

Perspective Expansion – A Reading List

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

Introduction

Several people have asked me for my reading list and how I would use it were I doing this all over again. Here is my attempt to provide what was requested.

For this to make sense, some background is required.

My overall summary of how this process works is as follows. Our beliefs are supported by social networks, what we think makes sense, our conditioning, the information we have been exposed to, etc. Add to this our ability to change, as determined by genetics and conditioning; our ability to learn as determined the same way; cognitive dissonance as a result of various things etc. and you have what amounts to a weight that holds our beliefs in place. Our psychology is designed to promote stability - to cause us not to change social groups unless the cost benefit advantages are obvious, and often not even then. This makes sense in light of the importance of being part of a well functioning group to our survival throughout most of humankind's evolutionary history. And it is exploited to a tee by Mormonism and other groups.

It takes a massive amount of learning to overcome the weight I just described. I visualize this as an old fashioned set of scales, like the scales of justice for those familiar with that term. Disconfirming experience and evidence has to be piled on the other side of our scales until they begin to tip. Most of this can be understood in terms of cog dis as well. We have to experience enough cog dis to make us finally question the reality we have assumed to exist. That is why I think I am doing my loved ones a favour when I become a cog dis creating force in their lives. I could tell a number of stories re the positive changes many of my still tbm family and friends have made as a result (in part) of the pain I had caused them.

The epiphany experience many of us have had as we left Mormonism is related to what happens when we reach the "tipping point" on our scale. Then, it is as if a switch were thrown and we can see all kinds of things that have been building up just out of view as a result of the work our mind has been doing to keep us in denial. Suddenly, much of this information and

insight is released into the conscious mind because the unconscious can no longer hold it back. The lights came on. The genie is out of the bottle. This experience changes most people irrevocably. Afterwards, they can perhaps fake being who they were, but they are and always will be different in fundamental ways.

Two Phases – Destructive and Constructive

I suggest that there are two phases to this process. The first is mostly destructive. We have to realize that there is a problem before we will be willing to invest the energy required to deal with it. Different people realize that there is a problem in different ways. For most, exposure to real Mormon history is required. This is a painful, depressing part of the process.

The second part of the process is rebuilding a world view. The essay on my website (<http://mccue.cc/bob/spirituality.htm>) titled "Out of My Faith" chronicles the first few months of my journey in this regard. This was one of the most exciting, enjoyable periods of my life.

What follows is two things. First, an indication of what I have read during the past couple of years. Second, an indication of what I wish I had read earlier in the process. * indicates a book I have not yet finished. ** indicates a book I read prior to two years ago and have gone back to during the past couple of years to compare old information to what I have been reading more recently. I have not attempted to list the countless essays I have read on the Internet related to Mormonism, philosophy, science, etc. I have spent roughly equal time reading on line and in hard copy.

The Destructive Phase

During the "destructive" phase of my process I did most of my reading online. I went back and forth between FARMS and LDS-Mormon.com, mostly. Then I began to order new books, such as American Apocrypha, New Mormon History, etc. Dialogue back issues were valuable (especially the 35th Anniversary edition that came out in 2001). I ordered some Sunstone back issues and also found them useful. I also ordered back issued Sunstone tapes, and found some of them to be marvellous.

Were I doing it again, given the resources of which I am aware, this is what I would recommend for the "destructive" phase:

- Palmer, An Insider's View of Mormon Origins (Gives a taste of real history etc., while still indicating that the Church is "true" in some sense and is worth preserving. Argues for the "go mainstream"

approach. Since this is what GBH and co. want, it is my view that they will not try to take this book out of circulation in the Mormon community while being careful not to approve of it. When last I checked, it was on sale at BYU. That is not an accident)

- 20 Truths About Mormonism <http://www.trialsOfAscension.net/mormon.html> (Great summary and analysis.)
- Rethinking Mormonism <http://www.i4m.com/think/> (Great summary and analysis.)

I wish the two website just noted had been around when I was getting started on my renovation project.

- LDS-Mormon.com <http://www.lds-mormon.com/>
- *Michael Quinn, The Mormon Hierarchy – Origins of Power (This is strong medicine for the typical faithful Mormon. This one book would do the destructive job if a person could ingest it whole. I needed to work up to it)

That should do it. Other works that might be useful include:

- *Quinn, The Mormon Hierarchy – Extensions of Power; Early Mormonism and the Magical World View (Great books.)
- *Todd Compton, In Sacred Loneliness. (Best book re JS and polygamy from the female perspective.)
- *Brooke, The Refiner's Fire (Great book; provides background as to where the early Mormon magical influences came from and how they interfaced with other relevant social influences.)
- American Apocrypha (Best single source of information respecting the Book of Mormon and its likely 19th century origins. I suggest reading this together with the apologetic Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited by Reynolds. The contrast in reasoning, use of evidence etc. is striking.)
- New Mormon History (Good collection of essays re how Mormon history has been, and should be, told.)

- New Approaches to the Book of Mormon (Similar to New Mormon History and American Apocrypha.)
- Arrington, The Adventures of a Church Historian (OK. I would love to get a copy of the personal history I am told he prepared for his family only. He chose his words with care in the public version. Some useful info re how the blacks and the priesthood matter played out during both the McKay and Kimball periods. Otherwise, interesting but tepid for my purposes.)
- Ure, Leaving the Fold (I suggest reading this in conjunction with A Thoughtful Faith and Why I Believe. The latter two are collections of essays by faithful Mormons of some academic or other repute. Ure's book is a collection of interviews with unfaithful Mormons or former Mormons. The contrast between the reasoning evidenced in these three books was striking, and helped me to decide which group of people I wished to associate myself with.)
- Deborah Laake, Sacred Ceremonies (A bit strident for my taste, but some accurate insights into how Mormon culture works. She had a brutal life. Mormonism is likely responsible for at least some of that.)
- Bradford, Lowell L. Bennion (Interesting, but low priority.)
- *Peterson, Hugh Nibley – A Consecrated Life (ditto)
- McMurrin, The theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion (Best summary I have seen of where Mormon theology came from and how it fits into broad philosophical and theological trends.)
- *Toscano, Strangers in Paradox (This left me cold.)
- **Widstoe, Evidences and Reconciliation (For historical reference only.)
- **Nibley, The World and the Prophets; Since Cumorah; The Temple and the Cosmos; The Ancient State (Used to confirm my growing suspicion that Nibley was seeing patterns in vast amounts of data that were not there. Now Nibley reminds me of John Nash (see "A Beautiful Mind").)
- **Hinckley, Standing for Something (Great if you like platitudes.)

And here are a few I did not read, but have heard others whose judgement I respect recommend highly:

- Charles Larson, Quest for the Gold Plates (A biography, of sorts, of Thomas Stuart Ferguson who spent a good part of his life trying to prove the Book of Mormon to be "true" and eventually acknowledged failure.)
- Dan Vogel, Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet (Recent book. Well received by several well read post Mormons of my acquaintance. I have read enough of this kind of thing already.)
- Newell and Avery, Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith (Describes polygamy and a variety of other early Mormon phenomena from Emma's point of view.)
- David L. Bigler, Forgotten Kingdom: The Mormon Theocracy in the American West 1847-1896
- J. and S. Tanner, Joseph Smith and Polygamy (Contains a very detailed study of the Mormon doctrine of plural marriage, the spiritual wife doctrine, the John C. Bennett book, the Nancy Rigdon, Sarah Pratt and Martha H. Brotherton affairs. Includes a list of 84 women who may have been married to Joseph Smith. I take the Tanner's with a grain of salt, but their research is at times the best around. I have not read this book and so cannot comment further.)

The Constructive Phase – Critical Thinking and Worldview Building Tools

Once the idea that a serious problem exists that should be dealt with has been drummed in, I would suggest something general in terms of critical thinking skills and how the world works. The following were useful to me in this regard:

- Shermer, Why People Believe Weird Things; Why We Believe (Great critical thinking skills overview. A great place to start. See also the website for the Skeptics Society and its magazine, which Shermer edits. <http://www.skeptic.com/>)
- *Sagan, Demon-Haunted World (I highly recommend this.)
- Pinker, The Blank Slate; *How the Mind Works; (These are both brilliant. How the Mind Works was a Pulitzer finalist.)

- *Aronson, The Social Animal (Brilliant, particularly re cognitive dissonance - Chapter 9.)
- Boyer, Religion Explained (Worth reading. Ties religious behaviour to neural mechanisms that were developed for other purposes. Naturalistic explanation of religion.)
- Feynman, The Pleasure of Finding Things Out (Brilliant – read many parts twice and three times. Brings science down to earth. Shows the humble functioning of a great scientific mind.)
- Newberg, Why God Won't Go Away (Initial parts re experimental data are brilliant. I disagree with the conclusions. Worth reading for first part alone.)
- Diamond, Guns, Germs and Steel (Brilliant. Pulitzer Prize winner. Explains why Africa is poor, Europe is rich, etc.)
- *Ehrlich, Human Natures (Diamond recommends this as the book to read respecting biological and cultural evolution. I am not finished yet. I wish I had found this earlier.)
- Wilson, Darwin's Cathedral (Great book. Shows how organizations evolve. Explanatory respecting what we see in Mormonism.)
- Dennett, Freedom Evolves (Read it three times. Very challenging.)
- Walter Kaufman, The Faith of a Heretic (This is a brilliant, short essay on the philosophy of choice. Accessible at <http://faculty.plts.edu/gpence/html/kaufmann.htm>)

Other books I have read that were useful in this regard as follows:

- Watson, DNA - The Secret of Life (Brilliant.)
- Armstrong, The History of God; The Battle for God (Both brilliant, but tough reads. The first particularly.)
- *Damasio, Descartes Error (Precedes Pinker. Not necessary if you have read him.)
- **Barzun, From Dawn to Decadence (Likely to become the locus classicus for western civ history from 500 to 2000 CE.)

- Taleb, Fooled by Randomness (Quick read. OK.)a
- **Friedman, The Lexus and the Olive Tree (Read this twice.)
- **Potok, Wanderings (History of the Jews. Good read. Western Civ through Jewish eyes.)
- Keefe, On the Sweet Spot (Sports psychology. Good read.)
- Van Doren, A History of Knowledge (Read this twice. Great review of how we as a society came to know that we do. Particularly important in how it shows the Dark Ages paradigm and why it was so critical that this concept was jettisoned by the Renaissance. Mormonism uses the Dark Ages paradigm.)
- ** Ratey, Shadow Syndromes (Read this twice, parts three and four times. Explains a lot of human nature. Dovetails nicely with Pinker's The Blank Slate.)a
- Brockman, The Next Fifty Years – Science in the First Half of the 21st Century (A compilation of essays – I highly recommend it.)
- The Best Science American Science Writing of 2002 (A compilation of essays – I highly recommend it.)
- The Best Science American Science Writing of 2003 (A compilation of essays – I highly recommend it.)
- Scientific American Mind – Special Edition (January 2004) (A good summary of current psychology and neurology research.)
- Cahill, The Gift of the Jews; How the Irish Saved Civilization (OK. Interesting theories and history.)
- Swartz, Culture and Power – The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu (Highly recommended. A lot of good info re how culture develops and members of groups "misrecognize" the reality of what they are doing. This applies to leaders and members. Highly explanatory of many things Mormon.)
- Levine, The Power of Persuasion (Readable source re cognitive dissonance theory. Easy to see parallels between various sales orgs and Mormonism.)

- Paden, *Interpreting the Sacred* (Great overview of religious studies. Used as college text, but short and to the point.)
- Wilber, *A Theory of Everything* (Interesting intellectual exercise. In the end, I don't buy what he is selling.)
- Garrett, *Introducing Post Modernism* (Great intro.)
- *Hoftstaeder, *Godel Escher Bach* (I love it. It will take years for me to absorb the concepts in this book.)
- James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (Locus classicus in religious studies. A must read (or at least skim).)
- *Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became an American Icon* (Great book. Shows how religious figures take on a life of their own and are moulded by different populations to suit the people's purposes as they change from time to time. Many parallels re Mormonism. JS and Emma have both, in particular, moulded to different purposes as time passed. JS will be moulded again and perhaps almost discarded as more of his history becomes known.)
- Nasar, *A Beautiful Mind: The Life of Mathematical Genius and Nobel Laureate John Nash* (Worth reading as to how the interface between genius and insanity works. The movie does not tell the same story.)

The Constructive Phase – Building Materials

Most importantly, here are the books that gave me vision and hope when it came to building a new worldview. Many of the books related to critical thinking were helpful in this regard as well.

- Seligman, *Authentic Happiness* (Read it three times. Very encouraging.)
- *Fowler, *The Stages of Faith* (Highly explanatory of things Mormon. Great book. Is limited in its point of view in that it does not take account of the Eastern religious paradigm. But it nicely explains much of the western religious experience.)
- Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (Read it at least three times - it helped me to pull back from the nihilistic abyss once I realized how I

had been had by Mormonism.); *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,
*The Mythic Image, *A Fire in the Mind

- *World Philosophy (published by Veda) (Great resource.)
- *The Routledge Concise Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (Great resource.)
- *Morris, If Aristotle Ran General Motors (Brings philosophy down to earth. Interesting book.)
- *A Guide to Heidegger's Being and Time (editor, John Llewellyn) (A tough read. Only for those seriously interested in Heidegger's work. I found enough to satisfy me elsewhere.)
- Strathern, Nietzsche in 90 Minutes (Useful intro.)
- Hubben, Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Kafka (Useful intro.)
- Harvey, The Essential Mystics (Not that helpful.)
- Albom, Tuesdays with Morrie; The Five People You Meet in Heaven (Nice, light, encouraging reads.)
- *McIntyre, After Virtue (Challenging. Good exercise. I do not agree with a lot of it.)
- Larue et al, The Ethics of Management (Great overview.)
- Velasquez, Business Ethics (Great overview.)
- *Becker, The Denial of Death (Pulitzer Prize winner. Great book. Challenging.)
- Spong, A New Christianity (A statement of where the liberal edge of Christianity is at the moment. Worth reading. I could be Christian (pretty much) on Spong's terms.)
- Shaku, Zen for Americans (Loved it.)
- Carlos Castenada, The Teachings of Don Juan; *Tales of Power; *Journey to Ixtal; *A Separate Reality (I got a little tired of Carlos. Teachings of Don Juan was enough for me.)
- **Jackson, Sacred Hoops (Zen light, for sports guys. Fun book.)

- **Wooden, They Call Me Coach (Great insights into human nature from one of the great human beings of the sports world.)
- Rotella, Golf is Not a Game of Perfect (Good sports psychology.)
- **Werner, Bonds that Make Us Free (Martin Buber interpreted by BYU prof. OK. Better to read Buber himself or others who see him in broader term. Mormon myopia on display.)
- **Shah, Trail of Feathers (A little like Castenada. Explains aspects of Inca spirituality, shamanism etc. Good read.)
- Momoday, In the Bear's Home (Native American mythology.)
- Stephen King, On Writing (Nice, readable insight into a great mind.)
- Rhodes, How to Write (More of a technical book than King's.)
- *Harold Bloom, How to Read and Why (Worthwhile read.)
- *Nietzsche, The Will to Power (A classic. Powerful ideas. A challenging read.)
- *Manseau and Sharlet, Killing The Buddha (Cutting edge gen X spirituality. I find it challenging, enjoyable, and at times irritating. Worth the time.)
- Tolle, The Power of Now (I do not recommend this. Mystic babble with a few good Buddhist ideas.)
- Chesterton, Heretics/Orthodoxy (I do not recommend this. Apologetic nonsense.)
- Kushner, Who Needs God (Interesting, but barely enough to recommend it.)
- *Cowan, The Shaman's Quest (Interesting anthropology. Not high on my re-read list though.)
- Rhodes, Hypnosis – Theory, Practise and Application (Run of the mill.)
- Levin, Meditation (Run of the mill.)

- *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works (Mysticism. Not that helpful to me.)
- Hudson et al, The Wisdom of the Enneagram (Pop psych. I found some useful insights here. Not sure if it was worth the time spent.)
- Powell, God in the Equation - How Einstein Became the Prophet of the New Religious Era (This is worthwhile both for its summary of the development of certain scientific principles, and for the manner in which it outlines a kind of scientific spiritual paradigm. I don't agree with much of the latter part, but it was definitely worth reading.)
- Berry, Post Atheism (Read this twice.)
- Peck, A Different Drummer; A Road Less Travelled (I found Different Drummer the more useful of the two. Many of Peck's ideas seem dated to me, in light of the other psych etc. reading I have done. And I don't like his quasi-mystical point of view.)
- *A Year With CS Lewis (Most of this left me cold. I grew out of Lewis when I grew out of Mormonism.)
- *Whitehouse, Arguments and Icons (Highly regarded, but technical. Hard to read.)

And finally, fiction (I am just starting to read this stuff in greater volumes)

- Martel, The Life of Pi (Great book. Won the Booker Prize last year.)
- Joyce, The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (A classic. Worth reading. Very dark at times. Paints a grotesque picture of growing up Catholic. Mormons are gentle by comparison.)
- Roald Dahl, Boy and Going Solo (Nice, light, read. Autobiography of the well known children's author.)
- McCourt, *Tis; Angela's Ashes (Life in Ireland, then the US. Brutally real. AA definitely worth the read. McCourt runs out of steam a bit in Tis.)
- *Gary Zukov, Soul Stories (Nothing to get excited about.)
- Dave Barry, A Complete Guide to Guys (I love Dave Barry.)

- Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (A classic. I did not enjoy it, or find it insightful. But I can appreciate the genre of lit it introduced.)

What Next?

And finally, what am I likely to read next? In addition to many of the half finished books above, here is what is on my list, in no particular order:

- Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality* (Post modern theory.)
- Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation*
- Robert Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism* (Here is the review that caught my eye.
http://www.economist.com/books/displayStory.cfm?story_id=2498713
There seem to be some interesting parallels to Mormonism here.)
- Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality* (Epistemology from a scientific point of view.)
- Alan Watts, *The Wisdom of Insecurity*
- Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*
- Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*
- Immanuel Velikovsky, *Mankind in Amnesia*
- Andrew Bard Schmookler, *The Parable of the Tribes: The Problem of power in Social Evolution*
- Susan Haack, *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate: Unfashionable Essays* (Debunks the extreme, silly side of post modern theory.)
- Stanley Fish, *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech* (More post modern stuff. This may need some of Haack's debunking.)
- David S. Katz and Richard H. Popkin, *Messianic Revolution Radical Religious Politics to the End of the Second Millennium*