premises even if they are true. For example, P3 does not hold in the case of certain types of optical illusions, one of which is caused by the sun or moon being close to horizon as opposed to far from it. And C1 is not required by P1-3, since it does not take into account things like how the sun's angle affects the amount of heat it creates on the Earth's surface, and how heat is retained by air during the course of the day. So, it is possible that even if the Sun were further away at mid-day that it would still be warmer. That is, the premises do not deal with many cause and effect relationships that possibly relevant to the conclusion.

The second boy's argument is logically sound in that if the premises are true, the conclusion is required. However, P44 is likely not true because the heat felt will depend upon the nature of the medium through which it is transmitted. A heat source that separated from us by a shorter distance as well as a good insulator may well feel cooler than one that is further away and separated only by air. More to the point, it appears likely that the nature of the air that in part separates us from the Sun does change during the course of the day as a result of its retention of heat radiated earlier by the Sun.

In short, the information produced by science regarding optics, the physics of heat, the motion of the planets, etc. now allow us to be feel justified in saying that we have a high probability of being able to show each boy the fallacy of his position. In this case, Confucius would have done better to administer a lesson in logic, the principles on which cause and effect operate, evidence and probabilities, instead of saying what he did. Having taught a lesson about how to reason using both logic and empirical data, he could have used this to illustrate why it is often wise to say, "I don't know" as well as "How do you know what you say you know?", "Is there anything else that might explain what you see?", "Do your premises require that conclusion?", and finally, "Based on the evidence we now have, here is how the probabilities appear ...".

In conclusion on this point, let's break Confucius' argument itself down into a logic chain:

P: Evidence is hard to assess.

P: Cause and effect relationships are hard to understand.

P: Reasoning is hard to assess.

P: Human beings frequently seem to be proven wrong after they have been certain to be right.

C: Therefore, it is possible to prove anything with clever arguments.

The premises are likely to be accepted as almost certainly true by most people. But the conclusion is not required by the premises. This is an example of what most westerners, who are oriented toward connecting to the greatest possible degree with reality, would label a "bad" theory, and as noted below regarding the application of post-modern theory to Mormonism, Confucius is not the only person who has found this idea to be attractive.

While I will defer on this point to those who better understand oriental philosophy than I do, it seems to me that Confucius teaching as indicated above may be a reflection of what in his mind were the relative importance of two principles – that of harmony versus that of seeking information about reality. Oriental philosophy is characterized to a much greater extent than Western philosophy by the idea that we proceed through intellectual life through a repeating process of "thesis", "antithesis", and "synthesis". And, the synthesis does not mean that truth has been found, it means that harmony has been found. Harmony trumps truth. And, the maintenance of authority has historically been much more important in Eastern society than it has been in the West.

Perhaps Confucius' lesson to the two boys, and society at large, is that any wisdom that can come from arguing will not offset the social cost of arguing. With this, I also respectfully disagree.

The Importance of Examining Premises

As the Confucian example above illustrates, much of the useful work that is done as a result of logic-based argument is a result of finding, and then weighing, evidence related to the establishment of premises. As noted above, the testability of premises is not a black and white matter. Some premises are perfectly testable. $2+2=4$ and other mathematical equations use premises that are given meaning by man made definition, and hence are certain. Other premises depend for their truth on real things, such as the boiling point of water at a particular altitude, can be well enough defined to be considered reliable for practical purposes. That is, tested based on such premises yield predictable results within certain parameters time after time.

However, whether a particular historical event occurred or not will always be open to question. The reliability of any conclusion we may draw in this regard depends upon how solid our evidence is, and this is something of which we can never be certain. But, certain historical events are much easier to assess than others as a result of the number of witnesses to them, and the manner in which their evidence was collected and preserved. Finally, some premises are very difficult, or impossible, to test. Is there life on other planets or in other galaxies? Does God exist? Etc.

As noted above, monist societies usually espouse the belief that some factual matters are certain. In logical terms, this means that they do not permit premises in the logic chains they use to be questioned. To question such premises is taboo because it shakes the very foundations of the society in question. This flies in the face of the highly effective means science has provided to us for the purpose of exploring and learning more about reality.

For example, it is useful to break the arguments presented to in favour or against any proposition down into a chain of premises and conclusions in order to highlight the things that need to be proven (the premises) in order to justify the conclusion, and then to test the cause and effect linkages between the premises and the conclusion. Since scientists accept that nothing in the real world can be proven with 100% certainty, but only to a greater or lesser

degree of probability based on the evidence available, no argument related to things in the real world will be 100% certain. We might feel that some are pretty close to that, like the Earth is not in centre of the Universe or is not flat. But, the scientists most knowledgeable about this kind of thing will say that while they are as close to certain as they can be respecting matters such as this, they are not 100% certain.

One way that most Mormons would accept of setting out the basic Mormon approach to the "truth" of Mormonism is as follows:

P1: There is one, and only one, God.

P2: God communicates His will to mankind.

P3: God gave Joseph Smith His exclusive authority in modern times.

P4: Smith, at God's command, translated the Book of Mormon.

P5: Anyone who reads the Book of Mormon and prays to God with sincere intent will be told by God that the Book of Mormon is His word and that Smith translated it through the gift and power of God.

P6: God communicates with human beings in this regard by way of sometimes powerful, sometimes subtle, emotional or mental impressions and other similar experiences.

P7: Those who are sinful, including those who are inadequately humble or lack faith, cannot hear God's voice and hence cannot experience, or properly interpret, the impressions or experiences just mentioned.

C: Therefore, anyone who does not, after reading the Book of Mormon and praying about it as indicated above, receive confirmation from God that it is His word etc., either did not have sincere intent when asking for God's guidance or is subject to sin of some kind that prevents him from hearing God's voice.

This logic chain is analyzed in depth at <http://home.mccue.cc:10000/bob/documents/rs.do%20smart%20mormons%20make%20mormonism%20true.pdf> starting at page 28. For the moment, it is sufficient to note that what is set up as a conclusion in this theory is not really a conclusion. As my example above involving Canadians, humans and mammals indicates, conclusion are supposed to be drawn from premises based upon known characteristics of the premises to suggest something that is the logical consequence of those premises. The Mormon theory just stated uses no such logic. Rather, the conclusion simply restates the premises – “The cat is black, therefore, the cat is black”. This is a common logical error and is referred to as a “circular argument” or “tautology” – an argument that purports to draw a conclusion but is merely a repetition of one the assumptions the argument asks us to make. Hence, the argument contains no reasoning. This is often hard to spot because of the way in which assumptions are buried in, or even only implied by, the premises used to create the argument's foundation. Such is the case with the Mormon theory set out above. At the conclusion of such an argument, and with a flourish, one can say “therefore” and state what sounds like a dramatic conclusion – making it appear like something has just been proven – when all that we have done is restate our premises using different language. When this is understood, the argument collapses. It amounts to nothing more than an invitation to believe in unprovable premises, supported by a powerful taboo that

says that believers are not permitted to question certain premises. Such arguments are more persuasive tricks (witting or not) than sincere efforts to find out what "is".

Consider, for example, the following argument (or statement of "eternal truth") from Dallin Oaks:

It is one thing to depreciate a person who exercises corporate power or even government power. It is quite another thing to criticize or depreciate a person for the performance of an office to which he or she has been called of God. It does not matter that the criticism is true. As Elder George F. Richards, President of the Council of the Twelve, said in a conference address in April 1947,

... when we say anything bad about the leaders of the Church, whether true or false, we tend to impair their influence and their usefulness and are thus working against the Lord and his cause. ... The Holy Ghost will not guide or confirm criticism of the Lord's anointed, or of Church leaders, local or general.

This reality should be part of the spiritual evaluation that LDS readers and viewers apply to those things written about our history and those who made it. (Dallin Oaks, "Reading Church History," CES Doctrine and Covenants Symposium, Brigham Young University, 16 Aug. 1985, page 25).

Oaks comments are of course consistent with the covenant faithful Mormons make in Mormon temples not to speak critically about Mormon leaders. See http://www.i4m.com/think/leaders/mormon_loyalty.htm for other related quotes.

Here is Oak's and Richard's argument broken down into a logic chain:

Paa: The God in which Mormons believe exists.

Pbb: The Mormon Church is God's only authorized organization.

Pcc: God communicates his Will regarding mankind exclusively to Mormon leaders.

Pdd: Mormon leaders sometimes make mistakes.

Pee: God communicates his Will respecting what individuals are to do to individuals.

Pff: When individuals criticize Mormon leaders, whether they are accurate in their criticism or not, they impair the leaders ability to carry out what God has told them to do.

Pgg: No good that could come of such criticism is justified in light of the harm that comes from impairing the influence of Mormon leaders.

Pff: God never communicates to individuals that they should criticize Mormon leaders.

Caa: Therefore, when individuals think they are being guided by God or are otherwise doing what is right when they criticize Mormon leaders, they are mistaken.

This argument is logically sound. If the premises are true, the conclusion must be true. The problem with the argument as used by Oaks is that the premises are not open to question. They are truths, and to question them (or the leaders who dictate them) in any way is evil. That

is the whole point of the argument – to cause Mormons to accept a kind of lesser evils argument that says that no matter what small good might come of accurately criticizing Mormon leaders, such great harm is caused that such criticism is never justified. And, to even question the argument that the harm is so great is in and of itself so harmful that it is never justified.

Since I know how difficult it is for all of us (Mormons included) to recognize the nature of our dominant social culture, let me outline a couple of other theories that suffer from precisely the same problems as do the Mormon arguments just outlined.

I have some friends who have lived in Haiti. Voodoo is commonly practised there. It is not uncommon for a Voodoo practitioner to say something like this when consulted by a troubled position client:

“When you feel good or good things happen to you, it is the result of my Voodoo. When you feel bad or bad things happen to you, it is the result of your enemies Voodoo. You should hire me to use my Voodoo to fight your enemies’ Voodoo.”

This kind of approach preys upon basic human fears and desires, and uses the same kind of undisputable circular logic that Mormonism uses.

P11: There are powerful forces of good and evil.

P22: Voodoo practitioners can influence those forces to either harm or help you.

P33: Your suffering sometimes results from the Voodoo of people who wish to harm you.

P44: I have the power to counteract that and to use my Voodoo to make more good things happen in your life.

C11: Therefore if you hire me and will protect you from harm and bring more good into your life.

C12: Therefore, after you have hired me the good you experience is partly at least the result of what I do for you, and the evil you experience would have been much worse if I had not been using my power to protect you.

The premises in this argument are untestable, and the conclusion merely repeats some of the premises.

And how about this argument.

Pw: There is an Irish fairy that is invisible, and lives in Ottawa, Canada.

Px: The Irish fairy knows all, and rewards those who believe that it exists.

Py: The Irish fairy makes its existence known in many ways, the most common of which are appearing to its followers in dreams or visions, or causing a feeling of great peace when its followers meditate on its existence.

Pz: Those who do not receive the Irish fairy's manifestation in the manner indicated have not developed adequate faith, and will receive the manifestation when their faith is adequate.

Cw: Therefore, all those who have yet to receive the Irish fairy's manifestation lack faith.

Again, we have untestable premises and a conclusion that merely repeats a few of the premises and hence cannot contradict them. As is the case with the Mormon theories summarized above, the argument in favour of the existence of the Irish fairy is of no practical use unless our purpose is to convince people of the existence of the Irish fairy using any effective means. And, the testimony of people who have felt calm while meditating or who after hearing stories about the Irish fairy for many years have dreamt of it, and so believe that the Irish fairy exists, will be effective in some cases at least. That is, this theory cannot help us to understand the nature of the reality around us. It uses normal human experience (we feel calm while we meditate; we dream of odd things of which we speak, sing, etc.) to convince us that something that cannot be proven to exist, does exist. This, regrettably, is what the foundations of Mormonism come down to.

Let's now consider an alternative theory that might be used to explain the behaviour of people relative to Mormonism and other belief systems. It goes as follows:

Pa: Many humans have powerful emotional experiences related to many things.

Pb: Many humans believe in different types of gods.

Pc: Many humans interpret some of their emotional experiences to indicate that they have an exclusive relationship with god as they perceive him/it to be.

Pd: The experiences that lead to these beliefs in different human groups are very similar.

Pe: The structure of individual human psychology and human group sociology reinforces beliefs of this sort.

Pf: Beliefs of this sort are used for a variety of purposes in the organization and maintenance of human groups.

Pg: Beliefs of this sort are more common in primitive populations that tend to have violent relationships with their neighbours.

Ph: Beliefs of this sort tend to be abandoned as populations become better educated and more secure.

Ca: Therefore, a belief in an exclusive relationship to god is an important aspect of human psychology and sociology within many social groups, but the function this belief performs can be performed by other cultural institutions and individual belief systems.

Cb, Therefore, abandonment of the belief in an exclusive relationship to god often improves the well being of both the group and individuals in question and their neighbours.

Each of the premises just stated is testable to a reasonable degree, but the interpretation of the results of such tests would be disputed by many social scientists. The conclusion is derived using principles of logic. It too would be disputed. In the course of arguing about the premises and conclusion in this theory, much data would be collected and many arguments made as to how such data should be interpreted. In the course of this dispute, a lot would be learned about how and why people hold certain religious beliefs, and what consequences these beliefs have. That is, the development and testing of this theory would help us to understand the nature of the reality of which we are a part. This is what primarily distinguishes from most theories Mormons use to support their beliefs, and theories like that regard to the Irish fairy.

I note that the theory just stated does not conclude that there is no God, or no God of a type in which Mormons believe. This is not something that can be proven using evidence or logic. All it does is offer an explanation for the human experience we see all around us in the religious world, and it therefore suggests that the Mormon experience is part of this whole. Also, by comparing how this theory functions to how the Mormon theory functions we are brought face to face with the reality that the Mormon theory assumes very dubious causal connections between routine emotional experience and the existence of things like a particular kind of God. Those causal connections are not testable, and hence can't be disproven. However, once many people have walked through the exercise of comparing these two theories and realize the nature of the assumptions and leaps of logic they have been making, they are not longer prepared to assume the premises that support the Mormon theory to be correct. This decision is based on a realization that this assumption is not more reasonable than that made by believers in Irish fairies or Voodoo.

Of the examples noted above that illustrate Mormon logic, the Voodoo example is probably the most helpful since it uses primal hopes and fears to persuade us to hire someone to do things for us that likely do not need to be done. This hiring, of course, transfers assets (money) from one person (the person invited to make the assumption) to another person (the person who makes the invitation and holds himself out as having special power or authority). This precisely parallels the relationship between Mormon leaders and Mormon followers. While Mormon leaders realize modest monetary gains from their "service", the ego investment and the opportunity to manage large capital budgets, build massive and beautiful buildings, and be venerated by rank and file Mormons is more than enough to attract and hold human interest. Anyone who doubts this should spend a few minutes thinking about our political process. The position of many political leaders is a precise analogue to that of Mormon religious leaders, except that the Mormon leaders have the additional power of appointing their colleagues and successors.

The Sacred – That Which Cannot be Questioned

As noted above, religious and other ideological institutions do what they can to prevent their adherents from questioning the premises on which their societies are based. The idea of what is "sacred" is used in this regard. That is, we can determine what is most sacred, and hence more important and foundation to any particular social group by determining what cannot be questioned without meeting a great deal of social resistance.

The easiest way to show that any piece of "knowledge" is not certain is to simply ask "How do you know that?" in response to each statement of fact (this is called "questioning the premises") until either circularity is established or an admission is made that the matter is uncertain. Epistemic circularity is also sometimes called an "infinite regress".

Circularity is established when one statement of fact can be shown, through a chain of questions, to rely on itself. It is easy to this with some assertions, such as: God exists!

Question: How do you know?

Answer: Because it says so in the Bible.

Q: How do you know that what the Bible says is true?

A: Because God says it is.

Q: Where does he say that?

A: In the Bible.

I have had the dialogue just outlined on a number of occasions with faithful Mormons and other religiously inclined friends, and they see nothing wrong with it. Until questioned closely on this point, and sometimes even after such questioning, their position is that no proof is required that God exists. He just does, and to question his existence is worse than pointless. Such questions disclose the questioner's suspect, or even evil, nature. This attitude is the result of a monist paradigm. Most believers, however, will acknowledge the uncertainty of their belief, while still harbouring concern with respect to the moral fibre of anyone who does not share their view.

The assertion "God exists" is easy to deal with in the fashion just described because it is based on a non-testable theory – there is no way to prove, or disprove, God's existence – and so the chain of logic back to the source of authority for this statement – God – is relatively short. And science has nothing definitive to say with respect to this debate despite how desperately many try to enlist it.

It is possible to establish circularity with respect to an assertion of fact such as that the Earth is not flat (or is round), but only when dealing with someone who treats science like God – a source of unquestionable authority. In this case, the series of assertions and questions is likely to play out something like this:

Assertion: The earth is round.

Question: How do you know that?

Answer: Everyone knows that, and I can find it in my science text book.

Q: How do you that "everyone", or your science textbook, is right?

A: Because the best scientists in the world say that the textbook is right?

Q: And how do you know that they are right.

A: This is stupid! They are the best scientists in the world! How could they possibly be wrong!?

And so circularity is established – the scientists are right because they say they are right. This kind of discussion can be wonderfully entertaining when it occurs between two people with different opinions with respect to a complex issue such as global warming, and who predictably have a different opinion as to who “the best scientists in the world” are. Such a discussion can quickly devolve into name calling, hair pulling and face scratching, and differs only in the terminology used from similar skirmishes between religionists of different stripes.

In discussions related to philosophy, or politics, or anything else, one will find this kind of reasoning surprisingly often even among the well-educated. They use various sources of indisputable authority behind which one simply does not look. Only the most enlightened will be prepared to make an admission of uncertainty respecting ideological matters. The source of indisputable authority might be scientists or great philosophers (Socrates said ..., or Einstein said ... and that settles the matter), or political leaders (the Chairman said, or Marx said) etc. But more people resort to "God said", through his prophet or otherwise, than anything else.

When dealing with someone who understands how science works, circularity will not usually be established. Rather, there will be an admission of uncertainty. For example:

Assertion: The earth is not flat.

Question: How do you know that?

Answer: Satellite pictures taken from space show it to be round.

Q: How do you know that those pictures are real, and not made up?

A: I am not certain of that. But, I trust the National Geographic, various government space agencies and the many independent scientists who have been involved with the taking of these photographs. There is only the tiniest of chances that they are all wrong. And, the laws of physics indicate on the basis of various measurements that the earth is round.

Q: How do you know that these measurements are accurate and that the theory on which they predict the Earth to be round is accurate?

A: I am not 100% certain of that, but ...(a summary of evidence follows). And so again, it is so unlikely that these measurements or the theories on which they are based are incorrect that I am not prepared to worry about it.

This process could go on for a long time in the case of a statement respecting the shape of the Earth, and in each case the conclusion would be the same – a summary would be provided to show that on the basis of a theory that cannot be proven true, evidence that cannot be proven to have been accurately observed supports the theory that the Earth is not flat. And, there would be no way to prove that no other contradictory evidence would ever be produced, or a theory that produced a contrary conclusion would ever be formulated. However, the more thoroughly and successfully test a theory is, the more confidence we are justified in having with respect to it, and as shown below, some theories that cannot be proven to be 100% certain have shown themselves to be so reliable in various circumstances that we are justified in treating them as true for practical purposes.

Humans dislike uncertainty. So, we find "certain" authorities to which we turn to cut off the infinite regresses into which we otherwise would continually fall. Religion is the most popular of all such authorities, of all time. If god says it, or the person we consider to be god's agent says it for god, it IS true and hence can't be questioned. Hence, no infinite regress. Hence, we feel secure.

Some people rely upon science as their ultimate authority. Oddly, these people are almost never scientists. Often, religious people use scientific authority to buttress their religious authority in cases where they feel that is required to remain secure. Mormons have long done this.

Some people use the great philosophers as their unquestionable authorities. Some people even use political leaders in this role. Hitler, for a while, was such an authority figure. Marx, Mao and others have held such authority for much longer periods, over broader areas.

In light of the foregoing, let me suggest two things. First, as humanity becomes more aware - or as Buddha would say, more "awake" - the bounds of authority are pushed back. That is, more choice is left to individual human beings, and less to leaders. This, in my view, is the fundamental measure of a civilization - how much choice can the individual humans within a society handle without running amok. This ties into Daniel Dennett's ideas set out in his book "Freedom Evolves".

Second, no matter how far out the circle of authority is pushed, we still eventually in almost all cases find things that people are not prepared to question – sources of absolute authority. These are the "sacred" of a society or an individual. Much can be learned by asking "How do you know that?" until circularity is established or uncertainty is admitted. Often this process brings an unquestionable source of authority into view.

For example, in western democratic societies it is not generally acceptable to question the idea that all persons are equal in the most important respects. Any attempt to do this is likely to be met with outrage. Similarly, in fundamentalist Christian or Muslim society, it is generally not possible to question the existence of a particular type of God or the connection to God of certain religious leaders without incurring the same wrath. So, in Mormon company to suggest that Joseph Smith did not literally speak with God and receive His exclusive representative on Earth is to stir a hornets nest. These premises are sacred, and hence beyond question. And as long as they remain beyond question, an illusion of certainty can be maintained regarding many factual things that are among the most uncertain imaginable. These include the mutually contradictory beliefs held by many religious groups that they and they alone hold God's exclusive authority; our fate after death; God's ability to tell people (including the leaders of nations) what they should do; etc.

However, we live in a world in which for the most part the scientific method and logic are king and queen. Much of what we value has been produced by their combination. And despite Mormon and other religious protestations to the contrary, when something that has been believed to be certain by religious people is proven by science to be almost certainly incorrect, it is only a matter of time before religious belief changes to accommodate the common perception of reality. That is, sacred premises can be desccralized. This is part of the "awakening" process referred to above, and it usually takes more than one generation from the time at which the scientific community acknowledges something that contradicts religious belief and when the relevant religious community does so. Consider the history of both the place of the Earth in the cosmos (at the centre or not) and the evolutionary origins of mankind. In the former case, it

took centuries for Galileo and Copernicus' theory to be accepted, and Darwin's is still not accepted by a significant percentage of Americans. Those who grow up with one idea – like the Earth is less than 10,000 years old – are likely never to give them up. However, their children or grandchildren will be more likely to accept the evidence offered by science, and hence their beliefs will either fundamentally change, or will continue much as they were but supported by fewer sacred and unquestionable premises.

Think of, for example, the manner in which a variety of once fundamental religious beliefs – sacred and unquestionable premises to generations or even centuries of believers – have changed. This process is now well underway in intellectual Mormon circles regarding the Book of Mormon. Many of the most knowledgeable Mormons now believe that it is not an historic record, but rather "inspired" mythology of some sort. This belief will become more common as time passed, and eventually, just as it is now accepted that the Earth is not at the center of the Universe even though that was rock solid Catholic dogma for centuries, it will be generally accepted by Mormons.

Mormon Testimony Bearing – The Ultimate Bulwark Against Pluralism

As the sacred premises of religions like Mormonism are put under more pressure by science, many have retreated toward metaphor. That is, they have abandoned the idea that their sacred texts tell a story that is real in an historical sense, but believe that such texts and their religious traditions are still important as a result of the way in which through the use of metaphor they help to better understand our interior world. I believe that overall this is a healthy trend, and explore this topic at <http://home.mccue.cc:10000/bob/documents/rs.do%20smart%20mormons%20make%20mormonism%20true.pdf> starting at page 5.

Other religious traditions, such as Mormonism, continue to insist against a rising tide of increasingly persuasive evidence, that their sacred premises are literally true. This requires them to find powerful psychological forces that will enable their followers to feel justified in holding beliefs that are not justified by the evidence.

As noted above, accepting pluralism requires the acceptance of uncertainty, and the retention of monist belief requires the insistence upon certainty regarding things that seem manifestly uncertain when the evidence relative to them is considered. So how can that certainty be maintained? First, by limiting the circulation of any information that suggests that the facts in question are uncertain. See <http://home.mccue.cc:10000/bob/documents/come%20clean.pdf> for a summary of how the "faithful history" policy works in that regard. And second, by using a variety of means that are described at <http://home.mccue.cc:10000/bob/documents/rs.religious%20faith%20-%20enlightening%20or%20blinding.pdf> and <http://home.mccue.cc:10000/bob/documents/rs.mormon%20use%20of%20persuasive%20technique1002365.pdf>. One of the most important of these is causing people to repeat as often as possible that they are certain Mormonism is what it claims to be. In Mormon culture, this is done by encouraging people to "bear their testimonies".

Russell Ballard's Recent "Bear Your Testimony" Address

Mormons have since Mormonism's earliest days have been encouraged to bear testimony. The most recent evidence of this comes from a talk given by Mormon Apostle Russell Ballard at the October 3, 2004 General Conference. He said, in part:

My experience throughout the Church leads me to worry that too many of our members' testimonies linger on "I am thankful" and "I love," and too few are able to say with humble but sincere clarity, "I know." As a result, our meetings sometimes lack the testimony-rich, spiritual underpinnings that stir the soul and have meaningful, positive impact on the lives of all those who hear them. ...

Many years ago Brigham Young told of an early missionary in the Church who was asked to share his testimony with a large group of people. According to President Young, this particular elder "never had been able to say that he knew Joseph [Smith] was a Prophet." He would have preferred to just say a prayer and leave, but the circumstances made that impossible. So he started to speak, and "as soon as he got out 'Joseph is a Prophet,' ... his tongue was loosened, and he continued talking until near sun-down."

President Young used this experience to teach that "the Lord pours out His Spirit upon a man, when he testifies that [which] the Lord gives him to testify of" (Millennial Star, supplement, 1853, 30). ...

The lesson, I believe, is clear: having a testimony alone is not enough. In fact, when we are truly converted, we cannot be restrained from testifying. And as it was with Apostles and faithful members of old, so is it also our privilege, our duty, and our solemn obligation to "declare the things which [we] know to be true" (D&C 80:4). ...

Brothers and sisters, join together with the missionaries in sharing your precious testimony every day, witnessing at every opportunity the glorious message of the Restoration. The fire of your testimony is all that you need in order to introduce the gospel to many more of our Father's children. Trust in the Lord, and never underestimate the impact your testimony can have upon the lives of others as you bear it with the power of the Spirit. Doubt and fear are tools of Satan. The time has come for all of us to overcome any fear and boldly take every opportunity to share our testimonies of the gospel. ...

So, Ballard is saying several things. First, Mormons have a duty to say they "know" the Mormon Church is true more often. Second, they should say that even if they don't believe it is true. Third, they should ignore the feelings of fear and doubt that indicate they do not know the Mormon Church is what it claims to be. And fourth, the act of saying something is true will cause them to "know" that they did not previously know.

And most of all, Ballard is saying that the basic premises of Mormonism are still sacred, and hence unquestionable, as far as Mormon leaders are concerned.

"Doubt and Fear are Tools of Satan"

I will make a quick comment in passing with respect to Ballard's statement that "doubt and fear are tools of Satan". While Ballard does not qualify this statement, the implicit qualification is that doubt and fear are only bad for sure insofar as they incline us to question premises held sacred by the Mormon community. This is a monist idea. Since we know we have the truth, anything that causes others to question our truth must be bad. Mormons use fear and doubt for their usual purposes in all aspects of life that do not concern Mormonism. Doubt and fear were wired into us by evolution for a variety of important reasons. They are not always right, but they are

right often enough that their voices should be listened to and analyzed. And there is nothing about religious issues that changes the way in which fear and doubt work within us.

Saying Is Believing – An Application of the Principle of Insufficient Justification

While Ballard may be criticized for giving poor advice to those who wish to understand more of reality instead of continuing to be controlled by those who lead the Mormon Church, it must be admitted that he got one thing right – if Mormons can be persuaded to say things that they don't believe, they are likely to end up believing them.

Leon Festinger is the father of cognitive dissonance theory. In his seminal experiments (Leon Festinger, "Conflict, Decision, and Dissonance", Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1964) he illustrates nicely an important aspect of cognitive dissonance theory that is relevant to the Mormon experience. This is known as the principle of "insufficient justification" and has been used to explain a wide variety of odd human behaviours.

Cognitive dissonance theory is based on the observation that humans do not like uncertainty, and so tend to resolve conflicts between differing ideas (cognitions) by suppressing or modifying one and allowing the other to reign supreme. We do not seem to be designed to carry important conflicting ideas in our brains.

One of Festinger's key experiments was designed as follows. Three groups of subjects were asked to perform a tedious task for an hour. The task involved putting knobs on pegs, turning them a quarter turn, and then taking them off again. After this had been completed, subjects in the control group rated how interesting the experiment was. The members of the two comparison groups were treated differently. Each of these was told that the experimenter's assistant had not shown up yet so he needed them to help him by telling the next subject that the experiment was interesting. The subjects in one of these two groups were given \$1 to perform this additional task, while subjects in the other were given \$20. After telling the next subject that the experiment was fun, each of the subjects who had been paid was asked to rate how interesting the experiment was.

Both comparison groups rated the task as being more enjoyable than the control group. However, the group that was paid \$20 rated it only slightly higher than the control group, whereas the group that was paid only \$1 rated it much higher than the control group. This result is explained by cognitive dissonance theory as follows: We assume that the subjects came into the experiment with the belief that they do not lie without a good reason. Then, they are induced to lie. Those who were paid \$20 (remember, we are talking about college students about 40 years ago) felt they had a good reason to lie, so that lie did not influence their perception of the experiment. The subjects who were only paid \$1 did not find in that payment sufficient justification for lying, so the fact that they lied without good reason was inconsistent with the belief that they do not lie unless they are justified in doing so.

To reduce the cognitive dissonance created by these inconsistent beliefs, the subjects had to change one of them. The "I do not lie without good reason" belief is important to most people's self-perception, so it would be hard to change that belief. It is easier to change other cognition. The subjects could not deny saying that the experiment was fun, so they subconsciously increased their perception of how interesting the experiment was.

So, Mormons are caused to do many things that bring the principle of insufficient justification to bear on the creation of belief in the key tenets of the Mormon Church. For example, Mormons

go through odd temple rituals that require promises of faithfulness and obedience to be made in front of other members of the community of faith; Mormons regularly state in public while teaching lessons or “bearing testimony” in Mormon meetings that they “know” the Mormon Church is God’s only “true” church, that Joseph Smith was God’s prophet, etc.; Mormons act as lay leaders of their congregations and commit enormous amounts of time and effort to Mormonism in this way; Mormons spend two years as fulltime missionaries while bearing testimony daily and baptizing new members who look up to the missionaries as their literal saviours; Mormons hand out Books of Mormons to their friends and otherwise encourage their friends to join the Mormon Church because it is God’s one and only true Church; and Mormons engage in many other behaviours that are part of Mormon culture and that publicly commit them to the Mormon Church. In each of these cases, the principle of insufficient justification will kick in to make Mormons feel that the Church must be “true” and otherwise more valuable than it should objectively or rationally seem in their lives. Were this not the case, they were either liars or fools to do and say the things they did, and it is hard for most humans to consider that as a viable alternative.

Other experiments have been conducted with respect to what has become known as the “saying is believing” principle which is an application of the principle of insufficient justification that is particularly important to the understanding of Mormon testimony bearing influences belief and hence behaviour. These experiments are summarized in Aronson, “The Social Animal” 9th ed., a text used in many college psychology courses. Regarding the saying is believing principle, Aronson notes:

If all I want you to do is recite a speech favouring Fidel Castro, the Marx Brothers, socialized medicine or anything else, the most efficient thing for me to do would be to give you the largest possible reward. This would increase the probability of your complying by making that speech. But suppose I have a more ambitious goal: suppose I want to effect a lasting change in your attitudes and beliefs. In that case, just the reverse is true. The smaller the external reward I give to induce the recite the speech, the more likely it is you will be forced seek additional justification for delivering it by convincing yourself that the things that you said were actually true. This would result in an actual change in attitude rather than mere compliance. The importance of this technique cannot be overstated. If we change our attitudes because we have made a public statement for minimal external justification, our attitude change will be relatively permanent; we are not changing our attitudes because of reward (compliance) but because of the influence of an attractive person (identification). We are changing our attitudes because we have succeeded in convincing ourselves that our previous attitudes were incorrect. This is a very powerful form of attitude change”(p. ?).

Aronson later added:

... lying produces greater attitude change when the liar is under compensated for lying especially when the lie is likely to invoke a change in the audience's belief or behaviour. A great deal of subsequent research supports this reasoning and allows us to state a general principle about dissonance and the self-concept: dissonance effects us greatest when

- (1) people feel personally responsible for their actions and
- (2) their actions have serious consequences.

That is, the greater the consequence and the greater our responsibility for it, the greater the dissonance; the greater the dissonance the greater our own attitude change. (p. ?)

So, there are three important principles to bear in mind. First, if we say something we don't believe without receiving some kind of external reward for doing so, our attitudes are likely to shift in the direction of what we have said. Second, the more important the consequences for which we might be responsible as a result of saying what we did, the more likely it is that our attitudes will shift and the stronger that shift is likely to be. And third, I think that it is fair to assume that the more often a statement is repeated, the stronger its effect will be.

Experiments regarding the saying is believing principle were conducted with regard to certain student riots at Yale University. Various students had witnessed the riots. Students who strongly believed the police behaved badly with respect to those riots were asked to write an essay in support of the police actions. Before writing the essays, the students were paid a sum of money. After writing the essay, each student was asked to indicate his own private attitudes respecting the police actions. The results showed that the smaller the payment for writing the essay, the greater the attitude was affected. It is important to note that this attitude change occurred as a result of the students writing an essay that they were told to make up. They were told to pretend that their position was what they wrote, but not asked to believe anything that they had written.

In another similar experiment, a group of white college students were asked to write an essay endorsing a proposal at their university to double the amount of money available for African American student scholarships. Precisely the same phenomenon was observed as noted above respecting police brutality.

Other experiments have been conducted with regarding to cheating behaviour. People who are induced to cheat for a reward, which would be a form of external justification, do not show long-term changes in their attitudes respecting cheating. However, students induced to cheat for a small or negligible reward show a significant attitudinal change in that regard.

Nowhere is the "saying is believing" paradigm more visible in Mormon culture than regarding the Mormon custom of bearing testimony. One of the techniques used by missionaries and members of the Church to "strengthen the faith" of prospective members and young people who were raised in the Church but do not "have a testimony", is that of bearing their testimony before they get it. Ballard referred to this practise above by telling a story that dates to Brigham Young, near the beginning of Mormonism and it is fair to assume has been used since then. I recall being told that story, and others like it, when I was a young person and did not believe that Mormonism was "true". However, my testimony did not spring from saying things I did not believe. Rather, the dynamics described by the short story "The Missionary" (see <http://home.mccue.cc:10000/bob/documents/rs.the%20missionary.pdf>) are closer to what I experienced. And so, I was never a fan of the "say it even though you don't believe it" philosophy that is prevalent within Mormonism.

A large percentage of the missionaries who enter Mormon missionary service do not have a "testimony". It is commonly believed within the Mormon community that young men are sent into the mission field first and foremost for their own good – that is, to get their own testimony and become firm in the faith. And, they are encouraged to find their testimony by bearing it. That Ballard would say this at a Mormon General conference is not surprising since he has been a key player in the formation of Mormon missionary strategies for decades and has consistently taught this principle in that context at least since I was a missionary in the late 1970s.

Think of how the principles Aronson outlined above would be likely to apply to one of the many Mormon missionaries who starts his missionary service without a testimony. He doesn't yet have a testimony of his own, and many times each week for two years he stands in public wearing an authoritative looking suit and bears solemn testimony in God's name with regard to the truthfulness of the Mormon Church. He is not paid to do this. In fact, he knows that he is sacrificing his and his family's money and time in order to have the privilege of bearing this testimony. So, either what he says is true, or he is a liar (or fool) to have said it. Since few people like to admit that they have been fooled or are a liar, the easiest conclusion to reach is that the statements made must be true. He also knows he is encouraging the people who hear him to make a commitment that will absorb a huge percentage of their lives and will change the course of their lives in dramatic fashion. This situation is calculated to produce the maximum attitudinal change in those young missionaries.

Something similar happens when regular Mormon members bear testimony to their friends and neighbours, and it is intensified if any of those friends become Mormons as well. This is why Mormon leaders like Ballard are constantly after the members to do missionary work with the friends, and to bear their testimonies. Mormon leaders justify the practise of encouraging people to say things that they don't believe on the clearly monist basis that those things are certain to be true, so even if the person saying them does not believe them to be true, she is still telling the truth.

Testimony bearing is a fundamental part of the Mormon culture. Each meeting, class, Mormon activity, etc., is opened with prayer. Most Mormon prayers are an implicit bearing of testimony; a certification that the Mormon Church is the Mormon Church's God's true Church. From the time they are able to speak their first words, little children are encouraged to utter such prayers. They do so at their meetings on Sunday, and at home on a daily basis with their families. Those occurs both in private, with Mom and Dad initially saying the words for the child, and in public before family members in the home each day and later in larger groups at Church.

Formal testimony bearing is part of every lesson presented at Mormon Church or activity, and every speech (talks by Mormons) presented in Church services. Young people, again, begin to give these talks on a regular basis starting at age three or four. They are encouraged to bear their testimony each time they stand up and give a talk. Most adults have teaching responsibilities within the Mormon Church. They also bear their testimony each time they stand before the congregation to teach.

Mormon hymns are another form of testimony bearing. Starting at age 18 months, Mormon children are taught to mouth the words to songs that testify to the truth of the Mormon message. Each week these songs are sung at Mormon worship services for children, teenagers and adults. Mormon are encouraged to sing these songs in their homes during weekly Family Home Evenings and to have them playing in the background at other times.

Once a month, each Mormon congregation has a "fast and testimony" meeting. This is a meeting held at the end of a Sunday on which food and water are abstained from for a period of 24 hours by faithful Mormons. Toward the end of that period, the testimony meeting occurs. Going without food weakens body and the intellect, making it more susceptible to emotional experiences. These meetings are intended to provoke emotional experience. Feelings are shared with regard to the importance of family, community and a part of every testimony is a formula which has been laid down by Church leaders respecting belief that Joseph Smith was a prophet, that the current prophet (whoever he may be) is also God's only prophet on Earth and that the Mormon Church is the one and only true Church of God on the Earth. No dissenting

opinion is permitted. And a steady stream of members approach the pulpit to express their faith in public. It is thought "cute" to have small children to stand up before the congregation to utter the words "I know the Church is true; I know the Book of Mormon is true; etc." Special, and highly charged testimony meetings are held for teenagers at "Youth Conferences" and other special youth meetings which for many young Mormons is where the first visible glimmers of testimony are felt, and magnified. The short story "The Missionary" explores this process (see <http://home.mccue.cc:10000/bob/documents/rs.the%20missionary.pdf>).

A variety of other similar examples from within Mormon culture could be described. I do not accuse Mormons of consciously planning to brainwash their children and those who investigate the merits of the Mormon Church; however, the system just described could hardly be better designed for that purpose. Again, I do not accuse Mormons of dishonesty or deceit. There may be a few at the top that are guilty of this, but the vast majority are certainly not.

I like to use a "scales" analogy with regard to ideological belief that is contrary to the evidence. The kind of social conditioning described above amounts to weight on one side of a set of scales. The more weight is pile there by continual testimony bearing and other similar things, the more weight will be required on the disconfirming side of the scales to reach the tipping point. If the instructions issued by Ballard and other current Mormon leaders are followed, Mormons will spend more time teaching dogma to each other, bearing testimony of dogma to each other etc. and so will have less time to connect with disconfirming reality.

After acquiring a Mormon testimony at about age 18, I became a typical Mormon as far as testimony bearing was concerned. I stood in public countless times and said that "I know the Church is true!", and even wept as I did so as a result of the powerful emotional forces that are part of intense group experiences of a religious or other nature. The principle of insufficient justification would predict that this behaviour on my part would have created a powerful cognitive dissonance barrier to any information that indicates that the Mormon Church is not "true". This is because if the Church is not true, I have been either dishonest or foolish by virtue of having stood in public and proclaimed it to be true, and I know that I am neither dishonest nor foolish! And, other experiments have shown that the more important to me is my image as a smart person, the more effective that cognitive dissonance barrier will be.

It is ironic that the persons least likely in some ways to acknowledge the error of the Mormon way are those who are the best educated and act as leaders in the Mormon community, as I did. Were it not for the difficulties that two of our daughters had (one with Mormonism and the other with her health) that made it advisable for me to step away from Mormon leadership activity for a time to attend to family matters, I am not sure that I would have been able to develop the perspective necessary to do what I have done. Well-educated Mormon leaders have been thoroughly conditioned by a life of faithful activity in the Mormon community while telling people on countless occasions that they know the Mormon Church is true. At the same time, they often develop justifiable confidence in their ability to think rationally in other contexts. Cognitive dissonance theory would predict that it would be very difficult for people of this type to ingest data that suggests that they – acknowledged by their peers to be among the smartest of the smart – have been so fundamentally wrong for so long with respect to something of such importance in their lives and the lives of their family members. Their subconscious understanding that those family members may reject them if they indicate that what they have taught about Mormonism is incorrect would create more fear, which would reinforce the walls designed to filter out all information that might disconfirm Mormon belief. Mormonism has people who are like I was in a particularly tight spot. The weight on the Mormon side of the scales is enormous. I was in that spot until about two years ago, and hence know it intimately.

This is perhaps the aspect of Mormonism that I find most offensive. Mormon leaders, who are knowledgeable with regard to the real history and origins of their faith, purposely teach a story that omits so many of the important facts that the conclusions that it is fair to call it deceptive. They then teach that story to innocent young people and members and send them out to bear a solemn testimony that what are likely falsehoods are truths, thus brining to bear the forces described above, and so causing them to believe these falsehoods themselves. Such leadership behaviour not only deceives those who hear the testimony borne, but it conditions at a very deep level the innocents who mouth false words. It is a form of psychological or intellectual abuse that although committed with the best of intentions is in my view an evil that should be rooted out of our society.

Denial in General

We have just reviewed a few of the mechanisms that tend to produce misperception in humans. Since writing this essay, I have expanded this analysis considerably in another essay titled "Denial" on my website.

Postmodern Mormons – Pluralism Infiltrates the "Faithful"?

Mormon Epistemology - How Different Mormons "Know"

By way of summary, lets review how Mormons come to "know" what is necessary to support their monist worldview. This will set up a discussion of how post-modern theory is used by Mormons who have let the information genie out of the bottle.

Mormons generally believe the following:

1. Truth can be discovered, and we should believe all truth, from whatever source it may come. This is a monist view. It implies a certainty that does not exist, and so tends to exacerbate the problem of assuming things to be certain that are not.
2. We already "know" some things because God has "revealed" them through his prophets, and so any information purporting to question those things should be discarded because regardless of how the probabilities appear, that information is misleading. That is, our minds are closed as to information that purports to disconfirm "revealed truth". These are the "sacred" premises referred to above. It is wrong to read or talk about anything that questions them.
3. God's prophets sometimes make mistakes and so at times things that might have been thought to be unquestionable truths will be discovered to be untrue. We will know such mistakes by waiting for a later prophet to indicate that a former prophet was wrong. Since prophets are the ultimate source of authority, only they can tell when a prior prophet has been wrong. The prophets are in control.
4. Since some Mormons will disobey the "don't learn or talk about things that will cause questioning" part of rule #2 or will through no fault of their own come into possession of information that seems to disconfirm Mormonism's sacred premises, an alternative approach has been developed for them that is not disclosed to the average member. That is, nothing is certain; hence those who criticize Mormonism and the information they use to do so is uncertain; and so since we cannot know what is "true", we should choose what works; and Mormonism is at least a justifiable choice on that basis, and is arguably the best choice because

it works so well. Some use this approach to continue to insist upon the monist, "we have the one truth" brand of Mormonism. Others quietly, or even unconsciously, have become pluralists as a result of their use of this idea.

Most Mormons when presented with a system such as the one I just described as used by another group (the Jehovah's Witnesses, for example) would immediately pick it apart in a sensible fashion (Not have a blood transfusion when you need one, on the basis of a religious belief!? That is nuts!). But, the same Mormon would be incapable of recognizing the nuttiness of her own system. I suggest that this is because of the universal human aversion to recognizing uncertainty about things that are foundational, and the ability of emotion to override reason. Many psychology and sociology experimental studies have been performed that establish this principle to my satisfaction. Much of this research relates to cognitive dissonance. See for example Aronson, "The Social Animal" (9th Ed.; 2004); Swartz, "Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu"; Levine, "The Power of Persuasion".

Postmodern Theory

The fourth stage of Mormon epistemology as outlined above makes use of post-modern theory. Postmodern theory was designed to encourage people to question the most seemingly solid and unquestionable premises in their lives. Jacques Derrida, one of the most influential of all post-modernists, recently passed away. He has been eulogized by quoting one of his peers, American philosopher Richard Rorty, who said:

Of all the philosophers of our time, [Derrida] has been the most effective at doing what Socrates hoped philosophers would do: breaking the crust of convention, questioning assumptions never before doubted, raising issues never before discussed. (See http://www.sltrib.com/nationworld/ci_2424893)

That is what post-modern theory was intended to do by those who created it. And ironically, it is used by some for the opposite purpose – to ignore even the kind of probability based, evidence weighing thinking to which we resort automatically (see the work of Gerd Gigerenzer - <http://human-nature.com/nibbs/03/selten.html> for a sample of this) as we make the stream of decisions on the basis of incomplete information and not enough time that life requires of us. It is one thing to say "get the most perspective you can", which is what people like Pierre Bourdieu (another prominent post modern social scientist) says, and then shows how that is done. It quite another to say as do many intellectually leaning Mormons of my acquaintance, "we can't be sure of anything, and Mormonism works for us, so we are justified in retaining our beliefs". This smacks a little of Confucius' argument above – clever arguments can be used to prove anything, so we should ignore clever arguments in general. So, while drifting near the kind of extreme relativism that is so pluralist as to bring nihilism into view, many Mormons cling to their monism. This produces the peculiar - and even comical – juxtaposition of philosophies. We end up with people who with one breath use Derrida to deconstruct science or history to protect Mormon dogma, and can be baited with the next to say that Mormonism's leaders have God's exclusive authority.

While in the past, the post-modern view of Mormonism has been used by what amounts to an intellectual elite within Mormonism, the Internet is letting the information genie out of the bottle for an increasingly large slice of the Mormon faithful, and so I expect to see the kind of reasoning outlined above surfacing with greater frequency, shorn in most cases of its technical language.

Post-modernism and Mormon History

There is a school of thought within the scholarly historian community that attempts to justify the reading and writing of history in almost any way as being as good as any other. This is connected to certain currents at the extreme, relativistic edge of post-modern theory that most scholars do not find helpful. See the philosopher Susan Haack's debunking of ideas in this regard as summarized at <http://www.csicop.org/si/9711/preposterism.html> and <http://cscs.umich.edu/~crshalizi/reviews/haack-manifesto/>.

The aspect of post-modern theory of which Haack and others are so critical has been used in the manner indicated above by religious people of all stripes as a weapon to resist science's advancing tide. In this regard, some post-modern thought results in a retreat from literalism toward a more mythological and hence pluralistic reading of religious texts. This pendulum has swung back and forth for decades if not centuries, and no doubt will continue to swing. Part of the comic juxtaposition of philosophies noted above is the use of post-modern theory to justify Mormonism's "faithful history" policy. For an example of how this debate has been conducted, see David E. Bohn, "Unfounded Claims and Impossible Expectations: A Critique of New Mormon History", and Malcolm R. Thorp, "Some Reflections on New Mormon History and the Possibilities of a "New" Traditional History". Both are found in "Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History", edited by George D. Smith. Thorp is replying to Bohn.

Among other things, Bohn invokes Heidegger, Derrida, Gadamer and others from the phenomenology and post-modern streams of thought to defend his thesis that Mormon history should not be read in an "objectivist" fashion. That is, he says that the Mormon story is much less certain than some historians like Michael Quinn would lead us to believe, and so Mormons are justified not only in their reading of history as they wish, but also in continuing to hold the monist beliefs that constitute Mormonism. To this Thorp replies, among other things, that if we take what the post-modern thinkers have said seriously, we end up questioning Mormonism from the ground up using tools and seeking answers to questions that go far beyond anything the New Mormon Historians have brought up. Quinn, after all, still says he is a believing Mormon, albeit of a metaphoric type.

If effect, Thorp is pointing out that Bohn and other similarly inclined Mormon scholars unsheathe and put into use for all the sharp, multiple edged sword that is post-modern theory in defence of Mormonism without seeming to realize what it might be used to do against them. It is my view that Derrida, Gadamer et al had social constructs precisely such as Mormonism in mind when they developed their "deconstructive" tools. And if anything is antithetical to a post-modern theory of history, it would be the use by an elite leadership group of something like "faithful history" to maintain control of the group they lead by suppressing information.

Here are a few of the many words Mormon leaders have spoken on the subject of information control that have a distinct monist flavour and which would likely be seen by post-modernists to be precisely the kind of paradigm shaping efforts that should be deconstructed:

My duty as a member of the Council of the Twelve is to protect what is most unique about the LDS church, namely the authority of priesthood, testimony regarding the restoration of the gospel, and the divine mission of the Saviour. Everything may be sacrificed in order to maintain the integrity of those essential facts. Thus, if Mormon Enigma reveals information that is detrimental to the reputation of Joseph Smith, then it is necessary to try to limit its influence and that of its authors. (Apostle Dallin Oaks,

footnote 28, "Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith: Psychobiography and the Book of Mormon", Introduction, page xliii)

And from Apostle Boyd Packer:

Church history can be so interesting and so inspiring as to be a very powerful tool indeed for building faith. If not properly written or properly taught, it may be a faith destroyer. There is a temptation for the writer or the teacher of Church history to want to tell everything, whether it is worthy or faith promoting or not. Some things that are true are not very useful. That historian or scholar who delights in pointing out the weaknesses and frailties of present or past leaders destroys faith. A destroyer of faith — particularly one within the Church, and more particularly one who is employed specifically to build faith — places himself in great spiritual jeopardy. He is serving the wrong master, and unless he repents, he will not be among the faithful in the eternities. ... Do not spread disease germs! ("The Mantle is Far, Far Greater Than the Intellect", 1981, BYU Studies, Vol. 21, No. 3, pages 259-271)

These views are, thankfully, more moderate than what some early Mormon leaders believed. For example, Sidney Rigdon indicated in 1838 that the role of certain Mormon enforcers in removing dissenting members such as Oliver Cowdery from the faithful flock was a result of:

... the imperative duty of the Church to obey the word of Joseph Smith, or the presidency, without question or inquiry, and that if there were any that would not, they should have their throats cut from ear [to] ear." (D. Michael Quinn, "The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power", page 94)

A variety of similar quotes can be accessed at http://www.i4m.com/think/intro/mormon_leaders.htm, http://www.i4m.com/think/leaders/mormon_loyalty.htm, and the essay on my website titled "Religious Faith: Enlightening or Blinding?", starting at page 9.

The "faithful history" policy amounts to an instruction to all knowledgeable Mormons, and particularly those who are charged with the responsibility of teaching other Mormons, not to mention any facts that might challenge the faith of believing Mormons and cause them to question the divine connection of current or former Mormon leaders. This has resulted, among other bad things, in the formation of personality cults respecting Smith and the current Mormon prophet Gordon Hinckley.

The faithful history policy is problematic on a number of fronts from my point of view. My thoughts in this regard can be found in two essays titled "Should the Mormon Church Come Clean", and "Christ's Moral System ..." at the web address above. For the moment, I will mention the most obvious point from an historian's point of view.

It is one thing to interpret facts differently, but only the most extreme post-modernists would argue that highly material facts can be deleted from the historical account entirely, thus avoiding the need to explain to one's audience how accepted facts square with the historian's express or implied theory of interpretation. For example, few would regard a history of the bombing of Hiroshima to be reasonable if it simply indicated that the Americans dropped out of the sky one day after minor provocation of one kind or another, and destroyed Hiroshima. The story cannot be understood without an understanding of Pearl Harbour, the atrocities of war that preceded both Pearl Harbour and Hiroshima, and many other relevant events. Let me be clear that I do

not attempt to draw a conclusion respecting Hiroshima for purposes of this essay, but only wish to point out that it is not possible to leave out huge chunks of the story that almost all listeners would regard as relevant, and to be considered to have treated your audience to a reasonable chance of understanding the event in question. And, I do not suggest that history can be understood in some kind of complete, objective sense. But, just as is the case with science where "truth" is ever pursued and never captured, some versions of history are more complete and well explained than others. I like what Joseph Freeman said in this regard:

Everyone falsifies history even if it is only his own personal history. Sometimes the falsification is deliberate, sometimes unconscious; but always the past is altered to suit the needs of the present. The best we can say of any account is not that it is the real truth at last, but that this is how the story appears now.

I suggest that the falsification of Mormon history is deliberate, and as noted below, have ample evidence in this from the mouths of Mormon leaders. The Hiroshima example just indicated exemplifies the difference between versions of history that are better or worse told and hence are more or less misleading, as does the distinction between Mormon history as the Mormon Church tells it and the version told by the most credible non-Mormon and Mormon scholars. The versions told by the Mormon Church itself and the most rabid of its "anti-Mormon" critics are, in my view, similarly unhelpful. Both tend to be incomplete, and over the top in their interpretations. I do not believe that I exaggerate when I say that the accounts of the most foundational aspects of Mormon history, as taught to faithful Mormons, are as unreasonable as would be an account of Hiroshima that omits all material reference to the prior events of World War II.

Let's use Smith's martyrdom as a case in point. Mormons are taught that a bloodthirsty mob hated Smith because he was God's prophet, and in a drunken, devilish frenzy, without provocation of any legitimate or even material kind, killed him in cold blood. The "rest of the story" includes things like Smith's sexual activities and lying about them for over a decade and the rumours of this that increasingly circulated; his attempts (some successful and others not) to seduce women; his then recent ordination as King of all the Earth by a secret council he had formed for that and other purposes, called the Council of Fifty; his destruction of a newspaper that tried to expose both his sexual practices and political ambitions; his sometimes questionable actions as the Commander in Chief of the largest private militia in the US during an extended conflict with the people surrounding the Mormon city of Nauvoo, Illinois, of which he was also Mayor; etc. (See the relevant portions of the time line in Appendix 7 to Michael D. Quinn's "The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power"). In short, without condoning what was an act of murder, it is fair to say that the story of Smith's death makes much more sense after the background facts have been summarized in a reasonable fashion.

Emma Smith, Joseph's wife, is reported to have said, "it is secret things that cost Joseph and Hyrum their lives" (See B. Carmon Hardy, "Lying for the Lord", footnote 41, at http://www.mormonism.net/pdf/lying_for_the_lord.pdf). Hyrum, Joseph's brother, was murdered with him. The "secret things" to which Emma referred were those respecting which Smith lied, such as his sexual activities. The Mormon leadership tendency toward keeping secrets that would dilute their authority, and hence control over the Mormon people, has continued from that day to this. It is also fair to say that the average person's perception of other foundational Mormon events such as the appearance of Christ and God the Father to Smith; the translation of the Book of Mormon; the ordination of Smith and his associate Oliver Cowdery by Peter, James and John; and numerous other alleged miraculous events change radically once the "rest of the story" is added. That is, the Mormon Church's faithful history policy grotesquely distorts the perception that the average faithful Mormon has of the history of his religious group

and its foundational events – the events that are alleged to confer upon its leaders their special and exclusive authority to act for God. And as has been noted by many, the history of Mormonism is much more important than the history of most religious groups, in part because it is so recent and hence accessible, and in part because the foundations of Mormonism are so novel.

It is my view that the use of post-modern theory within the Mormon historians community is little more than an attempt to excuse the faith based tendency to ignore pertinent evidence. It persuades only those who are already persuaded and are looking for excuses to hang onto their faith.

Why Do So Many Post-Mormons Discard Literalistic Christian Beliefs?

Many who leave Mormonism break the monist mould while doing so, and thus render all other monist worldviews unattractive. That is, in my view, why post Mormons tend not to become evangelical Christians, for example. That is just another monist view, and hence for someone who has broken out of the Mormon mindset will likely not be satisfying. Secular humanists, the UU, Episcopalians, some Lutherans, some Eastern faiths etc. that are more metaphoric and pluralistic in their worldview tend to be attractive to post Mormons of this type.

However, there are some who leave Mormonism without having to deal with the issues that usually fracture the monist worldview. For example, those who find out about Smith marrying other mens wives and modern leaders lying about history in general, and say "I am out of here" without struggling through the deeper social issues that create the monist view, may find themselves not only comfortable with, but needing to remain in, a monist environment. And, they may tend to have trouble understanding others who have left Mormonism and Christianity of the literalist variety at the same time.

Conclusion

The gradual movement of people throughout the world from a monist to a pluralist perspective is in my view an expected outgrowth of the same forces that gave rise to democracy and that are powering many of the other positive trends that we see throughout the world. This movement enriches all who participate in it, and make it more likely that we will find ways to manage the increasingly scarce resources on our small planet as its population continues to rise so as to preserve its life sustaining capacity for as long as possible. Tribal backwaters that resist this trend, such as Mormonism, should in my view be discouraged. One way to do this is to focus attention on this issue. This essay is part of my humble effort in this regard.

I have found a measure of freedom and joy that still stun me as a result of connecting to a broad spectrum of human culture that until recently I felt was not worth the effort to understand. After, I had "the truth" and they did not. What little they had to teach me paled in comparison to what I could learn by studying more of "the truth". And so that is how I spent my time. I am most grateful for this pluralist experience, and hope that those I love the most will be able to understand his aspect of reality and enjoy its fruits.