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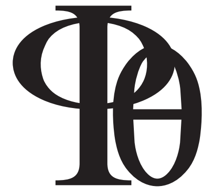

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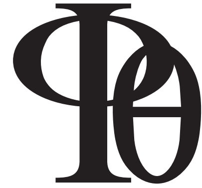

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SOCIETY FOR MORMON PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

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*"The purpose of the Society is to promote disciplined reflection on Latter-day Saint beliefs. Its aims include constructive engagement with the broader tradition of philosophy and theology. All its publications, conferences, and other forums for discussion will take seriously both the commitments of faith and the standards of scholarship."*

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# The Mormon Trinity and Other Trinities

*by* Stephen T. Davis

## I

In this paper I want to explore the LDS view of God and, more specifically, the Trinity. I happen to be a Presbyterian, and thus a member of a large group that I will call "Mainstream Christianity." By that term, I mean to cover Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant Christians; and by "Protestant Christians" I mean mainline denominational Christians like Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, etc., as well as Evangelical, Fundamentalist, and Pentecostal Christians.

Now if I were asked – as indeed I have been asked – what are the main theological differences between Mormons and mainstream Christians, I would not list the doctrine of the Trinity first. To be sure, there are important differences on that doctrine, and I hope to discuss some of them. But the first two items that I would mention are: (1) the Mormon Church's use of sacred texts in addition to the Old and New Testaments; and (2) the LDS view of "eternal progression," as found especially in the King Follett Sermon and in Lorenzo Snow's famous couplet.[1] But my assignment is to talk about the Trinity, and so to that fascinating but difficult topic I turn.

My friend David Paulson says that he has never read anything about the Mormon view of the Trinity written by a non-LDS scholar that got the Mormon view right. As a non-Mormon, I am very much afraid that I

will be joining Paulsen's line-up of people who got the theory wrong. I do not consider myself an expert on Mormonism or Mormon thought. One obvious problem is that there appears to me to be a plurality of views of the Trinity available, certainly to mainstream Christians, but also to LDS thinkers.

Let me say something about how I want to frame the discussion. I am not interested in arguing that the Mormon theory of the Trinity is logically inferior to the mainstream Christian view. Indeed, in one sense – the sense of obvious logical coherence – it is superior. So far as I can see, there are no big logical difficulties in defending a theory which says that there exist three divine beings who are unified in will and purpose. There *are* big logical difficulties in defending the view that there are three divine Persons who are, in some robust sense, ontologically one.

Today I am more interested in the question of whether the LDS view of the Trinity falls within the bounds of Trinitarian orthodoxy, as usually understood by mainstream Christians. Now in one sense, this is an odd question to raise. I have always thought that the LDS church ought to work out its own theology quite apart from and even oblivious to the opinions of people like me. But over the years I have found (somewhat to my surprise) that many Mormons seem fascinated by the opinions that mainstream Christians have of Mormonism. Now I know that many Mormons bristle at the suggestion that Mormons need or should ever seek theological approval from mainstream Christians. I actually agree with that idea. I do not see why they should. But I will say that in the eyes of this outsider, it seems to have been a hallmark of Gordon B. Hinckley's presidency to try to place Mormonism, in the eyes of mainstream America, as an acceptable Christian option (or even denomination) not unlike the Lutherans, the Baptists, or the Pentecostals. So raising the question of the LDS view of the Trinity in the way that I hope to do perhaps makes sense after all.

## II

Let us call "Trinitarian" any theology that asserts that God is both three and one or three-in-one. That God is a Trinity is taken by mainstream Christians to be an essential and non-negotiable aspect of their faith. It follows that any religious group that claims that God is an undifferentiated unity (as Jews and Moslems do) is not Trinitarian and will thus

constitute an unacceptable theology for Christians. Moreover, any religious group that claims that there are two, or three, or ten, or five hundred Gods that are ontologically distinct entities is not Trinitarian and thus will also constitute an unacceptable theology for Christians. Throughout the history of mainstream Trinitarian thought, there has existed something of a theological consensus. Its core idea is that the one God exists in three distinct and coequal Persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the Persons are not three Gods, or even three actions or aspects of God, but are ontologically one God. No Person is subordinate to any other; no one Person exists longer than any of the others; no one Person exists *as God* longer than any of the others; all are co-equally and co-eternally divine.

Orthodox Trinitarianism faces theological dangers in either direction. Pushing too hard on the oneness of God can lead to modalism, which is the theory that God is truly one but only seems to us (or appears to us) to be three; as God relates to human beings, God plays three roles. Pushing too hard on the threeness can lead to tritheism, which is the theory that the Trinity is truly three separate Gods who are perhaps unified in some ways. Both modalism and tritheism are considered heretical in Christian history; and thus both are to be avoided.

In the tradition, there are two main ways of expressing or explaining this consensus. The so-called "Social Theory of the Trinity" (ST) is one way of understanding the Trinity. In what I will call the "standard picture" of the early Trinitarian controversies, ST is most closely associated with the Eastern Orthodox churches, and especially with the Cappadocian fathers, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Basil of Caesarea.[2] It logically begins with and takes as basic the threeness of the Trinity. It also emphasizes the primacy of the Father as the "fount of divinity." The word "God" or "the Godhead" names the triune community itself. So, on this conception of the Trinity, God is in some ways like a community or society. The three persons each possess the generic divine nature as an attribute, and so are all fully divine. They are three individual cases or instances of deity. In some versions of ST, they have distinct minds and wills. Indeed, something like this seems essential if the persons are to be in loving relationship with each other, which is one of the central *desiderata* of ST. It is important to note that ST does not claim to describe merely what we now call the economic Trinity (e.g., that God *in God's relations to us* is three); it rather claims that God *in God's inner life* is like a loving com-

munity. The great challenge facing ST is to make room for and explain the oneness of God, that is, to ensure that Christianity is monotheistic.

According to the standard picture, ST contrasts with the Western or Latin theory of the Trinity (LT). This theory is associated most closely with Augustine, and especially his great work, *de Trinitate*.[3] LT logically begins with and takes as basic the oneness of the Blessed Trinity. LT stresses the claim that there is but one divine being or substance, and it is God. God does exist in three persons, and the persons are genuine distinctions within the Godhead (and thus modalism is avoided); but all three are simply God. The three persons have the same divine nature, but there is one and only one case or instance of God. While in ST (as Brian Leftow would have it[4]) the persons are both distinct and discrete, in LT the persons are distinct but not discrete. The great challenge for LT is to make room for and explain the threeness of God.

It should be noted that the way in which I have just distinguished between the East and the West – the "standard picture" – has recently been called into question.[5] The Cappadocians stressed the oneness as much as did Augustine (so the revisionists claim) and Augustine stressed the threeness as much as did the Cappodicians. The East and West continued to have lots of mutually fertilizing contacts and conversations; until the Photian schism of A.D. 863 it was entirely possible to see their Trinitarian views as compatible. I accept the revisionist picture, although it will not ultimately matter here, since the present paper is meant to be directed primarily toward the LDS view of the Trinity. Moreover, there definitely is a disjunction among contemporary mainstream defenders of the Trinity, with Christian philosophers who write about the Trinity pretty evenly divided between the two views.

In the current debate, I see three differences between ST and LT. First, as noted, LT begins with, and takes as basic, the oneness of God; while ST begins with, and takes as basic, the threeness of God. Second, in ST the persons are robust – robust enough to constitute genuine "otherness" in the Trinity. There are three centers of consciousness, will, and action (God is like a community, but because of *perichoresis* [to be explained below] cannot be said to *be* a community). In LT the Persons are not robust; they are not three centers of consciousness, will, and action; God is not like a community at all. Third, in ST the Persons share a universal nature (which we can call "divinity") while on LT they share an individual nature

("God"). In other words, in ST the three Persons are all one kind of being, viz., God (of which there is but one instance), and so each is divine; while In LT the three Persons are all one individual thing.

## III

Let me now turn to the Mormon Trinity. It is clear that Mormons can affirm the seven propositions that make up the classical doctrine of the Trinity.

(1) The Father is God.
(2) The Son is God.
(3) The Holy Spirit is God.
(4) The Father is not the Son.
(5) The Son is not the Holy Spirit.
(6) The Holy Spirit is not the Father
(7) There is only one God.

This is perhaps the strongest point in favor of mainstream Christians accepting the LDS view of the Trinity as a viable theological option. But does their affirmation of (1) – (7) make Mormons into defenders of a Trinitarianism that ought to be acceptable to mainstream Christians? Unfortunately, I believe the answer is no. The problem, so it seems to me, is that Mormons have to interpret some of these propositions in ways that would not be acceptable to mainstream Christians. Whether Mormon subordinationist Christology amounts to an acceptable interpretation of (2), for example, is a question that I will not discuss here.[6] The central problem, so it seems to me, is that Mormons do not affirm (7) in the right way.

I say this for two reasons. First, Mormons certainly do have a theory of the oneness of God; that God is one is clearly affirmed in the Mormon scriptures (e.g., III Nephi 11:27, 36; Mosiah 15:4). But I doubt that many advocates of classical Trinitarianism will judge this fact to be sufficient. This is clear not just from the tritheistic-sounding texts that can also be found in the Mormon scriptures, but from the conviction (as I just argued) that unity of purpose is not enough.

Second, as I understand LDS thought, Mormons have to add qualifications to (7) that no mainstream Christian could ever accept, qualifications

like "for this world" or "with whom we have to do." I recognize that some LDS scholars argue that the existence of other Gods besides God is, in Mormonism, a matter of speculation, not of revealed truth. As a non-Mormon, I am in no position to dispute that claim. I will merely point out – as I think LDS scholars can understand – that this is a matter of profound suspicion for mainstream Christians, especially those who have read the King Follett sermon and other such texts.

I recognize that King Follett is not considered sacred scripture to Mormons. I do not profess to know whether that fact is due to: (1) the esoteric doctrines espoused or apparently espoused in the discourse; (2) the fact that Joseph's Smith's death shortly afterwards prevented him from ever correcting or authorizing any text of the discourse; or (3) the fact that the discourse was not given as a revelation in the way that other LDS revelations were. But there is no denying that the King Follett Discourse is and always has been a highly authoritative source of Mormon thought.

As an aside, let me note that an issue in theological method for Latter-day Saints seems to me to emerge here. If Mormons do not give much theological weight to the King Follett Discourse, given the context in which it was delivered, then why give substantial weight to other things Joseph Smith said outside the context of "revealed truth," as Mormons seem to me to do? I realize that nobody holds that everything Joseph ever said in his life was religiously authoritative. So it seems that some sort of criterion is needed to decide which extracanonical teachings of Joseph Smith are authoritative for the LDS church and which are not.

Let's return briefly to the King Follett Discourse. In that funeral homily, Joseph Smith does seem to be speaking authoritatively – indeed, he repeats that fact again and again – and he insists that the "Head God" brought forth the Gods and organized the heavens and the earth. The God whom we humans worship – so Joseph Smith insists – is apparently God "pertaining to us;" he is apparently the God whom the Head God appointed for us to worship and obey. That, at least, is how I find myself reading the plain sense of Joseph's words. As you can guess, mainstream Christians can react to such notions with nothing other than shock and horror. Who is this Head God? Did he create our God? How many other Gods exist? Are they all contingent? Or all but the Head God? Where are the lucky folk who get to worship the Head God?

I recognize that the common Latter-day Saint understanding of this material is, first, that the "Head God" is God the Father (with whom

we have to do), and, second, that the Council of Gods consists of the pre-mortal Christ and other chosen spirit children of God, like Abraham (see Abraham 2:22-25; 4:1). The part from which I wish to demur on this occasion is the first claim, that the Head God is the same being as (what I am calling) Our God. Consider Joseph's statement (in the June 16, 1844 sermon), "The heads of the Gods appointed one God for us."[7] I just can't read that statement in the common LDS way. It looks to me as if Joseph intended that the Head God or even the heads of the Gods are different from the God that was "appointed…for us."

Moreover, the related idea that God – the very being whom we worship – was once a man is equally shocking to mainstream Christians. Notice that there is a big difference between the Eastern Orthodox notion of *theosis* or divinization and the LDS notion of *eternal progression*. In the former, when God restores in us the perfected image of God that was all but destroyed in the fall, God graciously gives us something that is not rightfully ours. In *theosis* we do not ontologically become Gods.[8] But in the LDS view, as I understand it, God and human beings share the same ontology, so in their exaltation humans attain what was potentially theirs all along, viz., immortality and status as God.

Why then do I argue that the Mormon theory of the Trinity is not acceptable to mainstream Christians? Suppose mainstream Christians want to ask whether a given trinitarian theology is close enough to mainstream trinitarianism to be acceptable. Then, in my opinion, one absolutely critical question (there are others[9]) is this: Are the members of the Trinity in question *three distinct persons* or *three separate beings*? If they are the former, and if the rest of the doctrine is okay, then I would judge that we are talking about an acceptable version of the Trinity. This is obviously because such a view makes room for a robust version of ontological oneness, which Christianity accepts from its parent Judaism as a defining characteristic. Christianity is essentially monotheistic (Deut. 6:4; I Cor. 8:5); without divine ontological oneness, a theology is not acceptable. This of course is the heart of the issue for Mormons.

But if they are the latter – i.e., three separate beings (or, as Joseph prefers, "personages") – then no matter what the rest of the doctrine says (e.g., no matter how similar the three beings are in knowledge and power or unified in mind and purpose), we are not talking about acceptable Trinitarianism. We are looking at what I would consider a (slightly muted) version of tritheism. I say, "slightly muted," because such a theory could

well be – as Mormonism trinitarianism certainly is – quite different from a theology that says that there are three Gods who are not united at all.

Although many versions of trinitarianism have been tried out in the history of mainstream Christianity, no version of tritheism has ever been held to be acceptable. What then are the boundary lines between ST and tritheism?[10] This is an important question because just *saying* that one is a monotheist does not make it so. Clearly the boundary will have to do with the type and degree of unity or oneness among the persons. For example, an apparent tritheist might argue that her three Gods are really one God because of their sharing of the divine nature and because they are unified in will and purpose. Is that enough to make them *one God*? Mormons apparently think so; thus they reject the label of "tritheists." But mainstream Christians will demur.

Let me roughly make the distinction between tritheism and ST in this way: ST claims that God is in some remarkable ways *similar to* a community; tritheism claims that God *is* a community. Accordingly, those who are committed to ST are never under any circumstance allowed to talk of "three Gods," while those who are committed to tritheism are allowed to use such language.

Let me say a word here about ST's usual strategy for coping with the "oneness" question. The issue is this. Suppose that God is like a community (i.e., that there are three persons or subsistent centers of consciousness, will, and action in God). If so, then how is it that God is *one*, as of course orthodoxy requires? The answer, according to ST, is threefold: (1) Each of the persons equally possesses the divine essence in its totality. (2) The three necessarily share an essential unity of purpose, will, and action; that is, it is not possible for them to disagree or to be in conflict. (3) They exist in *perichoresis*. In other words, each is "in" the others; each ontologically embraces the others; to be a divine person is by nature to be in relation to the other two; the boundaries between them are transparent; their love for and communion with each other is such that they can be said to "interpenetrate" each other.

Again, it is important to note that the affirmation is that God is something *like* a community. More radical defenders of ST sometimes claim that God *is* a community, but in my view that statement swings too dangerously close to tritheism for comfort. Three Gods who are unified in will and purpose is not orthodox Trinitiarianism.

So the central reason that the three distinct persons posited by Social Trinitarians can be acceptably *one* is because of the doctrine of *perichoresis*,[11] which allows for *homoousios* (oneness of substance). The term *perichoresis* means coinherence, mutual indwelling, interpenetrating, merging. In using the metaphor of *perichoresis*, classical Trinitarians are admittedly feeling their way toward a mystery. The metaphor tries to capture the truth that the core of God's inner being is the highest degree of self-giving love. The three persons are fully open to each other, their actions *ad extra* are actions in common, they "see with each other's eyes," the boundaries between them are transparent to each other, and each ontological embraces the others. Of course there does remain, like a non-spatial Euclidian point, a core of unshared status (Son-ness, for example, for the Second Person). These are the persons; this is the threeness of the Trinity.

Is it possible for the three members of the LDS Trinity to be related perichoretically? I do not know. I do know that some Mormon scholars come close to the idea. For example, Blake Ostler says: "The Mormon scriptures consistently present a view of three persons who are one God in virtue of a unity so profound that they are *one* and *in* each other. God *is* the relationship of intimate and inter-penetrating love in this sense."[12] I am heartened by this kind of talk, and would express the hope that Mormons, as they continue to develop their thinking about the Trinity, move more in this direction than in the "separate and distinct personages" direction.

But there is at least a problem in seeing how two or more *embodied* persons can be perichoretically related, and that includes two of the three members of the Mormon Godhead. (That is, my understanding is that the Holy Spirit, in LDS thought, has a spirit body but not a physical body.) The problem is that human bodies are not "boundary-less," they do not overlap or permeate each other. We are of course familiar with the phenomenon of two liquid or gaseous substances completely inter-penetrating each other, but that model is of no help in the Trinity case because the two then lose their integrity as the individual substances that they were. So belief in *perichoresis*, at least as I understand it, may not be an option for Mormons.

On the other hand, LDS scholars can object by pointing to an aspect of Christian tradition that mainstream scholars accept, viz., the claim that the Second Person of the Trinity continues to exist at God's right hand *in an embodied state*. So if embodiment *per se* rules out perichoresis, then

Christ cannot be perichoretically related to the Father and the Spirit. In reply, it can be pointed out that we already have a model or conceptuality for understanding and accepting how one embodied being can be boundary-less to, and peneratable by, a different non-embodied being, and that is the notion of The Holy Spirit indwelling us. If there is a problem for LDS thought here, it exists because two of its Trinitarian persons are embodied. It accordingly becomes difficult to see how the Mormon Father and the Son can be related perichoretically.

But I am willing to grant the possibility that Mormons can solve this problem, depending on what sort of "bodies" the Father and the Son are or have. Perhaps raised, glorified bodies can be perichoretically related. The curious 'Come and go" quality of Jesus' risen body (Luke 24:31; John 20:19) might lead one to think so.

There may be some support even in the Mormon scriptures for my suspicion that two embodied beings cannot be perichoretically related. In D&C 130:22, it says: "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us." (Whether the Holy Spirit, with what Mormons call its "spirit body," can be spatially locatable or can "indwell" us, are good questions.) Now I recognize that the Holy Spirit's indwelling us is not the same thing as inter-Trinitarian perichoresis. Still, the ideas are close; they essentially involve one being penetrating and permeating another.

But defenders of classical Trinitarianism will insist, as Athanasius said against the Arians, that there was no time when the three persons were not one God. That is, God has always been God; the three persons have always been the three persons; and the three persons have always been related to each other perichoretically. Because of the doctrine of eternal progression, found as noted in its most graphic form in the King Follett Sermon and in Lorenzo Snow's famous couplet, at least some Mormons apparently cannot affirm as much.

## IV

So it seems that there exists something of a continuum of Trinitarian theories. Although not strictly speaking Trinitarian, let us say that at one end of the continuum are theories which hold that there is one God who is an undifferentiated unity (as in Judaism and Islam, for example).

Next, there is Latin Trinitarianism, which begins with and emphasizes the oneness and tries to make room for the threeness. Next there is the Social Trinitarianism of the Cappadocian fathers and of contemporary Social Trinitarians. It begins with and emphasizes the threeness and tries to make room for the oneness. Finally, at the other end of the continuum (in my opinion) is the Mormon understanding of the Trinity.

Many mainstream Christians believe that the Mormon Trinity amounts to Tritheism. Indeed, there are mainstream Christians (e.g., Brian Leftow) who consider mainstream Social Trinitarianism to amount to Tritheism, so they will of course consider the Mormon theory guilty of that charge as well. The crucial question, as I suppose, is the question whether LDS thinkers can affirm the "of one substance" clause of the creed. If not, they will consider the Mormon theory outside the pale.

The phrase, "of one substance" (one word in Greek: *homoousias*), was first used to protect Christ's full deity or divinity. Later it was used to protect the unity of the three persons of the Trinity, i.e., to ensure that the Christian view of God is monotheistic. I would say that X and Y are definitely not of one substance if X created Y (or vice versa), if X has existed longer than Y (or vice versa), or if X has existed as God longer than Y has (or vice versa). In other words, I hold that an essential aspect of the doctrine of the Trinity is to deny that the Father is God in any stronger or different sense than the Son or the Holy Spirit is God. I do not think Mormons can affirm anything like the "of one substance" clause, nor should they want to do so.

It is often pointed out that the word *homoousias* is not found in the Bible. That is quite true, but of course many theological and Trinitarian words are not found in the Bible, including Joseph's word, "personage." I think everyone understands that the Bible underdetermines the doctrine of the Trinity, both mainstream doctrines and the Mormon doctrine. People like me think that the word *homoousias* best captures and preserves the overall sense of the Bible on the nature of God.

It is true that mainstream Social Trinitarian and the Mormon view of the Trinity are close. But they are not the same. No mainstream Christian, in any context, would ever be happy, as Joseph Smith was, to speak of "three Gods" or "the plurality of Gods."

If that is correct, then Tritheism comes in two varieties. They are: (1) three Gods who are not unified at all; and (2) three Gods who are unified

in will and purpose (the Mormon view). My own view is that neither is acceptable to mainstream Christians. Of course, I am neither Pope nor magisterium; I have no authority to decide for the Christian community. I am speaking here only for myself.

## V

Let me conclude with some brief and speculative thoughts about Joseph Smith's fascinating claim in his sermon of June 16, 1844 that "In the beginning the head of the Gods brought forth the Gods….and organized the heavens and the earth." I want to play with this idea a bit. Who is this Head God? Again, as I read this claim, and the context in which it is imbedded, I naturally find myself assuming that the Head God is not the same God as the God whom we know, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (I will call these two beings respectively, "the Head God" and "Our God.") That is, I believe Joseph Smith meant that the God whom we worship is one of the other or lesser Gods that the prophet was talking about. I make that assumption because he goes on, in the same sermon, to say that the Head God "appointed one God for us." Now I am not going to talk here about how troubling this idea is to mainstream Christians; I think most Mormons are quite aware of that fact.

But it raises an interesting question about the history of our discipline of philosophy. Who then is this figure called God who keeps cropping up in the Western philosophical tradition? Who is this God? Is it Joseph Smith's "Head God" or the lesser God with whom we have to do? Well, I think that depends. For example, when in philosophy we talk about the Design Argument for the existence of God, even in its contemporary "intelligent design" versions, we are clearly talking about the Head God. This is because he is the one who – so Joseph Smith says – "organized the heavens and the earth." And when we raise questions that have to do with God's relations to us – how divine providence works, for example, or whether God answers prayers – it is clear that it is Our God whom we are talking about. I suppose this would also be true of Descartes' God who, being no deceiver, makes knowledge possible despite the ravages of methodical doubt. I am not sure whether it is true of Berkeley's God, who always insures the continued integrity of even humanly unperceived things despite the doctrine that "to be is to be perceived."

But with Anselm's "Greatest Conceivable Being," we are clearly talking

not about Our God but about the Head God – if, at least, it is a great-making property to have existed eternally, or longer than all the other Gods, *as God*. What about Aquinas' First Cause or First Mover? Well, clearly Joseph Smith would not have allowed that a God who is metaphysically simple, impassable, immutable, and timeless exists at all. But if we hold that Aquinas was right that there must be a First Mover and First Cause, even if he was wrong about some of the attributes of that being, we are clearly talking about Joseph Smith's "Head God." Our God was hardly the universe's First Mover.

Pascal famously distinguishes between that God of the philosophers, on the one hand, and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, on the other. I am not able to explore the question whether this distinction is similar to the one we have been discussing. Still, it is clear that in our purely philosophical tradition – the material we teach to students in our professional lives – some of those items apply to Our God and some to the Head God. I would think that exploring these notions further would be a fruitful area of exploration for future Mormon philosophy of religion.[13]

*Stephen T. Davis is the Russell K. Pitzer Professor of Philosophy at Claremont McKenna College.*

## NOTES

[1] This would include such related doctrines as the claim that God was once a human being, that God and human beings do not differ in kind or species, that God is embodied, and that the spirits of human beings are uncreated.

[2] Although Sarah Coakley convincingly disassociates Gregory of Nyssa from ST, or at least from the way ST has been understood by contemporary analytic philosophers. See Sarah Coakley, "'Persons' in the 'Social' Doctrine of the Trinity," in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity,* ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 123-144.

[3] Augustine, "On the Holy Trinity," in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers* , vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956).

[4] Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity,* ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 204.

[5] As well as the essay by Coakley (see footnote 2), see Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983) and Michel Rene Barnes, "Rereading Augustine's Theology of the Trinity," in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity,* ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 145-176.

[6] The issue is explored sensitively in third chapter of Craig Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 111-142.

[7] See *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith, et al. (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Company, 1961), 372.

[8] Mormon apologists sometimes use John 17: 20-21, where Jesus, speaking of his followers, prays to the Father "…that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us…" But there is not the slightest suggestion here of Jesus' followers ontologically becoming divine.

[9] Another question, crucial in the present context, is whether the God in question has the attributes that mainstream Christians believe: that God has e.g., omnipotence, omniscience, everlastingness, etc.

[10] Of course, defenders of LT who see themselves as enemies of Social Trinitarianism usually hold that this theory amounts to tritheism. I reject that claim, but see Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," 203-249.

[11] I have so argued in "Perichoretic Monotheism: A Defense of a Social Theory of the Trinity," in *The Trinity: East/West Dialogue,* ed. Melville Steward (Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003).

[12] Blake Ostler, "Re-visioning the Mormon Concept of Deity," *Element* 1:1 (Spring, 2005), 31. Italics in original.

[13] I want to thank Professor Brian Birch for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. He obviously does not agree with everything that I've written.

# Unity in Action and the Unity of God

*by* Benjamin Huff

The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus Christ and his Father are one. Traditional Christians have struggled for centuries to make sense of this teaching.[1] Mormons, on the other hand, have been happy to break with tradition on many points, and have often pointed at the difficulties of traditional Christians in explaining the unity of the Godhead as a sign of their having fallen into error, enamored with their own clever philosophies. Since the time of Joseph Smith, Mormons have often been happy to declare that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three Gods.[2] Mormons do not deny that the three are united, but typically explain that they are united in purpose, in cooperation and love, and not "in substance" as Nicene Christians maintain.

In our eagerness to point out flaws in the tradition, however, Mormons have a tendency to go too far, exaggerating differences even to the point of neglecting what our own scriptures say. Mormons are committed to the unity of God at least as much as traditional Christians are. In fact, The Book of Mormon is even more express than the Bible in its teaching that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God.

The Bible often states that Christ and his Father, and sometimes the Holy Ghost, are "one." For example, in John 10:30, Jesus says, "I and my Father are one," and in John 17:21-3, he prays that he, the Father, and his disciples "all may be one . . . as we are one" – that is, as he and his father

are.[3] The Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants, however, state in several places not only that they are "one," but that they are "one God." For example, 2 Nephi 31:21 reads, "this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end"; Alma 11:44 refers to "the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God"; D&C 20:28 states, "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one God"; other passages also use the phrase "one God".[4] Mormons thus face the same original puzzle as traditional Christians of explaining how this is.

Mormons are committed, at least by their own traditional discourse, to the idea that the oneness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a unity in purpose and will. James Talmage in a classic statement describes it as a "unity in the attributes, powers, and purposes of its members," or a "unity of purpose and operation," and specifically rejects the traditional Christian idea of a unity in substance.[5] Mormons since have typically used language quite similar to Talmage's. One may wonder whether in this we have taken ourselves some distance from the Book of Mormon teaching that they are one God.[6] In this paper, however, I argue that these teachings are quite harmonious; in fact unity in purpose provides a complete solution to the traditional problem which both Mormons and traditional Christians face.[7]

As I will explain, Aristotle maintained that for personal beings, unity of purpose *is* substantial unity, and I think he is right. Of course, Aristotle did not explicitly apply this conception of unity to God, and he emphasized the gulf between God and humans in a way that is quite opposed to Mormon thought, and to the use I will make of his conception of personal unity. However, if we examine his account of what it is to be a human person, we find that it provides a helpful model for understanding the unity of persons, human or divine.

Different conceptions of what a human being is may be helpful in different contexts. For biological purposes, a human being may be identified by a distinctive anatomy, as a hairless ape, or featherless biped with opposable thumbs, or by DNA sequences. From an anatomical perspective, we can count human persons simply by counting noses. For legal purposes we may identify a person by a name, a signature, fingerprints, or a numbered identity card. Aristotle suggests that the most important way of understanding a person, however, is as an origin of actions.[8] This

is the conception he finds most helpful in ethics, and in understanding what it is that makes a human life good. In the West today, traditions of empirical science, and political and ethical individualism, incline us to think of a human being as no more or less than a particular human body. If life for a human being is more than breath (pulse, etc.), however, we have reason to see the boundaries of personhood as more fluid than the boundaries of our bodies.

In this paper I set out and argue for a certain way of understanding a person as an origin of actions. The conception I present is based on Aristotle's texts, but not fully determined by them, so in part I steer the conception to my own liking. I also offer some arguments of my own in favor of it. Elsewhere I have argued that this conception illuminates important features of human experience, especially moral experience, and solves key theoretical difficulties in ethics.[9] Here I argue that this conception of unity solves the traditional problem of the unity of God, since God is a personal being.

Of course, in English, traditional Christians typically use the word "person" to refer to the sense in which the three are three, and "substance" to refer to the sense in which they are one. However, they do not pretend to use "person" in its most common contemporary English sense. Since my intent is to offer a solution to the problem presented by scriptural descriptions of God, and not necessarily a rehabilitation of the traditional solution, I will use the word "person" in a different sense, a sense closer to the usual, contemporary meaning of "person" in English. I will construe the Godhead as one person. In particular, because the members of the Godhead are perfectly united in action, I argue they should be understood as a single origin of action, and hence a single person.

Some advantages of this account of the unity of the Godhead are first, that it is clear; second, that it is clearly relevant to religious life and worship; and third, that it allows for the possibility that persons who are not now one with God can become so – a development that should be the highest hope for all Christians.

## AN ORIGIN OF ACTIONS

While discussing choice in his *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.2, Aristotle gives what amounts to a definition of a human being: "what originates movement in this way," through decision or choice, "is a human being."[10]

The Ross translation reads: "Such an origin of action is a man."[11] Aristotle doesn't elaborate on it there, but this definition fits into a fabric of passages elsewhere (particularly in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *De Anima*) that develop his ethical conception of a human being.

In the books on friendship, he says that a person is to be identified with her practical reason: "just as a city and every other composite system seems to be above all its most controlling part, the same is true of a human being," but the most controlling part is reason, at least in a well-constituted person.[12] To reinforce the point, a person's "own voluntary actions seem above all to be those involving reason." Actions deriving from something other than one's reason, even if it be one's feelings, seem to be less than fully voluntary. Evidently "then, [reason], or [reason] above all, is what each person is."[13] The context indicates that the sense of *reason*, here, is *practical reason*. A voluntary action, an action that belongs to one in the truest sense, is an action that originates in one's practical reason. Practical reason is above all the origin of human action, and so to say that the person is to be identified above all with her practical reason is very much in the spirit of the Book VI definition.

Aristotle uses this identification of the person with reason as a sort of short-hand for some points he goes on to make later in the chapter,[14] as he contrasts the virtuous person with the person who merely follows his feelings. Strictly speaking though, to identify a person with her practical reason is a bit of an oversimplification. Practical reason is the most important part of a person from the standpoint of originating action, but the decision, say, to take a walk, goes nowhere without the legs and feet. The decision to recite a poem goes nowhere without the tongue and lips. Strictly speaking, it is the person as a whole that is an origin of actions. Reason and desire have an especially crucial role on this conception, but arms and hands, legs and feet, and eyes and ears are also critically involved.

Conceiving of a person as an origin of actions thus does not conflict, exactly, with conceiving of a person as a certain sort of living body – as a hairless ape, or a multi-cellular organism with a certain kind of DNA. However, it casts these conceptions of the human body in a unique light: the body is now the means by which a person lives her life.[15] Interestingly, Aristotle's *De Anima* specifically identifies any animal, including a human being, as a living body. Yet a living body, in turn, is to be understood precisely as the means of living a certain kind of life.[16] Thus a human,

a certain kind of living body, is to be understood as the origin of characteristic actions and activities that compose a certain kind of life – a human life.

Aristotle understands the various organs of the body – limbs, sense organs, heart, and so forth – in a similar manner. The human heart is a four-chambered muscle in the chest, but it is more properly understood in terms of its activity, pumping blood. The eye is a spherical chamber filled with clear jelly, but more properly an organ for seeing, an organ capable of being used for sight. Of course, persons and organs differ for Aristotle in that strictly speaking, it is the person who originates an activity *in virtue of* the organ. Still the activity distinctive to the organ – or more strictly, the power to perform the activity – is essential to understanding an organ. Because a severed leg can no longer be used for its characteristic activities of walking, jumping and such, it is only a leg in an extended sense, by a kind of resemblance or historical connection with a properly attached leg. It is more strictly the *remains* of a leg, as a corpse is not a person, but rather the remains of a person who has died. Of course, we do not normally speak this way today about the parts of a body. There is something that is the same whether it is attached to a living chicken, or roasting on a grill, covered in barbeque sauce, and we call it a leg. Yet this thing is not what Aristotle finds most interesting for understanding life. There is a difference between a living body and a corpse, and in this case our language can be used more naturally to mark the difference Aristotle is interested in. A living body can move and breathe: the difference between a living body and a corpse is the living body's ability to engage in certain kinds of activity. Aristotle's conception of a human being as an origin of actions through a combination of reason and desire in choice thus can be seen as merely the particular way of working out in the case of humans his understanding of living things in general.

In the discussion of decision, Aristotle specifies that a human being is the origin of her actions in the sense of the origin of movement, the efficient cause. In the order of efficient causation, the person is prior to the actions. Yet in the order of understanding and explanation, the action is prior to the power to act.[17] A power to do an action X cannot really be understood as a power, except in a way that is derived from the action. Indeed, what makes it the kind of power that it is, is its relation to a certain type of action. The being of a power, then, is in action. Aristotle develops this point in his discussion of benefaction: "We are in so far as

we are actualized, since we are in so far as we live and act."[18]

To say that a person is an origin of actions is to say that she is the potency that is realized or actualized in her life, particularly as that life is constituted by actions. Thus while a person is not simply identical with her life, she is not neatly separable from it, either. She is known by a sort of inference from her actions – "what [the producer] is potentially is what the product indicates in actualization,"[19] and the ultimate product of a person is the person's life, including all her actions. To reflect this fact, Anthony Price rephrases *origin of action* as *practical persona*.[20]

## SHARING IN ACTION

One implication of understanding a human being as an origin of actions, is that the boundaries of the person become somewhat fluid. If my arms and legs are parts of me in virtue of the role they play in my actions, then other things that play a crucial role in my actions may count as parts of me as well. Put just like that, this idea sounds odd, but I suggest it fits with our experience. For a musician who has mastered an instrument, the instrument becomes like an extension of herself. She controls its action almost as completely as she controls her own limbs. Without it, she is unable to perform the music that may have become a defining feature of her life. Of course if a guitar, say, is lost or destroyed, it can be replaced much more easily than a hand or foot (though less easily than a fingernail or a shock of hair). Yet while she uses it, arguably the instrument becomes a detachable part of the musician.[21]

More importantly, the boundaries between individual persons can become blurred by this conception. Many activities central to human life are essentially cooperative, and many others are best done in cooperation. When two or more persons originate an action together, they act as one person.

The members of a folk ensemble play different instruments and different parts. When the vocalist sings a melody, the others play various harmonies. Then the fiddle may repeat the melody while the cellist improvises underneath. Yet they are all playing one piece of music. If they were playing individually, they would play quite differently. When they play together, what each member is doing makes sense only because it is part of a concerted effort. In part, this is a matter of planning in advance how each will play to achieve an artful joint performance. Yet if the players are

skilled, each one's effort will be further fitted to that of the others from moment to moment as they play. In all, the predominant intent and goal of each player is the collective activity and achievement of the ensemble. Nor is this merely a matter of idealism. As a practical matter, musicians whose attention and intent are not directed to the performance of the entire ensemble in this way simply will not perform well, and discerning listeners will hear the difference.

While their individual contributions can be distinguished (and must be for some purposes), these contributions can only be fully understood as their respective ways of participating in a larger project. We may call what each one contributes his or her *effort*, which is subsumed in the *action* of all. This example of the musical ensemble illustrates two characteristic features of shared action: collaboration and shared decision. The musicians collaborate in that each one plays an active part in the collective performance. They show mutual decision because they play their parts voluntarily, with the same intention and goal, and they know this.[22]

When persons originate an action in concert in this way, the activity of each is the activity of all. The other players are constitutive of this portion of each player's life. If this action were their whole life, we might say the players were one person with four cooperating bodies.[23] Of course, one musical performance is only a small part of a person's life – a temporal part. Accordingly, the players are not one person, but a part of each is a part of the others. The sharing of life in this way, through originating actions together, I call *friendship for action*.[24] The longer they play together, the more they participate in each others' lives, and hence in each other.

A great many distinctively human activities can only be performed within a society. While we may be reluctant to think of one's society as a part of one, there is something right in Aristotle's claim that a human being living in isolation is either a beast or a god – he is not fully a human being, because so many distinctively human activities are not possible for him. When spouses run a household together, raise children together, vacation together, and so forth, for decade after decade, it is hardly an exaggeration if one speaks of the other as his "better half". To the extent that the actions or lives that define the persons are one, the persons defined in terms of those actions or lives become one. Aristotle says,

> Whatever someone [regards as] his being, or the end for which he chooses to be alive, that is the activity he wishes to pursue in his

> friend's company. Hence some friends drink together, others play dice, while others do gymnastics and go hunting, or do philosophy. They spend their days together on whichever pursuit in life they like most; for since they want to live with their friends, they share the actions in which they find their common life.[25]

When they share enough activities, persons come to share a life, and hence become one in being, one in the thing that makes them persons.

At this point it is important to distinguish my construal of Aristotle's ethical conception of persons from that of some other readers.[26] Certain texts describe an asymmetric sharing of action. The discussion of benefaction in IX.7, the ideal of the magnanimous man in IV.3, and one way of reading the discussion of self-love in IX.8, all can be read as suggesting that while action is often cooperative, there is always one person who is to be understood as the origin, so that his personality is extended into the others' but not vice versa. On this conception, sharing in action may seem to involve a competition for the achievements of virtue, and may threaten to diminish or obliterate the identity of some persons, as they become mere extensions of others' agency. Rather than spelling out my alternative reading of those texts, in the interest of brevity I will only point to other texts that suggest a more mutual picture of shared action: the many references to companions and brothers in the friendship books as equals who share everything, the repeated praise in *Politics* of aristocratic government as opposed to a government of mastery, and the latter portions of Book IX, which emphasize the pleasure of a shared life, particularly in sharing "conversation and thought,"[27] and that "The excellent person is related to his friend in the same way as he is related to himself."[28] The basic notion of persons as origins of actions is susceptible of a mutual reading, and this is the reading I find most attractive. In the best cases, shared activity is a free and mutual participation in each other's lives, based partly on collaboration, but more crucially on shared choice.

## UNITY THROUGH ACTION

For Aristotle, then, unity in action is unity in being. Two or more persons can become one person, if they come to share a life. At this point, we may wonder how to talk about what has happened. Are they two persons, or one? Aristotle does not mind quoting a common saying that

refers to close friends as "one soul in two bodies." We might say they are one person in two bodies. Of course, both of these living bodies are quite capable of functioning independently as persons; it is by their chosen actions that they instead are one. To indicate this potential, we might say they are two personables, or two humans, but one person. Of a married couple we might say they are a man and a woman, but one person.

This is not what we usually say, though, any more than we call a leg something different according to whether it is on a chicken, or on a grill. So long as ordinary English is with us, then, we will have to say they are two persons, but also one person, in another, arguably more important sense. To understand this more important sense, though, it is important to understand that two humans are quite capable of being two persons. That is why it is so wonderful when they become one.

## UNITY OF AND WITH GOD

Now, Aristotle thought that God is independent, not social, and that his primary activity is contemplation – contemplating the best object, namely himself. Aristotle emphasizes that God is self-sufficient. The Christian God, however, is a God who has children and cares for, teaches, and covenants with them. Our God is fundamentally social. Perhaps his chief attribute is love. Further, our Father carries out his work in harmonious cooperation with his Son, and with the Holy Ghost. Indeed, Jesus said, in John 14: 9-10, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father . . . Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?" and then he seems to explain: "the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself, but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works." Evidently, it is above all in their message and in their work that their unity is displayed. This is the same argument Jesus made earlier, when the Jews accused him of blasphemy for saying, "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). He said, "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do . . . ye may know . . . that the Father is in me, and I in him" (John 10: 37-8). The unity of their works is quite complete. Jesus says, "I do nothing of myself, but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things" (John 8:28).[29]

The unity of the Father and Son, then, seems to be above all a unity in action. If God is personal, then in Aristotle's sense God is one person, although the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three persons in a more

mundane sense. All have the attributes of personality, and all are capable of acting as persons in their own right. Hence we might sometimes say, with Joseph Smith, that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three persons and three Gods, and also say, with various Book of Mormon passages, that they are one God, in another, arguably more important sense. To understand this more important sense, though, it is crucial to understand that the members of the Godhead are quite capable of being three persons. That is why their unity is so wonderful. It is also why their unity is religiously important to understand. Though we are now separate persons from them, we are capable of becoming one with them.

Strikingly, after explaining the unity he enjoys with the Father in terms of their work, Jesus goes on to promise that this unity can be extended to his disciples as well: "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do" (John 14:12). Developing this point, he goes on, "I am the true vine . . . Abide in me, and I in you. . . I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, the same bringeth forth much fruit" (John 15:1, 4-5). Their unity with Christ here is the unity of a single living organism, and the task of both vine and branches, working together, is to bring forth fruit.

In the intercessory prayer which follows in chapter 17, Jesus prays that this promise of unity may be realized, not only for the disciples, but for those who come to believe through their work. There, truth and glory, as well as work are shared. Yet it seems to be a continuation and expansion on the same theme. Indeed, Moses 1:39 suggests God's work *is* his glory: bringing to pass the eternal life of his children.

## CONCLUSION

I have argued that persons are most properly understood as origins of actions, and that actions can be shared, through a shared judgment of the good, and cooperation. Active unity of purpose, then, is unity of substance, for humans or for God. Yet this sharing in judgment of the good, and in action, is precisely what Christ calls us to, above all. He calls us to unite our wills with his and his Father's, and to carry forward their work. He gives us authority to act in his name, he tells us how, and he promises that if we are obedient, through the Holy Spirit our hearts will be purified of all sinful desires, so that our wills will harmonize fully with his.

In an empiricist and individualist era, we are not accustomed to thinking of the boundaries of personhood as fluid. We are inclined to dismiss references to someone's "other half", or to someone's taking a part of someone else with him in dying or moving away, as mere poetry. In an Aristotelian frame of mind, however, we may take these references as quite literal and meaningful. This conception of any living being as an origin of certain kinds of distinctive action is woven into and developed systematically through large sections of Aristotle's writing. Further, this conception has appeal today. It explains the bonds we form with inanimate objects that are either instrumental in or otherwise integral to our actions – they become part of us so far as they are part of our activities. It explains the more important bonds we form with other persons through common experience, through serving each other, and through cooperation – they become part of us, and we of them. It also explains how we can become one with our fellow Saints, with our Father in Heaven, and with his Son: by having our wills united with theirs, by cooperating with them in their glorious work of salvation, and thus sharing in their eternal life.

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## NOTES

[1] To be sure, particular points have been established as normative for particular persons and times, but the doctrine has generally remained obscure and confusing for ordinary believers.

[2] Notably, in the "Sermon in the Grove," Joseph states that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost "constitute three distinct personages and three Gods." Joseph Fielding Smith ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 370.

[3] Similarly, 1 John 5:7 states, "there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." Manuscript evidence suggests this text was a late addition to 1 John, but this is of little relevance for my purpose, since similar passages appear in the Book of Mormon. Throughout this paper I use the King James translation of the Bible.

[4] "they are one God" (Mosiah 15:4); "being one God" (Mosiah 15:5); 1 Nephi 13:41; Alma 14:5.

[5] James E. Talmage, *A Study of the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 35–36.

[6] Authors such as Dan Vogel and Thomas Alexander have gone farther, arguing

that the Book of Mormon is not just trinitarian but modalistic, for example in Dan Vogel, "The Earliest Mormon Concept of God," in *Line upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine*, ed. Gary J. Bergera (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 17–33; or in Thomas G. Alexander, "The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine," also in *Line upon Line,* 53–66. I am persuaded, however, that the Book of Mormon is best interpreted as reflecting a social trinitarianism broadly in line with Talmage's view. An extremely thorough treatment of this question , appears in David L. Paulsen and Ari D. Bruening, "The Development of the Mormon Understanding of God," *FARMS Review* 13:2, 109-69.

[7] In fact, along with the idea that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one substance, Talmage specifically rejects the idea that they could be one person. I of course will argue that they are, in the appropriate senses, both one person and one substance. However, since I define these distinctive senses and do not deny that in more ordinary senses they are also three persons and three substances, I do not see myself as disagreeing materially with Talmage.

[8] Or "principle of actions" in T. Irwin's 1999 translation (Hackett). In developing my reading of Aristotle on the nature of persons I have benefited greatly from Jennifer Whiting, "Living Bodies," in M. Nussbaum and A. Rorty, eds., *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima* (Oxford University Press, 2003) 75-92; "Animals and other beings in Aristotle" in J.Lennox and A.Gotthelf, eds., *Philosophical Issues in Aristotle's Biology* (Cambridge University Press, 1987) 360-391; and A.W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (Clarendon Press, 1989). Aristotle consistently employs a functional or activity-based conception of biological being in *De Anima* and other biological works, although it is not obviously consistent with the hylomorphic theory of substance he develops elsewhere.

[9] Benjamin Huff, "Friendship and the Shared Life of Virtue," PhD dissertation, Univ. of Notre Dame, 2006; Benjamin Huff, "The Person as an Origin of Actions," (conference presentation) 8th International Conference on Persons, Warsaw, Poland, August 2005.

[10] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.2 1139b5, trans. T. Irwin (Hackett, 1985). Hereafter, unless otherwise noted, translations of Aristotle are taken from this edition.

[11] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Ross (Oxford UP, 1998). Irwin also offers another interesting translation: "That is why decision is either understanding combined with desire or desire combined with thought; and this is the sort of principle that a human being is." Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.2.1139b5, trans. T. Irwin (Hackett, 1999).

[12] *Nicomachen Ethics*, IX.8 1168b32-4.

[13] Ibid., 1169a2-3.

[14] Ibid., IX.8.

[15] The same could be said for a conception of personal identity based on, say, continuity of memory. Memory is an important feature of human life, without which distinctively human action would not be possible, but memory's meaning

now is found in its role in guiding and facilitating various kinds of action.

[16] For example, Aristotle claims we think of plants as living because "they are observed to possess in themselves an originative power through which they increase or decrease in all spatial directions . . ." (*De Anima* II.2 413a26-8, trans. J.A. Smith). What makes a plant alive is its being an origin of certain plantish activities. The definitive feature of a living body – the soul – in general is the power of nutrition (including growth, decay, and reproduction), the additional feature that distinguishes the animal soul is the power of sensation (in most animals accompanied by the power of local movement), and the feature distinctive of human soul, among the animals, is the power of thought. On the body's being a means of living, see e.g. *Posterior Analytics* I.1.642a9-13.

[17] As he explains in the case of soul generally, "it is necessary for the student of these [vegetable, animal, and human] forms of soul first to find a definition of each, expressive of what it is, and then to investigate its derivative properties, &c. But if we are to express what each is, viz. what the thinking power is, or the perceptive, or the nutritive, we must go farther back and first give an account of thinking or perceiving; for activities and actions are prior in definition to potentialities [or powers]." (*De Anima* II.4 415a16-20, trans. J.A. Smith). See also *Metaphysics* IX.8 1049b13-16.

[18] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IX.7.1168a6-7.

[19] Ibid., 1168a9.

[20] Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle*, 105. Price's account of shared action is excellent, though I disagree with him on some important points.

[21] We may see something similar with many kinds of tools. In lacrosse, for example, a skilled player's awareness of the stick is similar to his awareness of his own body. He catches and throws the ball using the stick, much of the time without having to look at it.

[22] Anthony Price picks out decision and execution as two aspects of action in which friends may share (*Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle*, 119). It may be more illuminating, however, to cast these as picking out two ways of originating action, one thinner and one thicker: sharing in the "mere" decision, or in both the decision and execution.

[23] Arguably it is because of the unity of activity that we consider a multi-cellular organism to be a single organism composed of many cells, rather than a colony of many symbiotic, single-celled organisms.

[24] Friendship for action is not exactly the same as any of the kinds of friendship Aristotle discusses in *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII-IX, but it is closely related to friendship for virtue. Friendship for virtue can be understood as an encompassing case of friendship for action – a friendship in which the friends share in the full range of actions that are expressive of their character and hence constitutive of their lives.

[25] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IX.12 1172a1-7.

[26] For example, A.W. Price, Richard Kraut, and Julia Annas.

[27] Ibid., IX.9 1170b14.

[28] Ibid., IX.9 1170b6.

[29] See also John 5:17, "My father worketh, and I work." John 5:19-20 parallels John 14:12.

# Lockean Persons and LDS Metaphysics

*by* Jan-Erik Jones

## I. INTRODUCTION

An important and defining characteristic of LDS theology is its unorthodox metaphysics. For one thing, the LDS – insofar as there is an LDS metaphysic – reject the actuality of immaterial substance, and thus we reject the doctrine of the immaterial soul. This brand of materialism has a long and interesting history in western theology. For example, in the 16th and 17th centuries those who denied the immaterial soul were typically associated with the Socinian heresy. Socinianism is the theological tradition associated with the teachings of the Italian theologian Fausto Sozzini or 'Socinus' (1539-1604), the forerunner of the Deists and Unitarians.[1] Socinianism today is an odd relic of theological history, but one that was at the center of many theological controversies from the 16th through 18th centuries. As a theological tradition, it is characterized by its radical departure from orthodoxy. Socinianism rejects the doctrines of (i) the Trinity; (ii) the literal divinity of Jesus; (iii) divine foreknowledge; (iv) innate ideas; (v) the satisfaction for sin by Jesus; and (vi) original sin. Most importantly, for my purposes, is the fact that Socinianism denies the natural immortality of the soul – which they took to be material in nature.[2]

It is this materialism about souls that will be the focus of my com-

ments. One advantage of believing that the soul is immaterial is that it explains why a human being can be physically destroyed at an instant, say, in an explosion, without destroying the soul; the soul is non-physical and thus cannot be physically damaged, but it is unclear how a material soul could remain equally undamaged. One of the problems with the Socinian doctrine of persons is that they are material, and hence, one would think, neither indestructible nor immortal. And since the LDS have a Socinian doctrine of souls, the question of how the LDS can explain the possibility of personal survival after the death, destruction and resurrection of a material being is an important question to be addressed. In this paper I will examine the unorthodox LDS doctrine of persons, i.e., material souls, and show that where persons are concerned, the LDS are Socinians.

In the interest of full disclosure, I should point out that my thesis is *not* that the LDS are wholesale Socinians. Rather, my thesis is that there is an interesting Socinian-compatible position within the LDS account of persons that ought to attract the attention of LDS philosophers. I will also argue that John Locke's account of persons and personal identity in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* might help the LDS philosopher and theologian address some of the problems within the doctrine of material persons. My intention here is not to solve the problem, but to demonstrate to the 21st century LDS community that there is a lot of philosophical work left to be done within LDS theology.[3]

## II. LDS METAPHYSICS

As I indicated above, the LDS have a Socinian account of personhood. Substance Dualism is the view that there are two kinds of substances in the created universe, material substances and immaterial, or spiritual, substances. Modern Christians take it that the two comprise the body and soul of humans; the body is the unthinking matter, and the mind is the immaterial spirit.[4] Like Locke and the Socinians, the LDS reject substance dualism and claim that minds (or spirits) are material things (material souls/brains?). For example, in *Doctrine and Covenants*, Section 131:7-8 it says that:

> There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes; We

> cannot see it; but when our bodies are purified we shall see that it is all matter.

The LDS are committed to a material monism; the nature of which is still to be worked out. But the main point is that in rejecting substance dualism by claiming that persons are identical with a material soul, the LDS position on personhood becomes compatible with the Socinian view that spirits are material.

This brand of materialism seems to offer a solution to the well-known mind/body interaction problem which is generated by the definitions of spirits as immaterial beings (having no material properties), and bodies as material beings (having no spiritual or mental properties); if their natures are mutually exclusive, then so are their causal powers.[5] The mind-body interaction problem is that it is inconceivable that a material body and an immaterial soul could causally interact with each other. For example, if my mind or spirit wants my arm to move, then what kind of force could it exert upon my body to move it? If it has no mass, no solidity, no motion, then what does it do to the body to move it? Moreover, if my eyes are receiving 'table' data, then what could my body do to my immaterial spirit to get it to perceive a table? How could the physical data somehow get to a non-physical spirit to perceive a table? If the mind is non-physical and the body is physical, then there is no conceivable set of laws that could allow one kind of thing to interact with the other kind. (Any laws we could conceive of would involve a transfer of matter-energy, but it's inconceivable that immaterial beings like spirits could be affected by matter-energy.) By making the spirit material, the LDS and Socinians appear to have a solution to that problem; the mind and body are both material, and so they can conceivably causally interact by means of some set of physical laws.[6]

Materialism about spirits, however, does create a problem. That is, an advantage of mind/body dualism is that it promises to explain personal survival after death and resurrection; what is dead is the material body, and what survives is the immaterial – and thus immortal – mind that is later added to a resurrected body. But if the LDS accept material monism, then we now need an LDS answer to the problem of personal survival after death and resurrection. Why? Because one major criticism of Socinian materialism about minds is the question of how such material minds could survive death. If the brain – the presumptive locus of conscious-

ness – dies and dissipates, then the materialist needs to explain what has to survive for personal identity to be preserved after death.

It seems that the matter of the brain (on its own) cannot preserve personal identity because after death the brain matter is gone, and the resurrected brain is not – we may suppose – made of numerically the same matter. Moreover, (as I will argue below) continuity of matter *on its own* does not preserve the person. If the brain is what is conscious, and the brain dies too – it stops working at death – then the mind does not survive death. So it seems that the survival of death and resurrection by a material person is a non-starter. If this is true, and given that LDS metaphysics requires that the spirit be material, then isn't the LDS commitment to survival after death and resurrection in trouble?[7]

Not yet. There are at least two possible models of personal survival of death and material disintegration from an LDS-materialist point of view. On the first model, minds *are* (or *are composed of*) uncreated material 'intelligences' that persist through all changes. In fact, many LDS hold to a version of this, where the spirit is simply a material 'copy' of the body, but one that is made out of less visible (or more refined) matter, and at death the two are separated, and rejoined at resurrection. These material minds are what constitute *who* we are, and are attached to our bodies in some physical way so that the two material entities can physically interact with each other.

But, if this is so, then the total set of laws that apply to the material spirit are going to be different from the laws that apply to the other kinds of matter with which we are familiar. After all, if someone at ground-zero in Nagasaki has their material body rapidly disintegrated by a nuclear blast, and one is unwilling to allow that the material spirit or mind is also disintegrated, then we must postulate a further set of laws that apply to material spirits that does not apply to matter generally. In this way, the LDS try to combine the explanatory advantages of metaphysical monism while embracing the theological advantages of mind-body dualism.

Of course, there are difficulties with this account that are analogous to the mind/body interaction problem for dualism. If this model is correct, then we would need to explain why it appears that it is the *brain* that is conscious. For example, *ex hypothesi* damage to the brain will not alter or destroy the soul but does alter and damage the consciousness of the individual. If the spirit is the mind and *it* is what is conscious, and the laws that apply to the spirit do not allow it to be physically damaged (as

in the Nagasaki case), then why does physical damage to the brain result in damage to the individual's consciousness? Since we are supposing that the laws that govern the spirit's interaction with the brain and *vice versa* are compatible enough with the physical laws to allow the spirit and brain to causally interact, then we need an explanation of why the similar causal laws that produce damage to the brain and damage to consciousness do not damage the spirit. Now the position of material spirits appears to be in trouble.[8]

There is, however, another option, and to see what it is, we will have to examine John Locke's method of solving the Socinian's problem. We should also notice that while dualism promises to deliver an account of personhood that will preserve personal identity after both death and resurrection, once we see *how* it could deliver on its promise, we'll see that materialism can provide a similar account.

## III. LOCKEAN PERSONS

The first thing to note is that for Locke, the person is not identical to any particular substance. If the mind (either the soul or brain) is a substance, and substances are simply things that support properties, and in this case mental properties, then the continuity of the substance *all on its own* does *not* preserve identity. If we took my soul or brain and wiped it clean of mental states, memories, consciousness, etc – completely emptied it – then my substance would survive, but would *I* survive that change? No.

On the other hand, imagine that we had two minds (either a soul or brain), one new, blank mind, and the mind of an experimental subject, call him 'Dennis'. What if we downloaded all of the consciousness, mental states, memories, etc., from Dennis' mind into the blank mind so that the new mind was now the substance that is supporting all of Dennis' conscious activity, along with his memories, etc., and then annihilated Dennis' old – and now empty – mind; would we have destroyed Dennis? No; there is still a being thinking Dennis-ish thoughts and behaving Dennis-ly, and who is in possession of all of Dennis' memories and point of view. This conclusion holds whether we suppose that the mind is either the brain or the immaterial soul. So, continuity of substance does not seem either necessary or sufficient to preserve personhood; what is required is continuity of consciousness.

Locke's definition of personhood tells us that persons are conscious, rational and self-aware beings. Therefore, sameness of person (conscious, self-aware, rational being) over time and through change, consists in continuity of consciousness.

> For since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and `tis that, that makes everyone to be, what he calls *self*; and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists personal identity, i.e. the sameness of a rational being: and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self now it was then; and `tis by the same self with this present one that now reflects on it, that that action was done. [II.xxvii.9][9]

Opponents of Locke's criterion of personal identity argue that there is more to personal identity than mere continuity of consciousness over time. Indeed, according to both mind-body dualism and scientific materialism, what makes for the identity of an individual person is the possession of either the same soul or same brain. But as we have seen, neither account on it's own is sufficient.

Before returning to the problem at hand, however, there are some interesting features of Locke's doctrine of persons which we should note. On the orthodox Christian view, the rational soul of humans does triple duty: (i) it sorts individuals into the zoological class of humans, (ii) it causes and explains our typically human behavior, and (iii) it plays the theological role of the *personal* soul – being a person is having a rational soul.

Locke, however, rejects the claim that the rational soul plays any such explanatory and classificatory roles. Locke famously argues that not only is it the case that some human beings have been born devoid of reason, but that there are animals who possess a rationality that surpasses even some human children and mentally handicapped adults. In this way Locke denies both that the rational soul manifests itself in observable ways, and that no rational creatures have been found lacking our general shape. In other words, we have no empirical evidence of such souls.

More importantly, Locke's rejection of the doctrine of the rational soul as the substantial forms for humans is *ipso facto* a rejection of the orthodox dualism of body and immaterial soul. By his lights, there is neither

a conceptual nor empirical reason to think that the locus of consciousness cannot be the brain.

## IV. PERSONS AND HUMANS

One stated purpose of Locke's *Essay* is to determine the origin, certainty, and extent of human knowledge. According to Locke, this includes knowledge of our moral duties: "Our business here is not to know all things, but those which concern our conduct" [I.i.6]. This knowledge of moral duties is achievable, he thinks, because God has designed us in a way that ensures that nothing relevant to morals is in principle cognitively unavailable to us: "the candle, that is set up in us, shines bright enough for all our purposes" [I.i.5]. In this section, I will examine one feature of Locke's 'metaphysics of morals' that deals with the distinction between persons and humans.

Unlike the species term 'human', the intension and extension of which are arbitrary for Locke, the moral term 'person' is clear and well-defined. A *person* 'is a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places' [II.xxvii.9]. And, as we saw in the previous section, personal identity for Locke consists in the continuity of consciousness as experienced from the same point of view. Since a certain continuity of consciousness is the ground of personal identity, then it follows that personal identity is a distinct concept from physical identity, or species identity.

> But yet the soul alone in the change of bodies, would scarce to anyone . . . be enough to make the same man. For should the soul of a prince, carrying with it the consciousness of the prince's past life, enter and inform the body of a cobbler as soon as deserted by his own soul, every one sees, he would be the same person with the prince, accountable only for the princes actions: but who would say it was the same man? [II.xxvii.15]

There are two important points brought up in this passage that are worth making note of here. First, Locke has a theological and a moral interest in seeing to it that his account of personal identity allows for the praise and blame of an individual according to *their own* actions. Sec-

ondly, it is important to notice that the presence of the consciousness of the prince in the body of the cobbler is both necessary and sufficient to preserve the personal identity of the prince, but he would not remain the same human being after the change; the prince is the same *person*, but a different *man* than before. Clearly, then, Locke's conclusion would hold if, as in Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, a man were to go to bed as a human, but wake up in the body of a bug; provided that he retained his consciousness and memories. The person would survive this transformation, i.e., he would be the same person but not the same man, for he would no longer be a *man*.

Locke's distinction between persons and humans is crucial for his programme. As he famously argues, there can be no *scientia* (deductive knowledge) of substances because their real essences are unknowable. Human beings, being legitimate substances, are therefore beyond our scientific ken. 'Human' is also a species term, and therefore arbitrary in both its extension and intension. By Locke's criteria, however, we can possess *scientia* of modes. By the word 'substance' he means an independent object, e.g., a man, a cat, a tree, a rock, God, etc., anything that exists on its own. In this technical sense, then, the concept of a *substance* is the concept of a *thing*. By contrast, however, a mode is any quality, property, relation, etc., that depends on substances for its existence. For example, honesty is a mode because it does not exist on its own but requires people (substances) to be honest; justice requires substances like people and objects as their property, so justice is a mode. By Locke's lights, mathematics, morals and all the conventional language of religion, politics and culture consist of modes. For this reason, he argues, the truths of mathematics and morals, whose essences are human creations, are demonstrable. Moreover, Locke argues that since the science of morals deals with persons, as opposed to individuals *qua* members of the human species, Locke is committed to the view that persons are not substances, but modes. And this is something we might expect, after all, Locke wants to remain uncommitted on the nature of the thing that accounts for personal identity.

It is clear then that Locke's motivation for the distinction between persons and humans is thoroughly moral and theological. The locus of moral responsibility cannot be a human, which is a substantial species term, because moral responsibility requires more than membership in the right species. More importantly, *humans* do not persist after death and the general resurrection, individual consciousnesses will. The real essence of

persons consists in something wholly knowable, i.e., the continuity of consciousness, whereas the real essence of humans is beyond our ken.

Locke takes special care to bring out the moral and theological motivations for this view. What he wants is to preserve all the important features of moral responsibility relevant to moral lives and the ultimate disposition of the soul.

> *Person*…is a forensic term appropriating actions and their merit; and so belongs only to intelligent agents capable of a law, and happiness and misery. This personality extends itself beyond present existence to what is past, only by consciousness, whereby it becomes concerned and accountable, owns and imputes to itself past actions, just upon the same ground, and for the same reason, that it does to the present. . . . And to receive pleasure or pain; i.e. reward or punishment, on the account of any such action. . . . And therefore conformable to this, the Apostle tells us that at that Great Day, when everyone shall receive according to his doings, the secrets of all hearts shall be laid open. The sentence shall be justified by the consciousness all persons shall have, that they themselves, in what bodies soever they appear, or what substances soever that consciousness adheres to, are the same, that committed those actions, and deserve that punishment for them. [II.xxvii.26]

When the dead appear before their judge to receive their rewards or punishments, it is morally required that the individuals who are thus rewarded and punished be those who performed the relevant actions. *Persons* belong to the correct ontological category for this kind of recompense because it is the same person (not the same human) who acted morally during their life and who will be rewarded in the hereafter.

## V. ANOTHER SOLUTION

While there are a lot of technical issues surrounding the *continuity of consciousness theory* of personal identity,[10] and a defense of the general theory would be beyond the scope of this discussion, it is not implausible to believe that what makes a person *the same person* (or at least a continuer of the person) over time and through change is not the stuff that creates or sustains the mental activity, but the continuity of the con-

sciousness itself. With this in mind, we shall return to the initial problem of providing a materialist account of personhood that will explain how a material person could remain the *same* person even after death and resurrection.

Drawing on the work of Locke we can make room for another materialist account of personal identity through death and resurrection. Let's begin by taking a look at the puzzle cases that John Hick presents to us:

> 1. Imagine that John Smith disappears in the US and an exact copy of him instantly appears in India. On close examination, memory tests, personality tests, DNA tests, etc., we discover that the Smith in India is indistinguishable from the Smith that no longer exists in the US, would we conclude that the Smith in India is the same person as the John Smith that formerly existed in the US?
> 2. Imagine that John Smith dies in the US and an exact copy of him instantly appears in India. Even though we have the corpse of John Smith in hand, on close examination, memory tests, personality tests, DNA tests, etc., we discover that the Smith in India is indistinguishable from the Smith that is dead in the US, would we conclude that the Smith in India is the same person as the John Smith that formerly lived in the US?
> 3. Imagine that John Smith died in the US and an exact copy of him appears in Resurrection World. On close examination, memory tests, personality tests, (DNA tests?), etc., we discover that Smith in Resurrection World is indistinguishable from the Smith who died in the US, would we conclude that the Smith in Resurrection World is the same person as the John Smith that formerly existed in the US?[11]

On the one hand, many philosophers and theologians will balk at the thought of personal survival in all of these cases, but as I argued above, continuity of substance *in se* is neither necessary nor sufficient for personal identity; and we have reason to suspect that the theory that says that the same material spirit survives is in trouble. On the other hand, it's not clear that survival of a material person after a change of matter is impossible. So here is one way it could be approached.

Let me now introduce a purposefully vague concept of *functionalism*. Functionalism in theories of consciousness says that a mind is any or-

ganization of stuff that is structured in a way sufficient to realize mental activity. That is, mental states are caused by occupants of specific causal roles. For example, a carburetor is an auto part that mixes oxygen with fuel. They come in a variety of designs, each with their own physical structure and composition, and each with their own mixture ratios, but anything that mixes air and fuel is a carburetor. Analogously, anything that is functionally organized in a way that causes mental activity is a mind. Two distinct minds could be functionally organized in exactly the same way, e.g., yours and mine. Moreover, if one could find appropriate computer components, one could *in principle* organize them so that they reproduce the functional architecture – causal roles – of a human mind, the result would be an artificial mind. This is called the 'multiple realizability of minds;' minds can be constituted out of a variety of things, not just gray matter.

Here's the point: if you believe that the spirit is conscious, and that it is material, and that there are different kinds of minds possible, then functionalism gives us another possible account of personal survival after death; materialism *cum* functionalism explain how a *mortal* spirit could in fact be resurrected without sacrificing sameness of person.

Imagine that LDS spirits are material beings functionally organized so that they are conscious. Indeed, according to *Doctrine and Covenants* 93, intelligences are conscious beings that are uncreated, nevertheless, it is plausible to think that they can be organized into more or less conscious beings.[12] Imagine further that when these spirits 'leave' the pre-existence, they do so by disappearing there (they disassociate) at the exact moment that the material brain on Earth to which they will be associated is at the right stage of development to support consciousness. On Earth, your conscious brain develops and records your beliefs and actions in its physical structure. At the instant you die, God takes the functional architecture of your mortal brain that preserves the memory of all of the things that you have done and recreates an exact replica in the matter of a post-mortal spirit. In this way, by copying the functional structure of your mortal brain, he creates a mind that continues the consciousness and beliefs that you had while on Earth. After judgment and resurrection, he then creates another spirit-mind in the matter of a perfect resurrected body, in which your pre-mortal, mortal and post-mortal experiences are completely represented as your memories.[13]

If this is possible, then it's perfectly possible for there to be four nu-

merically distinct instantiations of you (pre-mortal, mortal, post-mortal and resurrected) and still make sense of them as being legitimately *you*. Moreover, he could destroy the pre-mortal, mortal and post-mortal versions of you after the successor has been created, and as long as there is something that exists that is the instantiation of your particular consciousness, then you still exist. In this way, persons in the LDS tradition would not be substances but modes (functional organizations that depend upon the matter that causes and sustains that consciousness).

## VI. CONCLUSION.

Like the Socinians, Locke and the LDS reject substance dualism for theological reasons, and argue for a materialist account of persons. Moreover, like both Locke and the Socinians, there is room in the LDS metaphysic for souls to be mortal; no particular instantiation of your soul needs to be eternal, even though *you* are. Furthermore, on the LDS view, it is possible for there to be a distinction between persons and humans; we are only humans during our brief mortal experience, but we are persons throughout our careers as conscious creatures. In this way, "human" is a zoological classification, while "person" is a forensic term. The upshot of all of this is that the Socinian-compatible materialist account of persons in LDS theology is not just heretical, but creates a host of philosophical and theological issues which deserve to be explored further. It is my hope that this paper has inspired us to pursue that exploration.

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## NOTES

[1] Socinus was at one point the leader of the Minor Church, a Polish Protestant organization.

[2] The tradition of accusing Locke's works of being generally Socinian in tenor seems to have begun with John Edwards, who in 1695 accused Locke's anonymously published *Reasonableness of Christianity* of being '. . . all over Socinianized', an accusation he was to repeat in several other works on Socinianism. In 1697, the grand jury of Middlesex condemned Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity* for denying the Trinity and giving rise to Socinianism and Arianism, while simultaneously suggesting that it also gave rise to both deism and atheism. Whatever the merits of

the grand jury's decision, it does indicate that Socinianism was both a hot issue at the time, and its presence was detected by (at least some of the orthodox) readers of Locke's works. And there is some reason to suspect that Locke was a Socinian. He denied the doctrine of original sin and rejected infant baptism; the only one culpable for Adams sin was Adam. He also rejected the doctrine of innate ideas and espoused both theological rationalism and toleration. And even though all of these are enough to suspect Locke of embracing the Socinian heresy, there is more direct evidence available: he also denied the doctrine of the Trinity for what seem to be Socinian reasons.

It was the apparent taint of Socinianism in the *Essay* that prompted Edward Stillingfleet, Lord Bishop of Worcester, to press Locke on his acceptance or denial of the Trinity. Locke's answer to Stillingfleet on whether he believed in the Trinity was: "My lord, my Bible is faulty again, for I do not remember that I ever read in it either of these propositions, in these precise words, 'there are three persons in one nature, or, there are two natures in one person." This denial provides us with two further reasons for identifying Locke as a Socinian: first, Socinians denied the doctrine of the Trinity, as Locke does in the first part of the quotation. Secondly they deny the Trinity *by means of* denying the literal divinity of Jesus. Jesus, on the Socinian view, was a mere man. According to the Chalcedonian Creed, however, Jesus is God incarnate; simultaneously fully human and fully God. Thus, Locke's second claim, that the Bible lacks any reference to Jesus as having two natures, would surely be thought by most theologians at the time to indicate that he sided with the Socinians on this point.

Nevertheless, there remains some question about how Socinian Locke really was. First of all, Locke's Christology is unclear; his denial of the Chalcedonian Creed does not reveal enough of his positive view to determine whether he believes Jesus to be divine. Secondly, his motivation for the denial of the trinity is not theological, but exegetical (the Bible makes no reference to it) and philosophical. That is, Locke rejected the doctrine of the Trinity on semantic and epistemological grounds, not for theological reasons.

[3] I should point out that throughout this paper I will be using the terms "soul", "spirit" and "mind" interchangeably. Since nothing in particular hangs on the intentions or extensions of those terms, their relative synonymy will not cause any philosophical problems.

[4] The history of the nature of the soul in Christian thought is complicated. Not only were Pharisees and Sadducees materialists, but some among the early Christians, e.g., Tertullian, were as well. The impetus behind our current Christian tendency toward mind-body dualism seems to originate with the Christian Neo-Platonist St. Augustine who (presaging Descartes) took the irreducible distinction between thought and extension to indicate a real distinction between body and soul.

[5] This problem is traced back to the letter from Princess Elisabeth van de Pfalz to Descartes in May of 1643.

[6] There are other possible solutions to the interaction problem. For example,

idealists like Bishop George Berkeley (1685-1783; see his *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*), take it that the interaction problem can be solved by eliminating our ontological commitment to matter. That is, idealism is the view that the only things that exist are minds and their contents, and so if there are only minds and no material bodies, then the aforementioned tension does not arise. However, it is unclear how this solves the problem; how immaterial minds interact with each other, and account for consciousness, are equally unintelligible. Another approach to the problem, possibly advocated by Descartes (see, for example, his reply to Princess Elisabeth in *Rene Descartes: Philosophical Essays and Correspondence*, ed. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Press, 2000), 213-215), is the view that God created bodies and minds to be distinct kinds of substances, but also established laws that govern their interactions. Even if this suggestion were accepted, the unintelligibility of these interactions, along with our utter lack of evidence for an immaterial soul, remain problematic; the possibility that immaterial souls and material bodies interact is one thing, why we ought to *believe* that they *do* is another.

[7] It may be thought that there is an equivocation here between 'matter' *simpliciter* and the LDS concept of 'spirit matter'. If I am equivocating on 'matter' here, then this helps the LDS view. However, it is unlikely that such an accusation of equivocation can stick; the problem that I am attempting to diagnose seems to me to be general, not one that applies to any particular notion of matter. But this is part of the problem; a term is used equivocally if it has two different meanings in two different instances of use, but in order to equivocate in this way the concept of spirit matter would have to be understood well enough to distinguish it from matter generally, and this I do not believe has been done.

[8] A further problem with the material spirit is that, if it existed in a pre-existent world in another solar system, then it is unclear how it could travel the required distance to arrive here on Earth in a reasonable amount of time in order to attach to its host. After all, there appears to be a speed limit on bodies that have any rest mass, and it is less than the speed of light. But even at the speed of light, it would take four and one-third years—a significant amount of time—to travel to our nearest stellar neighbor, Alpha Centauri; it would take even longer for a body with a rest mass. The point is, the question of how spirits would travel the vast distances from Kolob to Earth has not been explained, and it does seem like an important issue to address.

[9] Unless noted otherwise, citiations of Locke are from his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding.*

[10] There are several stock criticisms of the continuity of consciousness theory. First, it is argued that it is circular; if the answer to the question 'who am I?' is 'the person that has my consciousness', then we have begged the question. Secondly, it is argued that it violates the transitivity of identity: if S at t1 remembers doing a1, and S at t2 remembers doing a1 & a2, but S at t3 remembers doing a2 but not a1, then the continuity of consciousness theory of persons seems to imply that S at t1 and t2 are the same person, and S at t2 and t3 are the same person, but S

at t1 is not the same person as S at t3. The view I advocate avoids both of these consequences. For more criticisms of the continuity of consciousness theory, see Bernard Williams' "The Self and the Future", *Philosophical Review,* Vol. 79 no. 2 (April 1970): 161-80, Mark Johnston's "Human Beings", *Journal of Philosophy*, 84 (1987): 59-83, and Tamar Szabó-Gendler's "Personal Identity and Thought Experiments", *The Philosophical Quarterly,* 52, n. 206 (2002): 34-54. The position for which I am presently arguing is also defended by Sydney Shoemaker's "Persons and their Pasts", in *American Philosophical Quarterly* 7, (1970).

[11] See John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1983), 122-32.

[12] While it appears from *Doctrine and Covenants* 93 that conscious intelligences are natural, not created, it also appears that they can be organized, so the fact that a naturally occurring material organization can be conscious is not incompatible with my thesis. If, on the other hand, they can be conscious prior to that organization into a composite, then it is still compatible with the thesis I am presenting that the organization does some of the work of preserving the mental states. So naturally occurring conscious beings need not be in conflict with functionalism about the kinds of consciousness required for personhood.

[13] Of course, this is not a theory that preserves personal *identity*, but it does preserve *persons*. That is, each successor stage of a person is the same person in the sense that the later person possesses the earlier person's beliefs and memories and experiences them—from the inside—as their own. In this way we can avoid the problem of circularity in defining the same person as the person who has the same consciousness. Moreover, we can avoid the problem of violating the law of transitivity; if person A is identical to person B, and person B is identical to person C, then A is identical to C, but in my version of persons the pre-mortal Dennis is not identical to the resurrected Dennis, but he is the same person. There is no identity of persons through change of matter, there are only successors.

# Latter-day Saint Conscience

*by* Rosalynde Frandsen Welch

LDS theology does not support a robust notion of individual conscience. The Book of Mormon contains only five instances of the word, spoken by only two Nephite prophets: King Benjamin uses the word three times in his important speech, and Alma the Younger uses the word twice, in two separate sermons.[1] The Doctrine and Covenants produces the word just four times, closely clustered in sections 134 and 135. Nor do non-canonical LDS sources supplement this lack: the word "conscience" appears infrequently in the titles of conference addresses; and *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism* contains no entry on "conscience" at all, although it does have an entry for "conscientious objection."

Given Mormonism's vibrant emphases on personal testimony and individual agency, this weak notion of conscience is curious. Placed in a historical context, however, this absence may not be as glaring as it initially seems; Christianity generally has not always supported a robust notion of conscience as we understand it, either. The idea of conscience developed in Scholastic thought held a bipartite anatomy: one limb, the Greek *synderesis,* represented a repository of general moral axioms and deontological principles, a resource that exists apart from active human reason, impersonal inert, and non-deliberative. The other, *syneidesis* (the Latin *conscientia*), referred to the agency of the soul that applies and adapts through reason and judgment the general axioms of *synderesis* to specific

actualities of circumstance and action; this faculty was deliberative, applied, and practical – though still not a self-justifying source of moral legitimacy.

By the middle of the seventeenth century, a different bifurcation of the concept, adapted to the political conditions of the day, dominated religio-political discourse of Reformation-racked England, the birthplace of our modern notions of conscience and, as I show below, the historical moment in which Mormon conscience locates itself. An older Calvinist variant was an inhibitory faculty that discouraged unauthorized action, an internalized arm of state and ecclesiastical power that infiltrated the very thought of the subject: this conscience was a backward-looking entity that generated guilt for past sin and urged present compliance with an accepted (and external) canon of behavior. Paul refers to this kind of inhibitory action in his most famous passage on conscience, Romans 13: 1, 5: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers… not only for wrath but also for conscience sake." The emerging variant of the private conscience, on the other hand, was something quite different: an autonomous and intensely internalized agency that endorsed conscientious dissent from (or a conscientious compliance with) the external claims of state and ecclesiastical authority. This conscience was a forward-looking and self-legitimizing center of individual moral authority. The private conscience evolved as a theological and institutional survival mechanism for marginalized religious sects during the tumultuous course of English reformation: first Protestant, then Catholic, and then radical Protestant ecclesiastical leaders needed to explain to their flocks how and why they should place personal conviction above external constraint, even when the personal costs for that choice were very high. The private conscience provided the vocabulary for those discussions.

The reasons for the absence of a vigorous category of conscience in LDS theology are not difficult to divine: the casuistical work of "conscience," as it has been developed in other religious contexts, is performed in LDS thought by alternate spiritual categories, rendering a formal conscience all but unnecessary. The LDS idea of the Light of Christ, for example, works in many ways analogously to the proto-conscience *synderesis*; indeed, conscience is explicitly equated with the Light of Christ in the LDS Bible Dictionary. The Light of Christ, like *synderesis*, originates apart from human cognition and experience; that is, ultimate moral prerogative and epistemic privilege does not reside within the individual but rather in

an external and superior source of truth. D&C 88 emphasizes the prior, external origin of the Light of Christ by likening the enlightenment it provides to the light of the sun, moon and stars, striking images of exteriority and distance: "And the light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings" (D&C 88:11).

Unlike familiar contemporary versions of conscience, the Light of Christ does not act or judge independently; indeed, it does not act or judge at all. Bruce R. McConkie explains the Light of Christ as the "indwelling, immanent" mechanism of divine omnipresence, which has "no agency, [and] does not act independently."[2] Rather, the Light of Christ provides a substrate of knowledge of good and evil without which human agency is incapable of moral choice. Human moral agency is a great theme of Book of Mormon prophets, and Mormon emphasizes the leveling effect of the Light of Christ on human capacity for moral judgment: "For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to *every man*, that he may know good from evil; . . . And now, my brethren, seeing that ye know the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ, see that ye do not judge wrongfully" (Moroni 7: 16, 18, emphasis mine). Two elements work against each other in this scripture. First, all humans are awarded access to the Light of Christ; most formulations of conscience contains elements of a similar epistemic individualism, even egalitarianism. But here Mormon limits the radical egalitarian implications of conscience, reserving ultimate moral authority for Christ rather than for the individual judgment.

Still, the doctrine of the Light of Christ allocates the *potential* for moral judgment to all men and women equally, and thus incorporates some of the decentering impulse of conscience. As a dependent faculty that draws its legitimacy from the (external) agency of Christ himself, the Light of Christ provides every human with a basic knowledge of good and evil sufficient to influence choice by generating guilt for past sin and inhibiting present sinful behavior. This is the sense in which both Benjamin an Alma use the term "conscience": Benjamin assures his listeners twice of his "clear conscience" before God, his conscience having surveyed his past actions and recognized them to be devoid of blame; conversely, Alma associates "remorse of conscience" with the guilt attendant on sin. In this way, the Book of Mormon prophets' limited use of the concept most closely resembles the Calvinist inhibitory conscience, that backward-looking entity that generates guilt for past sin and urges compliance with a

prior (and external) standard of behavior

If the Light of Christ displaces the inhibitory conscience in Mormon theology, then the concepts of the Holy Ghost and personal revelation can be seen to replace the private conscience. The Holy Ghost is the revelator who discharges the process of personal revelation: Joseph Smith taught that "no man can receive the Holy Ghost without receiving revelations."[3] And personal revelation, among the most vibrant and distinct of LDS doctrines, awards each worthy member the right to request and receive divine guidance on "all things which are expedient unto the children of men" (D&C 18:18). Taken together, then, the imbricated principles of the Holy Ghost and personal revelation facilitate the transmission of divine knowledge, knowledge that may endorse conviction, inform choice, and legitimize future and present action. The Holy Ghost works as a moral guide, as the arbiter of competing truth claims, and, above all, as the infallible witness of the divinity of Christ and the truth of the restored church. The great role of the Holy Ghost, then, is to communicate testimony: Moroni promises that "By the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things" (Moroni 10:5). In this way, the related principles of the Holy Ghost and personal revelation correspond with the function performed in post-restoration England by private conscience, the primary province of which was the great matter of sectarian affiliation.

And like the early modern private conscience, the principle of personal revelation requires some supplementary limiting principle in order to contain its potential to disperse moral authority beyond the organizational channels of the institution in which it resides. Because personal revelation, like private conscience, is both epistemologically unverifiable and radically egalitarian, its authority, left unchecked, would encroach upon and compete with the jurisdiction of centralized, institutional authority. (Indeed, the private conscience mediated precisely this sort of religio-political dissent on many occasions in early modern England, not least of which was the English Civil War.) In England, the discourse of conscience was organized around an incipient distinction between private and public realms: dissenting private conscience was tolerated within the confines of private space, and public authority presided in public space – but because the topography of public and private spaces was subject to continual negotiation, private conscience often irrupted into the public sphere. In the LDS context, a similar limiting principle has developed to organize vectors of authority: personal revelation dictates "private and

personal concerns," but official revelation governs the public affairs of the church and general principles of doctrine. This principle finds more familiar articulation in the vocabulary of stewardship: revelation, whether personal or official, flows to the proper stewards of the knowledge, and thus an individual acting on his or her own behalf may not claim the authority of personal revelation to legitimize behavior or speech that abrogates official revelation in matters of general church interest. In this way, the doctrine of personal revelation with its supplementary principle of stewardship more fully contains the destabilizing potential of dispersed moral authority than does the discourse of conscience.

Conscience does, however, play one crucial role in LDS theology. Conscience is the central category in the 11th article of faith: "We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may." Just like the beleaguered Protestant and Catholic ecclesiasts of the sixteenth-century, Joseph Smith, himself the leader of a beleaguered fledgling church, recognized the need for a category to negotiate the competing claims of state and religious authority, to organize public and private claims of legitimacy, and to shield the vulnerable claims of private religious conviction from coercive public power – competing claims that were often realized in violent conflict. This is precisely the context in which the word "conscience" appears in the 134th section of the D&C:

> We believe that no government can exist in peace, except such laws are framed and held inviolate as will secure to each individual the free exercise of conscience, the right and control of property, and the protection of life. . . . We believe that religion is instituted of God; and that men are amenable to him, and to him only, for the exercise of it, unless their religious opinions prompt them to infringe upon the rights and liberties of others; but we do not believe that human law has a right to interfere in prescribing rules of worship to bind the consciences of men, nor dictate forms for public or private devotion; that the civil magistrate should restrain crime, but never control conscience; should punish guilt, but never suppress the freedom of the soul…holding sacred the freedom of conscience. (D&C 134:2, 4, 5)

Rodney Smith has discussed the parallels between the political thinking of Section 134, which was drafted largely by Oliver Cowdery, and the written thought of James Madison and his teacher John Witherspoon, political philosopher of the Scottish Enlightenment.[4] For Madison and Witherspoon, conscience precedes reason, as God's law graven on our hearts and the "transcript of his moral excellence."[5] The epistemological privilege of conscience, according to Madison and Witherspoon, should be matched by political privilege for its dictates: governments should allow the "full and free" exercise of religious conscience, except under certain limited circumstances.[6] This political right to free conscience originates in one's spiritual duty to God: as Madison puts it, "What is here a right towards men [ie free conscience] is a duty towards the Creator."[7] In this way, the free exercise of conscience is both an inalienable right – perhaps, by virtue of its origin in duty to God, even more strongly protected than other fundamental political rights – and, simultaneously, a merely secondary effect of one's prior duty to God in a pluralistic society.

As Smith shows, the treatment of free conscience in Section 134 largely parallels its treatment in Madison's and Witherspoon's writing. Revealed and composed in response to the persecutions of Missouri, Section 134 vigorously shields the free exercise of conscience from the assaults of religious prejudice and the encroachment of legal regulation, placing one's obligation to God prior to one's obligation to the state. The privilege of private conscience, as it is laid out in Section 134, is subject to two limitations only: conscience may be curtailed if it 1) molests or disturbs the rights of others to conscience, property or life, or if it 2) fosters outright sedition or rebellion against the state.[8] These limitations are drawn quite narrowly, allowing a broad space for protected religious dissent to flourish and establishing the boundaries of public authority at a significant remove from religious practice. But herein lies a significant difference between the conscience that emerges from Madison's writing and the conscience of the Doctrine and Covenants: as Frederick Mark Gedicks has shown, Madison "value[s] *individual* conscience over loyalty to the collective, whether it was public or private," whereas D&C 134 primarily concerns the protection of group religious practice by government, saying very little about individual or private conscience.[9]

In the Doctrine and Covenants, then, conscience thus provides a way to understand the role of religious conviction in a plural religio-political field, the situation of the believer in Babylon. In this sense, conscience is

a useful category precisely when the potential for conflict between public/state and private/religious initiatives exists – a scenario that describes not only the position of dissenting religious sects during the Reformation but also the situation of polygamous Saints in the late nineteenth century. Appeals made on behalf of Lorenzo Snow to the U.S. Supreme Court while he was imprisoned in 1886 for violation of the Edmunds' Act invoke precisely this formulation of the rights of conscience.[10] President Snow's attorney explicitly likens the situation of the Latter-day Saints to dissenting Protestant sects during the Reformation, citing the inevitable specters of Philip II's inquisition and Bloody Mary's Protestant martyrs. A gross misunderstanding of the practice of polygamy, it is argued, "affords to their persecutors the opportunities and stimulus for breaking over all the bounds of religious toleration, for invoking and using the machinery of criminal law and pushing it up to and beyond the barriers which have been erected for the security of the rights of conscience."[11] In making this argument, the Mormons place themselves firmly in the long tradition of religious dissent mobilized by discourses of conscience.

For its part, the Supreme Court found Mormon conscience as challenging in 1878 as Elizabeth I found recusant Catholic conscience in 1578: if the Mormons should be allowed their conscience, the Court argued in the Reynolds decision, "the professed doctrines of religious belief [should be] superior to the law of the land, and . . . every citizen [should be permitted] to become a law unto himself."[12] This is the specter of egalitarianism gone amok: the unverifiable yet self-authenticating quality of multiple individual consciences undermines the basic conditions of consensus necessary for community. Some limiting principle was needed to determine when and how conscience may be constrained, and the Court's eventual formulation was essentially similar to Elizabeth's in distinguishing between religious belief and religious practice: "Laws are made for the government of actions, and while they cannot interfere with mere religious belief and opinions, they may with practices."[13] Nathan Oman, in a paper on the Reynolds arguments, suggests that Mormons responded (unsuccessfully, of course) to the court's curtailment of polygamy with a two-fold logic of resistance: first, it was argued, the practice of polygamy represented a highly visible case of religiously-motivated civil disobedience, in which the competing power claims of state and God were arbitrated and resolved in favor of loyalty to church by the individual conscience. Second, Mormons argued that the Court's decision was

unconstitutional because it violated natural law.[14] Because natural law is itself a concept that draws its legitimacy in part from a collective human conscience, both forms of Mormon resistance to federal authority can be seen to rest on notions of conscience.

The "freedom of conscience" in D&C 134, then, is primarily a freedom of *religious* conscience: as Gedicks argues, LDS conscience is oriented primarily to the infringement on religious conscience by government, and not toward the rights of individual conscience against private organizations. And because Latter-day Saints do not expect a thoroughgoing moral pluralism to characterize either Zion or the eternities, the concept of conscience is a useful but fundamentally pragmatic and temporal tenet of LDS theology.

Of course, concepts like personal revelation – that is, those categories that replace the individual private conscience in LDS thought – still pose some of the sociological and institutional challenges that conscience does, even if institutional loyalty takes priority over individual conscience – or even if conscience is not an overt part of the calculus at all. The cognate conflicts of conscience and its LDS proxies require us to ask how we negotiate "personal revelation" when it contradicts general revelation? How do we reconcile personal revelation with our emphasis on restored priesthood authority? What are the limits of the legitimacy of personal revelation? In my judgment, the LDS doctrines that replace conscience better contain the disruption to the crucial organizational conditions of transparency and consensus threatened by the radical individualism of conscience. In this corner of theology, as in others, Mormonism privileges a collective and social morality over the individual and agonistic morality of conscience.

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## NOTES

[1] See Mosiah 2:27, 4: 23; Alma 29:5, 42:18.

[2] Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Company, 1985), 257.

[3] Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith, et

al. (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Company, 1961), 328.

[4] See Rodney K. Smith, "James Madison, John Witherspoon, and Oliver Cowdery: The First Amendment and the 134th Section of the Doctrine and Covenants," *BYU Law Review,* no. 3 (2003): 291-340.

[5] Qtd. in ibid., 299.

[6] Ibid., 202.

[7] Qtd. in ibid., 206.

[8] See D&C 134:4-5.

[9] Frederick Mark Gedicks, "The 'Embarrassing' Section 134," *BYU Law Review,* no. 3 (2003): 970.

[10] See George Ticknor Curtis, *A Plea for Religious Liberty and the Rights of Conscienc.* (Washington D.C.: Gibson Bros., Printers and Bookbinders, 1886).

[11] Ibid., 32.

[12] Qtd. in Nathan Oman, "Polygamy, Positivism, and Natural Law," (unpublished manuscript), 27.

[13] Ibid., 36.

[14] See Oman's enlightening discussion in ibid., 45-47.

# Embodied Knowledge of God

*by* Jennifer C. Lane

In Spring 2005 I was attending a conference during the last days of Pope John Paul II. My return trip included a stopover in Atlanta where I spent several hours watching the funeral on the airport CNN broadcast. As I watched the celebration of the funeral Mass I reflected on the ease and naturalness with which Cardinal Ratzinger officiated. While I had attended Mass before, the mammoth scale of this liturgical event invited attention. I reflected on the kind of knowledge that was on display, a knowledge of what to do, how to hold oneself. This liturgical action represented a kind of embodied knowledge. By this I mean that his action was without thought, in the sense that it appeared to be purely natural. It was what the individual was. In watching it I wondered what would be involved in learning this and what it would mean to the one who embodied it.

The embodiment of knowledge I observed as an outsider caused me to reflect on knowledge and how it is conveyed in ritual and ordinance. The possibility of coming to a knowledge of God is repeated throughout the scriptures. I believe that our contemporary understanding of knowledge as acquiring a body of information is a tremendous barrier in understanding and receiving a fulfillment of those promises. Rather than attempting to offer a systematic examination of epistemology, I would like to reflect on the meaning of the knowledge of God in relation to ordinances and

ritual. As a starting point, I would like to refer to a comment made by Elder Dallin Oaks in the October, 2000 LDS General Conference. Before I return to consider the scripture Elder Oaks discusses, I will connect my discussion of embodied knowledge of God with contemporary ritual theory and a related aphorism from Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Elder Oaks began his talk "The Challenge to Become" by observing that:

> The Apostle Paul taught that the Lord's teachings and teachers were given that we may all attain 'the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ' (Eph. 4:13). This process requires far more than acquiring knowledge. It is not even enough for us to be convinced of the gospel; we must act and think so that we are converted by it. In contrast to the institutions of the world, which teach us to know something, the gospel of Jesus Christ challenges us to become something.[1]

I believe that knowledge as it is referenced in the language of scripture differs from that acquired in the "institutions of the world," (i.e. schools, universities, and other formal educational institutions). Knowledge in the scriptural sense is not what we know, but what we are, what we have become. This knowledge is knowing how to do things, instinctively knowing how to be in situations. This knowledge is not abstract, but embodied and it is modeled for us in ritual. The ordinances point to a way of being we achieve through the process of conversion; they model a way of being in which we know God.

## RITUAL AND KNOWLEDGE

This suggestion that ritual conveys knowledge seems in opposition to the recent emphasis in the theory of ritual and performance. One of the most influential recent theorists, Catherine Bell, in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, emphasizes the *lack* of meaning conveyed by ritual actions. She argues that rather than convey ideas or worldviews, ritual actions create or embody relationships of power and create "ritualized agents."[2] Instead of seeing it as a way of conveying ideas she points to it as a kind of em-

bodied knowledge. "Ritualization is not a matter of transmitting shared beliefs, instilling a dominant ideology as an internal subjectivity, or even providing participants with the concepts to think with. The particular construction and interplay of power relations effected by ritualization defines, empowers, and constrains."[3] This insistence that ritual action should not be reduced to a means to convey abstract knowledge initially seems at odds with our idea as Latter-day Saints of being able to learn from the ritual of the ordinances.

I would be the first to admit that Bell's fundamental assumptions about reality differ from those of the Restoration. For her ritual actions are social creations and can only be understood in terms of social and cultural relations. Concepts of revealed action, divine authority, covenant, and divine empowerment are for her cultural constructs rather than foundational truths. Nonetheless, I believe that in her observation about the role of ritual actions as ritualization we can learn something of one dimension of how ordinances function to allow individuals to participate in and embody the divine. In her reading of power relations she articulates something of the embodiment of knowledge that the ordinances offer. She observes:

> The ultimate purpose of ritualization is neither the immediate goals avowed by the community or the officiant nor the more abstract functions of social solidarity and conflict resolution: *it is nothing other than the production of ritualized agents, persons who have an instinctive knowledge of these schemes embedded in their bodies*, in their sense of reality, and in their understanding of how to act in ways that both maintain and qualify the complex microrelations of power.[4]

Interestingly, Bell does not express this ritualization as individuals being "programmed" or molded, but rather as a means of becoming an agent with a sense of mastery. Ritualization thus preserves individuality rather than becoming prescriptive. She notes that

> Ritual symbols and meanings are too indeterminate and their schemes too flexible to lend themselves to any simple process of instilling fixed ideas. Indeed, in terms of its scope, dependence, and legitimation, the type of authority formulated by ritualization tends to make ritual activities effective in grounding and displaying a sense

> of community *without* overriding the autonomy of individuals or subgroups.[5]

This effort to articulate the embodiment of knowledge and its relationship with agency has close affinity to a puzzling statement of Ludwig Wittgenstein about obeying rules.

A different angle with which to approach the question of what ritual action does or doesn't convey is found in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. He observed: "When I obey a rule, I do not choose. I obey the rule *blindly*."[6] You will remember Bell's insistence on how ritualization creates "ritualized agents, persons who have an instinctive knowledge," while at the same time maintaining that this embedded knowledge does not override "the autonomy of individuals." On the face of Wittgenstein's statement it would seem he wants to argue that "rules" create automatons. But the passage continues and here Wittgenstein, like Bell, also seems to suggest that in rule-obeying different choices are possible. In teasing out these different options within rule-giving and rule-obeying I think that he clarifies what he means in saying "I obey the rule *blindly*." Obeying *blindly* is not blind obedience. Consider the following remarks:

> Following a rule is analogous to obeying an order. We are trained to do so; we react to an order in a particular way. But what if one person reacts in one way and another in another to the order and the training? Which one is right?
>
> Suppose you came as an explorer into an unknown country with a language quite strange to you. In what circumstances would you say that the people there gave orders, understood them, obeyed them, rebelled against them, and so on?
>
> The common behaviour of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language.[7]

Wittgenstein's point here relates to his well-known argument against a private language. In opposition to the empiricist view that understanding language is a subjective, intellectualized phenomenon, Wittgenstein shows that the meaning of a language is shown in the social practices of those who use it. Without common reactions to language according to "rules," there could be no meaning to language.

Wittgenstein's discussion of following a rule receives some elaboration

through French anthropologist/sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical development of the embodied nature of knowledge.[8] Bourdieu articulates the idea of an embodied disposition of *habitus*, which explains how people can follow rules without being able to articulate them. *Habitus* describes how we follow a rule "blindly" because it locates our knowledge "in" our bodies as well as our minds.[9]

This knowledge of an embodied disposition can therefore be taught without needing to explain the system of thought abstractly.[10] Not only is behavior taught, but the significance of that behavior is also shared in this embodied knowledge. Following Bourdieu, Taylor observes: "Children are inducted into a culture, are taught the meanings which constitute it, partly through inculcation of the appropriate habitus. We learn how to hold ourselves, how to defer to others, how to be a presence for others, all largely through taking on different styles of bodily comportment[.]"[11] Through the formation of *habitus* knowledge becomes embodied.

Knowing how to be in the world is not innate, but something that is learned. Just as Wittgenstein seeks to describe how we know the rules without knowing the structure behind the rule, Bourdieu attempts to articulate rules of behavior without seeing those rules as a structure that is "causally operative."[12] We learn to "obey *blindly*" because the obedience is in our bodies rather than being an abstract concept in our minds. Bourdieu describes *habitus* saying: "The habitus is precisely this immanent law, *lex insita*, inscribed in bodies by identical histories, which is the precondition not only for the co-ordination of practices but also for the practices of co-ordination."[13] We can intuitively understand how *habitus* is inculcated in family members or people with a shared culture. They have a shared history and thus a shared way of being in the world. If gaining embodied knowledge is a matter of having an "identical history," then what can this mean in light of gaining a knowledge of God and what role might the ordinances play in this process?

## ORDINANCES AS RITUAL EMBODIMENT

To connect the idea of embodied knowledge to the scriptural injunction to gain a knowledge of God, the obvious starting point is the Intercessory Prayer. Christ taught, in John 17, eternal life is to know God. "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and

Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."[14] In this context, clearly, knowing God is not knowing facts about God. In his first epistle, John elaborates: "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him."[15] Knowing here is equated with obedience and, ultimately, knowing that "we are in him." But what does it mean to know that "we are in him"? John clarifies that we must keep his word to have the love of God perfected in us and thus to be in him and to know him. The ordinances alone are not identical with this way of being "in him" because they model for us more than we have become. But at the same time, as ritual embodiment, through the ordinances we participate in a way of being that we are in the process of becoming.

Ordinances point us towards "being in him" in one sense because they model knowledge of and participation in the divine. Through enacting obedience in the ordinances we are inculcating the *habitus* that embodies knowledge of God. This kind of knowledge that we physically experience through ritual embodiment teaches how to obey blindly in Wittengstein's sense: "when I obey a rule, I do not choose. I obey the rule *blindly*." We learn to "obey *blindly*" because the obedience is in our bodies rather than being an abstract concept in our minds. We are learning to be obedient to God by ritually enacting obedience rather than just learning the concept that obeying God is important. In Bell's language this ritualization creates "ritualized agents, persons who have an instinctive knowledge of these schemes embedded in their bodies, in their sense of reality, and in their understanding of how to act," but knowing how to be through this embedded knowledge does not, as we said, override "the autonomy of individuals" and produce automatons. Obeying *blindly* is not blind obedience.

The ordinances show us how, and I believe also enable us, to "put on Christ." Returning to Elder Oaks' words:

> The Apostle Paul taught that the Lord's teachings and teachers were given that we may all attain 'the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ' (Eph. 4:13). This process requires far more than acquiring knowledge [I believe here he means knowledge in the contemporary sense as a body of information]. It is not even enough for us to be

> convinced of the gospel; we must act and think so that we are converted by it. In contrast to the institutions of the world, which teach us to know something, the gospel of Jesus Christ challenges us to become something.[16]

The ordinances do not substitute for the conversion of becoming and taking on "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," but I do believe that they model this new way of being and furthermore, through covenant, empower us to become what we promise to become.

We can see this ritual embodiment of Christ in baptism and other ordinances. In the ordinances we "put on Christ" in a very literal sense, we participate in his life and his atoning sacrifice. We literally embody how Christ was in the world. We are all familiar with the explanation, clearly elaborated in Paul's writings, that in baptism by immersion we symbolically die, bury, and are resurrected with Christ. In Galatians 3:27 Paul says that "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." In Romans 13:14 Paul tells the Saints to "put . . . on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." He explains how putting on Christ, this way of being modeled in baptism, is a separation from worldliness, the death of the man of sin. He exhorts the Saints to embody in life what they have embodied in ritual.

Another aspect of how baptism embodies how Christ was in the world is found in 2 Nephi 31. Nephi explains how the ordinance of baptism is an embodiment and participation in Christ because Christ's own baptism was an embodiment of submission. Christ, in submitting to immersion, "according to the flesh he humbleth himself before the Father and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments."[17] The ordinance is way in the sense that Christ is the Way. Baptism "showeth unto the children of men the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate, by which they should enter, he having set the example before them."[18] The submission embodied in being immersed in water models an entire life of submission, the life of Christ. "And he said unto the children of men: Follow thou me. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, can we follow Jesus save we shall be willing to keep the commandments of the Father?"[19]

The ritual embodiment of Christ in baptism is extended in the ordinances of the temple. President Harold B. Lee commented that "The receiving of the endowment requires the assuming of obligations by cov-

enants which in reality are but an embodiment or an unfolding of the covenants each person should have assumed at baptism. . ."[20] Through the ordinances we gain a knowledge of God as we ritually embody the kind of obedience and submission that we need to develop in our lives through the process of conversion and becoming.

This discussion of ritual participation in Christ's obedience could be taken as somehow antithetical to the good news of the gospel in its emphasis on obedience. This can only happen, however, if obedience is understood as something we do independently of Christ. If our obedience is seen as our own capacity to save ourselves then it *is* a profound misunderstanding of the very essence of the gospel.

Instead I think the key here is reading obedience as submission. Christ said: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."[21] When we see the ordinances' ritual embodiment of Christ as the means of accepting this invitation then I think obedience in *all* our life makes sense in light of the gospel. Obedience is not about our capacity, but our willingness.

Obedience is the choice to exercise faith and submit. The submission of our will, as Elder Neal Maxwell so often emphasized, is the only thing we have to offer.[22] Our submission to the will of the Father is the only way we can put on Christ. In our echo of, "thy will, not mine be done" we then connect ourselves with the grace of Christ. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."[23] Putting on Christ through the ordinances is accepting the invitation to know God. The ritual embodiment of Christ is accepting the invitation to eternal life because it is Christ's life, God's life, that we are choosing to receive.

The connection of additional ordinances and the knowledge of God is made explicit in Doctrine and Covenants section 84:19–22

> And this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God. Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest. And without the ordinances thereof,

> and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh; For without this no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live.

The ritual embodiment of the ordinances points to and empowers true embodiment and true knowledge which is possible only through conversion and sanctification. As we accept the invitation to "come unto Christ and be perfected in him" we come to know him as we become like him.[24]

The ordinances point to a way of being in which we know God. They model a way of being in which we have "the mind of Christ."[25] The knowledge of God which the ordinances allow us to experience through ritual embodiment points us to a life in which the Spirit of the Lord is in us so that we can "obey blindly" because this is who we are, knowing what to do, what to say, how to live in a holy and godly manner, but without this being blind obedience. Through obedience and submission in ritual action we consent to be and learn to be in the world as Christ was. In the ordinances we come to know Christ because we become Christ through ritual embodiment. We participate in an embodiment of submission and willingness to obey as he did. This embodiment is the knowledge of God as referred to in the Intercessory Prayer, knowing God as life eternal (see John 17:3).

Allowing people to come to a knowledge of God seems to be the very purpose for which the Restoration was brought about. Some may look back to the early days of the Restoration with nostalgia and long for a time when knowledge was poured out on the Saints. I believe that such a view rests on a limited understanding of knowledge. With a broader sense of knowledge as embodied, both in ordinance and in converted lives, I believe that now is the time when the knowledge of God is positioned to be poured out more than at any other time in history. I believe that through the expansion of the Church and temple building throughout the earth we are seeing the beginning of the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy.

> Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, . . . . After those days, saith the LORD, *I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts*; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And *they shall*

> *teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me*, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.[26]

Elder Oaks observes that "in contrast to the institutions of the world, which teach us to know something, the gospel of Jesus Christ challenges us to become something." As Latter-day Saints we should not be content with the intellectual knowledge that comes in a form understandable to the "institutions of the world." We should not be disheartened because there are not new sections added to the Doctrine and Covenants. The knowledge of God is available. The key of the knowledge of God has been restored. "Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest." The ordinances were "given that we may all attain 'the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ' (Eph. 4:13)." As we attain the "stature of the fulness of Christ" we will know God because we will have become like him (see 1 John 3:1-6; Moroni 7:48).

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## NOTES

[1] Dallin H. Oaks, "The Challenge to Become," *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 32.

[2] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 221. At the same time Bell acknowledges that ritual acts take place within a culture and that they "must be understood within a semantic framework whereby the significance of an action is dependent upon its place and relationship within a context of all other ways of acting" (ibid., 220).

[3] Ibid., 221.

[4] Ibid.; emphasis added.

[5] Ibid., 221-22.

[6] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 3d ed. (New York: Macmillian, 1958), 85.

[7] Ibid., 82.

[8] See Charles Taylor, "To Follow a Rule . . ." in *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives,* ed. Calhoun, Craig and Edward LiPuma and Moishe Postone (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 45-60.

[9] Taylor, 45-48 and 54. Bourdieu uses Marcel Mauss's term *habitus* to describe what he himself calls the practical logic of participants. For a reflection of Mauss's

influence on ritual theory see Amy Hollywood's "Practice, Belief, and Feminist Philosophy of Religion," in *Thinking Through Rituals: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Kevin Schilbrack, 52-70 (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[10] Taylor argues that Bourdieu's insistence on our embodied state goes against the philosophical emphasis on "monological consciousness which stems from Descartes and Locke" (Taylor, 49).

[11] Ibid., 58.

[12] Ibid., 55.

[13] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 59.

[14] John 17:3.

[15] 1 John 2:3-5.

[16] Oaks, "The Challenge to Become," 32.

[17] 2 Nephi 31:7.

[18] 2 Nephi 31:9.

[19] 2 Nephi 31:10.

[20] Harold B. Lee, *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee: Eleventh President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. Clyde J. Williams 584 (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1996), 574.

[21] Matthew 11:28-30.

[22] See, for example, Neal A. Maxwell, "Willing to Submit," *Ensign* (May 1985): 70-71.

[23] John 15:4-5.

[24] See Moroni 10:32-33 and Moroni 7:48.

[25] 1 Corinthians 2:16.

[26] Jeremiah 31:31-34; emphasis mine.