

LETTERS

Inspiring Essay

"Stealing the Reaper's Grim: The Challenge of Dying Well" by Paul R. Cazier, *Dialogue* 32, no. 4 (Winter 1999), 115-147, is one of the most inspiring and thoughtful personal essays I have ever read. I am grateful to Dr. Cazier, his wife Leesa, and *Dialogue* for sharing with us this instructive and moving personal story. It should motivate us to live our lives on a higher, more Christ-like level.

G. Kevin Jones
Salt Lake City, Utah

Death and Community

I write to thank you for publishing the—well, not memoir—by Paul Cazier, and I write with gratitude to him and to his wife. Much of the past year I have been deeply enmeshed in helping my chief mentor and Idaho's state historian emeritus Merle Wells toward death. It was a difficult, often painful process not only for Merle, but for those of us who had become his only family. We laid him to rest on November 9 in the simplest and least expensive of caskets—he was not, at 81, willing to be cremated—and on the 20th we celebrated his life.

Merle was a thoughtful and deeply committed Presbyterian, a fine scholar, and a founding member of the Mormon History Association. A very private man, he had (at least outwardly) no fear of death—only a determination to keep going independently until the end came. We did not let him; we took over his life in the hope that he might die with a sense of community and lack of pain. But he would not talk with us about what we did. I wish

that he and we had been able to share this essay. It might have offered a framework for talking with him, to tell him how much we loved him and how determined we were that he not die alone.

I will keep a copy of the essay to share with my husband and stepchildren in the hope that it may add to our ability to share such times with each other openly. Again, thank you.

Judy Austin,
Boise, Idaho

Feint Praise

While praise is always much appreciated, it seems unfortunate, if not unfair, that Gideon Burton and Neal Kramer also chose to clothe a straw man in their comments regarding Signature Books's reputation (Fall 1999 issue). Indeed, no other publisher they discussed received the same kind of opprobrium.

They assert—without documentation—that Signature's "liberal reputation has estranged not only mainstream LDS audiences but many authors and academics uncomfortable with the ways LDS leaders and culture are not respected in some Signature titles. Signature has thus both filled a gap and created another" (p. 7). In a footnote, they allude to a seven-year-old disagreement with one or two book reviewers at FARMS over a review of one of Signature's titles and then refer readers to an essay critical of Signature without offering an opposing response.

In my experience, the "gap" Gideon and Neal note is of their own making, or, at the very most, of the making of a very small number of antagonistic critics. I'm unaware that Signature's

reputation has “estranged” “mainstream” LDS audiences (whoever those are), and I doubt that Gideon and Neal could supply the hard data to support such a conclusion. For, in fact, Signature has probably had a relatively minor impact on mainstream LDS audiences. As a small publisher, Signature simply cannot compete in the same retail arena as Deseret/Bookcraft and Covenant, both of which enjoy unparalleled, privileged access to consumers through their retail outlets. This isn’t to say that all readers, including the unnamed authors and academics to whom Gideon and Neal refer, agree with everything they read in Signature’s books. Hopefully, though, they understand that such works comprise the very essence of freedom of choice and conscience, and are willing to approach such books as they would like readers to treat their own.

As to the comment that some Signature titles portray LDS leaders and culture disrespectfully, I wish Gideon and Neal had provided some examples. I know that some Signature titles bring a critical eye to bear on certain aspects of LDS history and culture, but I don’t believe these have ever been disrespected.

In short, and Gideon and Neal’s gracious compliments notwithstanding, I wish they had been more willing to engage readers in a fair discussion of the challenges facing writers, readers, and publishers interested in contemporary Mormon studies. I fear that they are as much responsible for the gap they, and readers like them, accuse Signature of creating as are Signature and its authors.

Regarding Gene England’s complaint in the same issue that publisher and editor both should feel ashamed for having included a particular short story in Signature’s compilation *In Our Lovely Deseret: Mormon Fictions*, I can only reply that I and other readers did

not react the same way to the story in question. *In Our Lovely Deseret* does not pretend to sample the broad spectrum of contemporary LDS fiction, merely one specialized segment of it. Hopefully, other compilations will sample other areas; perhaps a new survey will even appear one day. In the meantime, *In Our Lovely Deseret* certainly contributes to the ongoing discussion over the creation of Mormon fiction.

Gary J. Bergera
Signature Books
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Long After Thoughts

I’ve been catching up on some past issues of *Dialogue* and was intrigued by some of the articles in the Spring 1997 issue. In “What You Walk Away From,” Holly Welker claims: “Jesus Christ seemed to prefer hanging out with the evil and adulterous to being stuck with the pious and dull.” She then asks, who is more interesting: Peter (whom she characterizes as being dull, weak, and cowardly) or Mary Magdalene (whom she describes as a “reformed whore who isn’t afraid of her future or ashamed of her past”)? Ms. Welker correctly states that this is “not a particularly innovative insight” (p. 6). It is, however, a faulty and a presumptuous one. As spiritual physician, the Savior hung out with sinners and adulteresses not because he preferred their scintillating company, but because they were in more dire need of his services. (He spent a fair amount of time among the scribes and Pharisees as well.)

As for Peter, yes, he denied Christ three times in one night. However, I find myself denying the Savior via my thoughts and actions often enough to hold my stone, so to speak, especially if (as Talmadge claims) it hadn’t yet clicked in Peter’s head and heart that

Christ truly was the Messiah. I don't have that excuse. Notwithstanding, I would be very hesitant to label as weak, cowardly, and boring a man who performed miracles, saw visions, extended the gospel to the gentiles in the most exclusionist of times, and led the ancient church of Jesus Christ in direct defiance of the world's mightiest empire. I suppose for those of us who live in sin it is tempting to think that Jesus likes us better because we're so much more interesting, intelligent, flamboyant, etc., than those square, straight, covenant-keeping, scripture-toting, white-shirt-and-tie-wearing, rank-and-file Mormons. But that attitude smacks of the most un-Christ-like of characteristics and the core of what the Savior preached against: false pride and arrogance. The Savior didn't ask for verve, wit, or brilliance. He asked for a broken heart, a contrite spirit, child-like humility, and meekness. If anything, he had a penchant for the plain, the weak, the ordinary, the simple, the ungifted and untalented (and certainly the uneducated). His message was: Come unto me, and I will make you strong, mighty, glorious. And remember that before he left the Earth, the Savior called Peter and his apostles "my friends." He then turned the keys of his church over to Peter. Boring? Weak? Cowardly? I think we need a new interpretation here. As for Ms. Welker's new affinity for "the young, the angry, the obnoxious," throw out the "young" and you've got the Sanhedrinists!

Michael Fillerup
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Unsupported Speculations

Kevin L. Barney's letter, *Dialogue* 32, no. 1 (Spring 1999) iv-vii, which sug-

gests that John Taylor 'shaped' the way Thomas Bullock portrayed Joseph's treatment of Genesis in "King Follett" struck me as sad.

First, Taylor's "The Gospel Kingdom" was from "*Selections from the Writings and Discourses of John Taylor: Selected, Arranged and Annotated with an Introduction by G. Homer Durham*" (Bookcraft, 1943). How or what unspecified comments therein by Taylor might have influenced Bullock's King Follett Discourse transcription in 1844 is questionable. Second, theorizing about Taylor's "the Head brought forth the Gods," Barney perpetuates one of the oldest unsupported Mormon speculative traditions extant, suggesting it means "a divine father begat and a divine mother conceived and bore the spirits of Jesus Christ and all of his brethren and sisters." Suggesting that "Gods" above means "the ante-mortal spirit children of the 'head,'" Barney then seeks support for this tradition in further interpreting the Hebrew Genesis 1:1 as "brought forth" means "by begetting them; by literally siring them."

Without examining his understanding of Taylor's Hebrew usage, permit me to apologize to those millions of endowed LDS women who do not look forward to becoming a "divine mother" if it means "producing" literally billions of spirit "children," given the best estimates of earth's population to date.

The brethren have been cautioning against this purely speculative notion regarding humankind's ante-mortal origins for many decades. Example: Joseph Fielding Smith wrote, "Some of our writers have endeavored to explain what an intelligence is, but to do so is futile, for we have never been given any insight into this matter beyond what the Lord has fragmentarily revealed. We know, however, that

there is something called intelligence which always existed. It is the real eternal part of man, which was not created nor made. This intelligence combined with the spirit constitutes a spiritual identity or individual" (*The Progress of Man* [Salt Lake City: Utah Genealogical Society, 1936], 11). Despite this and related cautions, popular Mormon cultural mythology continues to produce fictional accounts which parallel Nephi Anderson's old *Added Upon* with "begotten spirit children" growing up and interacting with a heavenly mother prior to coming to earth.

I submit that what is being "added upon" here is pure speculation not supported by scriptural revelation. I do not look with pleasure upon a vision of my eternal companion as a kind of queen bee baby factory endlessly producing such entities as are implicit above.

"That by him [the Only Begotten of the Father] and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters UNTO God" (D&C 76:24) has been used by some to support the notion of "intelligences" being transformed into "spirit children" via some unspecified process implicitly involving procreative activity. Again I submit this is pure speculation, since what the Lord meant by the above verse can be and has been interpreted variously. General authorities have been privately cautioning each other for over a century on this matter.

B. H. Roberts took exception to the neo-absolutist view that man, as an autonomous individual, was "created." Elaborating on the views expressed in his "new Witness for God," Roberts read a statement to the First Presidency supporting belief in the existence of "independent, uncreated, self-existent

intelligences." Roberts claimed that even before spiritual birth and consequent organization of a spirit body, man existed as an individual, autonomous, and self-conscious entity known as an intelligence. Noting objections to his view of personal eternalism, Roberts explained man's inherent moral freedom and inequality. The First Presidency allowed Roberts to publish his views in the *Improvement Era* in April of 1907 with their appended approval: "Elder Roberts submitted the following paper to the First Presidency and a number of the Twelve Apostles, none of whom found anything objectionable in it, or contrary to the revealed word of God, and therefore favor its publication."

The notion of "spiritual birth" here must, in my view, be carefully weighed in context with Joseph Smith Jr.'s statements that: "Man was in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was NOT created or made, neither indeed CAN be" (D&C 93:29-30). . . . God himself is a self-existent being. . . . Who told you that man did not exist in like manner upon the same principles? Man does exist upon the same principles. God made a tabernacle and put a spirit into it, and it became a living soul. It does NOT say in the Hebrew (Bible) that God created the spirit of man. . . . The mind of the intelligence which man possesses is co-equal with God himself" ("King Follett Discourse," April 1844, published in *Times & Season* August 15, 1844 [emphasis added]).

While indeed fragmentary, these statements alone ought to be sufficient to caution furthering of procreative notions about exalted spirit "baby factories" engaged in endless production.

The Kingdom of God Diagram: Possibly no clearer statement of the prophet Joseph Smith's theology re-

garding the concept of an eternal patriarchal order and priesthood of kings and priests, queens and priestesses, anointed and crowned in an unbroken hierarchy of Gods, extending families throughout eternity, can be found than what was published less than three years following his martyrdom. In a January 1847 editorial, Orson Hyde published something which, given its language, he may well have learned from Joseph Smith.

It begins with a simple diagram which looks like a tree, with a central trunk from which outward-extending, slanting lines emerge, each of which in turn has vertical linkages to the lines above. A crown apparently symbolizing a head God sits atop the diagram. The text suggests what might also be inferred from the passage cited above from D&C 76:24, viz, "begotten UNTO God. . ."

"The . . . diagram shows the order and unity of the kingdom of God. The eternal Father sits at the head, crowned King of kings and Lord of lords. Wherever the other lines meet, there sits a king and a priest unto God, bearing rule, authority, and dominion under the Father. He is one with the Father because his kingdom is joined to his Father's and becomes part of it.

"The most eminent and distinguished prophets who have laid down their lives for their testimonies (Jesus among the rest) will be crowned at the head of the largest kingdoms under the Father and will be one with Christ as Christ is one with his Father; for their kingdoms are all joined together, and such as do the will of the Father, the same are his mothers, sisters, and brothers [families?]. He that has been faithful over a few things, will be made ruler over many things; he that has been faithful over five talents, shall have dominion over five cities, and to

every man will be given a kingdom and a dominion, according to his merit, powers, and abilities to govern and control. It will be seen by the above diagram that there are kingdoms [families?] of all sizes, an infinite variety to suit all grades of merit and ability. The chosen vessels unto God are the kings and priests that are placed at the head of these kingdoms. These have received their washings and anointings in the temple of God on this earth; they have been chosen, ordained, and anointed kings and priests, to reign as such in the resurrection of the just. Such as have not received the fullness of the priesthood (for the fullness of the priesthood includes the authority of both king and priest) and have not been anointed and ordained in the temple of the Most High, may have salvation in the celestial kingdom, but not a celestial crown. Many are called to enjoy a celestial glory, yet few are chosen to wear a celestial crown, or rather to be rulers in the celestial kingdom [Note: See Abraham 3:21-23].

"While this portion of eternity that we now live in, called time, continues and while the other portions of eternity that we may hereafter dwell in, continue. Those lines in the foregoing diagram, representing kingdoms [families?], will continue to extend and be lengthened out; and thus, the increase of our kingdoms will increase in the kingdom of our God, even as Daniel hath said: ' . . . of the increase of his kingdom and government there shall be no end.' All these kingdoms are ONE kingdom, and there is a King over kings, and a Lord over lords. There are Lords many, and Gods many, for they are called Gods to whom the word of God comes, and the word of God comes to all these kings and priests. But to our branch of the king-

dom there is but one God, to whom we all owe the most perfect submission and loyalty; yet our God is just as subject to still higher intelligences, as we should be to him.

“. . . These kingdoms, which are one kingdom, are designed to extend till they not only embrace THIS world, but every other planet that rolls in the blue vault of heaven. Thus will all things be gathered in one during the dispensation of the fullness of times, and the Saints will not only possess the earth, but all things else, for, says Paul, ‘All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s’” (Orson Hyde, “A Diagram of the Kingdom of God,” *Millennial Star*, 15 January 1847, 9:23-24) [brackets mine].

Could Hyde’s model be applied to numberless families and their progeny, obviating the need for a single couple to become “spirit parents” of billions, all assigned to one earth? I do not know. However, perpetuating unsupported, speculative notions does not at all seem a spiritually attractive alternative. Factually, we know little or nothing about what a “begotten spirit child” is, or if indeed that is a correct description.

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Old Apologetics

I’m constantly amazed by the cognitive dissonance of those who attempt to respond to my research and interpretations. In reviewing my essay “Prophet Puzzle Revisited,” Vol. 31, no. 3 (Fall 1998), Armand Mauss, in his letter, Vol. 32, no. 2 (Summer 1999),

does not even use my name once let alone respond directly to my essay’s thesis, which was an attempt to resolve Jan Shipps’s “Prophet Puzzle” by “suggest[ing] that Smith was a ‘pious deceiver’ or ‘sincere fraud,’ someone who deceives to achieve holy objectives.” The primary evidence supporting this thesis was not Smith’s many contradictions, as Mauss asserts, but rather “instances in which he articulated the ideas and principles upon which a pious deception could be founded.”

Mauss calls my evidence speculative and criticizes my use of qualifying and equivocal language. My evidence, however, was not speculative, but interpretive. Indeed, the reviewer seems to confuse the two terms. The former implies a lack of evidence while the latter connotes a reasonable explanation of the evidence. Hence, my use of D&C 19:7 and Abraham 2:22-25 as instances in which Smith portrays God as sometimes authoring deception is not speculative, nor is it mere proof-texting as Mauss asserts, but rather contextually sound and interpretively reasonable. Mauss makes no attempt to overturn my interpretation of those passages, but simply applies disparaging labels, and in so doing commits the categorical fallacy.

While my essay is interpretive, it is far from another category Mauss tries to associate it with: psychobiography. Methodologically the two are worlds apart. There is no attempt in my essay to find meaning in Smith’s childhood nor to ascribe subconscious motivations to Smith’s behavior. Nevertheless, Mauss seems to be a naive purist, who thinks biography and psychology can be completely separated. Or that history is a simple scientific marshaling of facts. My presentation dealt with Smith’s thoughts, to be sure,

but only insofar as his own words and actions revealed.

While I caution against seeing Smith in either/or terms—that is, as either a true prophet or a malicious charlatan—this does not exclude the possibility that either/or situations might arise in Smith’s life. I therefore argue, for example, that either Smith had a real set of ancient plates, which he allowed his family and others to feel through a cloth, or he constructed them himself, perhaps out of scrap tin. In this situation, the unconscious fraud theory becomes untenable since it requires multiple hallucinations, even of Smith’s enemies. Another either/or situation that I discussed was Josiah Stowell’s 1826 testimony of finding a feather five feet underground as Smith had predicted. Since self-deluded magicians do not accomplish such feats, Smith either saw the treasure and feather or he planted the feather there, probably while digging. Thus, in providing proof for his claims, Smith moved out of the mental/spiritual realm into the physical world and thereby created the either/or situation himself. Nevertheless, in my essay I was careful to separate Smith’s possibly fraudulent activities from his self-perception, which Mauss seems to have missed. Thus, I argued that Smith may have believed himself to be a prophet, but, for whatever reason, he used deception to more fully accomplish his mission.

In attempting to excuse Smith’s career as a treasure seer, Mauss resorts to old apologetic and refuses to be ruffled by “puzzles.” My presentation of Stowell’s finding a feather while digging for treasure was designed to force Mormon historians to deal directly and specifically with the implications of Smith’s treasure-seeing rather than continue an apologetic that can only be

maintained on a superficial and generalized level of discussion. Here an observation Dale Morgan made about Bernard DeVoto’s unconscious fraud thesis comes to mind. Despite the advantages of DeVoto’s explanation, Morgan said, “As I get out of the realm of beautiful thinking and wrestle with obstinate facts which have to be set one in front of the other in some kind of order—I find the conception untenable.” So let’s consider one of those “obstinate facts.” How did Smith locate the feather? What happened to the treasure Smith said was buried with the feather? Did it slip away through the ground? Mauss obviously does not like these questions, so he treats them as “biographical complexities” that need not be explained. This violates a fundamental principle in both science and history which defines progress as a resolution of such anomalies. The discovery of a feather underground demands explanation: was it buried with the treasure, as Smith claimed, or was it planted there by Smith? This is not a false dichotomy, but rather an event in Smith’s life that the biographer must deal with if he is to be taken seriously. Mauss does a disservice to himself and his readers by confusing this event with the normal “ad hoc and contradictory pronouncements and behavior across time, as individuals seek to assimilate changing experiences and understanding.” For one thing, I did not present the feather as a contradiction, but as evidence that Smith sometimes engaged in deception as a treasure seer. His subsequent use of the same stone to translate the Book of Mormon makes this evidence especially meaningful for understanding his career as a prophet.

Mauss criticizes my essay for its “lack of comparative context,” meaning I do not make analogies between

Joseph Smith and other historical figures “from other contexts,” which the reviewer believes will bring “comparison and balance” to my essay. This is nothing more than an apologist’s attempt to water down or dilute the significance of my evidence, specifically Smith’s willingness to use deception for religious purposes and the resultant moral quandary in which he found himself. Simply the fact that others in history have undoubtedly faced moral dilemmas, generally, tells us very little about Joseph Smith’s specific circumstance. The reviewer would do well to study what David Hackett Fischer has written on fallacies of false analogy, particularly the “fallacy of the perfect analogy,” which “consists in reasoning from a partial resemblance between two entities to an entire and exact correspondence.”: Because an analogy is always partial, it can only be used as an illustration, not as evidence “in either an existential or an evaluative way.”¹

Nevertheless, Mauss has again missed the point of my discussion about Smith’s private and public beliefs. I did not argue that Smith was unique in this regard, only that his private beliefs have been neglected by historians. Neither did I argue that the disparity between Smith’s private and public persona was in itself proof of fraud, as Mauss insinuates.

Mauss also misrepresents my discussion of Smith’s early Universalism. I did not argue that Smith was a fraud because he had concealed this belief from many of his followers. Nor was I concerned because Smith made later modifications to this doctrine. But rather I was particularly interested in

Universalism as an aspect of Smith’s private belief system because it explains “Smith’s ability to rationalize his fraudulent activities, both as a treasure seer and later as a prophet.” Seeing Smith as a committed Universalist, even while dictating the Book of Mormon, is an important element in his mind-set. Mauss seems stuck in an old apologetic rut, which he rehearses despite its irrelevance to my thesis.

Again, Mauss misses an important point in my discussion of Smith’s activities as a treasure seer when he accuses me of being dismissive of “the plausible explanations of Quinn and Bushman.” That Smith outgrew magic? I acknowledged that Smith’s transformation from magician to prophet is evident, but I disputed the implication that a distinct dividing line could be drawn between the two roles and argued that there was some overlap. Historians and apologists must deal with the fact that Smith translated the Book of Mormon with the same stone previously used to discover slippery treasures. That cultural anthropologists sometimes discuss the evolution from magic to religion as a concept in the history of ideas is of questionable relevance to Joseph Smith’s particular circumstance. Regardless, Mauss has again failed to discuss a major aspect of my essay.

Mauss creates a straw man when he represents me as claiming that “since we know magic isn’t ‘real,’ Joseph Smith should have known it; and if he did, then he was deliberately deceiving people. . . . If he didn’t know, then he was himself a dupe.” A more accurate representation might read as follows: since we know treasures do

1. David Hackett Fisher, *Historian’s Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 247-51.

not move through the earth by magic enchantment, Smith was either deceptive or deluded. Nevertheless, the generalized wording allows Mauss to argue that magic-minded people always have an "escape clause" to explain failure. The reviewer then attempts to make an analogy between magic and Mormon administration to the sick. The problem is that the analogy works only in general application, but breaks down when applied to the specifics of Joseph Smith's case (the breakdown is known as the *fallacy of accident*). Smith claimed to see both treasures and their guardian spirits in his stone. Were the treasures real, imagined, or invented? If real, why were they not recovered? If imagined, how did Smith predict the discovery of a feather? The simplest explanation is that Smith planted the feather, perhaps during the process of digging. One either incorporates enchanted treasures into one's belief system, as Quinn apparently has, or allows the possibility that Smith used deception to advance his treasure-seeing career.

The purpose of my essay was not to prove or disprove Smith a prophet, but to offer a new paradigm in which to understand his words and behavior. The strength of such essays lies not in the presentation of new evidence, but in their power to explain and interpret already existing information and to solve apparent incongruities, something I think my essay does.

Dan Vogel
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Brilliant Offering

I would place Ostler's latest *Dialogue* offering, "Mormonism and Determinism" (Winter 1999) certainly

within the "Top Ten" essays—excluding divine revelation—ever written in Mormon Christian history and perhaps within the "Top Five" (Frances Menlove's "The Challenge of Honesty," *Dialogue* vol. 1, no. 1, Spring 1966, remains at the top of my list, but the new e-savvy FAIR, Kerry Shirts, and other burgeoning LDS websites are beginning to run a pleasant competition for my "top" awards). Ostler's articulation of a category of libertarianism, "universal cause libertarianism," apparently unknown to L. Rex Sears, whose position Ostler labels "classical necessitarian causal determinism," rebuts not merely Sears, whose own earlier published pro-determinist Mormon conclusions may hereafter be safely ignored, but simultaneously *with* Sears properly assails orthodox Christian notions of absolute divine foreknowledge at odds with human free will. "While I agree with Sears," he concedes, "that infallible foreknowledge is inconsistent with human free will . . ." (43). Ostler will later correctly note the general failure of Mormon Christians to appreciate the above important truth, or to understand precisely how LDS human pre-existence/innate freedom—hence, the notion of a "limited" God vis-a-vis Christian orthodox absolutism—fully explains Theodicy and the classical Problem of Evil, which remain utterly intractable in orthodox Judeo/Christian circles.

LDS theology is the only Christian theology on earth which *can* explain the Problem of Evil, one of many insurmountable impediments to orthodoxy's extreme concept of God. Yet no LDS author has yet published this important fact or argued it persuasively. It is precisely here that LDS thought needs to contrast its own correctly principled groundwork *against* that

of orthodox Judeo/Christianity, to demonstrate the superiority of the former over the latter. It is significant that Mormon Christianity easily explains the evil that orthodox Christianity cannot explain at all, except by its denial of human free will (both Augustine and Luther), an erroneous and infernal avowal of human decrepitude utterly foreign to Jesus' gospel.

Sears argues that the scriptures are incompatible with the view that God does not infallibly foreknow all free acts of humans. This assumption is quite common [and incorrect, as Ostler fully demonstrates] among [a majority of] Latter-day Saints. "How then do those who believe God's foreknowledge is limited explain biblical prophecy and faith in God's certain triumph over evil" (50-51)? Unthinking Mormon Christians apparently never see the power of a "limited" deity over an "absolute" deity. In the words of one of Ostler's earlier essays: "The idea of static, absolute perfection must be replaced, I believe, with the idea of perfection as a dynamic creativity that acts to enhance the happiness of others and by so doing enhances its own happiness. As one non-Mormon theologian observed, 'It is in fact extraordinary that Christian theologians have been so mesmerized by Greek [absolutist] concepts of perfection that they have been unable to develop a more truly Christian idea of God whose revealed nature is love'" (Keith Ward, quoted in Blake Ostler, "The Concept of a Finite God as an Adequate Object of Worship" in *Line Upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine*, ed. Gary James Bergera [Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1989], 79). The requirement that God must be unconditioned to be worthy of worship is unreasonable both because it is incoherent and because the being it de-

scribes is not available for religious purposes:

"Faith requires that the object of its hope be minimally sufficient to bring about the realization of the maximally valuable state of affairs. The contemporary Mormon concept of a finite God is an adequate object of faith because all individuals, indeed all aspects of reality, look to him for the realization of all that matters most ultimately. The Mormon God is, thus, the Optimal Actualizer. "God makes all things possible, but he can make all things actual only by working in conjunction with free individuals and actual entities. Hence, Mormonism does not shy away from recognizing humans as co-creators in God's purposes. God needs us and we need him for the realization of all that matters most. We are truly co-laborers, for growth of any nature or realized potential is impossible without him" (Blake Ostler, "The Concept of a Finite God, 79-80).

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Sears Responds

As I noted in "Determinist Mansions in the Mormon House" (Dialogue vol. 31, no. 4, Winter 1998), one of my principal aims in that essay was to invigorate an apparently moribund area of discussion, so I was gratified to see Blake Ostler's "Mormonism and Determinism" in the Winter 1999 issue. Naturally, I disagree with certain representations Ostler makes both of the views expressed in my paper and of the relevant issues, and I am writing to correct what I see as some of the more important mischaracterizations. The following is not comprehensive,

but it hits most of the highlights, roughly in the order that they appear in Ostler's essay.

As a careful reader might glean from the title and text of my "Determinist Mansions," I do not regard Mormonism as unequivocally committed either to determinism or libertarianism. I think that certain aspects of Mormon thought fit more comfortably with determinism than with its denial, but I also think that here, as elsewhere, disparate elements of the Mormon tradition militate in favor of contrary conclusions. In a related vein, while I think that doctrines favoring determinism, like divine foreknowledge, are more thoroughly interwoven in the fabric of Mormon thought than might be apparent at first glance, I certainly have not and would not maintain that any of those doctrines are "non-negotiable for Mormons": foreknowledge has deep roots (deeper than Ostler's selective presentation recognizes), but I lack the arrogance to dismiss as not truly Mormon B. H. Roberts and others who, I freely admit, have argued for modification or limitation of that doctrine.

Turning to more specific matters, Ostler concludes that I am unaware "that there is a distinction among uc-libertarianism and pa-libertarianism." I'm not uninformed, just unconvinced. I have heard people say things like: "causal conditions must be adequate for whatever occurs, but do not necessitate their effects"; I just haven't had any luck making sense of those claims. Just before Ostler's paper came out in *Dialogue*, I was pointed to an electronic draft Ostler posted on the internet, in which he said causal conditions must be "sufficient," rather than adequate, for whatever occurs. I gather that Ostler substituted "adequate" for "sufficient" because as a matter of logic,

identifying x as a *sufficient* condition of y is equivalent to identifying y as a necessary condition of x : i.e., if x is sufficient for y , then x presupposes y ; given x , y must follow. Ostler might have dodged the logical difficulty by substituting "adequate" for "sufficient," but now I don't know what he means by "adequate." More generally, I remain unpersuaded that it makes sense to "affirm the universality of causal relations, but hold that given the prior causal conditions, several effects could follow."

Along the same lines, Ostler is simply mistaken when he asserts that "no libertarian holds that free acts are merely random events": William James, for one, bluntly asserted that he believed in "chance," and expressly eschewed any other interpretation of his libertarianism. In any event, the interesting question is not whether libertarians openly recognize free actions as random, but whether an indeterministic choice can sensibly be characterized in any other way.

Ostler's misreading of my argument from conservation suggests that greater elaboration of that argument in my original essay would have been helpful. Ostler mistakenly reports that I regard the view "that pre-existing energy is consumed in making choices" as ad hoc. In fact, I characterized as ad hoc the view "that exercises of free will introduce pairs of compensating forces"—a view whose relevance is best understood against the backdrop of the surrounding discussion. The problem libertarianism poses for a system of thought committed to conservation principles is the apparent introduction of new forces. Mere conversion of ambient energy into new forces would not solve the problem because forces are vector quantities having not only magnitude but also direc-

tion. Hence I suggested that a libertarian could avoid the problem by positing the introduction of compensating pairs of forces, that sum to zero. It is this contemplated but apparently inescapable introduction of a second, compensating force for every force originated by a libertarian free will that I characterized as *ad hoc*.

By the way, I never claimed “that the relation between the Mormon view rejecting *creation ex nihilo* and determinism is ‘undeniable’”: my actual conclusion was that “the *tension* between libertarian thought and a *strong* commitment to conservation principles cannot be denied.”

Ostler finds my view of petitionary prayer incoherent because he insists that, on my view, God must infallibly foreknow the future containing whatever response God makes to foreseen prayer before God determines his response to that prayer. In so doing, Ostler misrepresents or ignores the Talmage-inspired explanation of foreknowledge that I play upon in my essay. On the Talmage model, God derives his foreknowledge thus: God takes stock of the present state of the universe and then starts applying his knowledge of general law and of particular actors and other entities in the universe to make predictions about future events; during this process, God correctly predicts that Ostler will offer a petitionary prayer at time *t*; God then decides what his own response will be, plugs that response into the predictive calculus at the appropriate place, and continues deriving more predictions. Before making his decision, God might develop models both of what will happen if he does as Ostler asks, and of what will happen if he doesn’t, to help him make a better informed decision. But nothing in this model requires God to foresee his response before making

his decision; and as discussed more fully in my essay, there is no reason to suppose that determinism entails any change in the look and feel of God’s own deliberation about what his own response will be (which contrasts essentially with the look and feel of God’s prediction of what Ostler’s choices will be).

Of course Ostler uncritically assumes that if determinism is true, then nobody—God included—ever really deliberates. I addressed this in my original essay, observing that our personal histories can be told from distinct perspectives; and while I am cognizant of hazards attendant on the comparison, I believe the situation can be clarified by analogizing from the case of a computer. The operations of a computer can be described in purely logical terms (assuming no hardware malfunctions), and that same operation can be described with reference to the deterministic disposition of electrical current in the hardware. It makes perfect sense to say that the computer displayed a certain output because it reached a certain point in a logical decision tree, and the availability of the physical level of explanation does not render the logical level either erroneous or superfluous. Mightn’t something similar be true of human deliberations?

By way of clarification of my personal views, I am a committed compatibilist—that is, I am fairly certain that determinism does not conflict with our status as morally responsible agents—but I am not decidedly determinist or indeterminist. I have determinist leanings, but not because I believe that science has proven determinism.

I take issue with other of Ostler’s characterizations of my essay; e.g., I do not espouse character determinism, I expressly rejected Madsen’s answer to

the consequence argument, and my comments about quantum mechanics were misunderstood. At another time and place, I would welcome the opportunity to address Ostler's arguments more fully, but I fear that I may have already taken full advantage of the hospitality I might reasonably expect the editors and readers of this journal to extend.

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Ostler Replies

Rex Sears has provided a thoughtful response to my article "Mormonism and Determinism." Given space limitations, perhaps the best I can do here is point out areas of further discussion. For example, Sears says that he is puzzled over just what it could mean to say that a cause is adequate but not sufficient for an effect to occur. I would have thought that the meaning was quite clear—it means that the prior causes explain but do not necessitate an outcome. Quantum physics gives us actual examples of such conditions that are adequate but not sufficient to explain why an electron behaves as it does. In any given trial, an electron may be emitted, but the prior causes are not sufficient to explain why an electron lands where it does although the causes are adequate to explain the occurrence.

However, Sears has pointed to a deep problem in philosophy—the problem of describing and explaining causation. Is causation simply a constant conjunction or is there something necessary in a causal connection? When is a cause sufficient? What is an adequate explanation of causation? These are deep philosophical issues

that have been dealt with by philosophers such as Aristotle, Aquinas, Kant, Swinburne, Mackie, and Toolie, to name only a few. I could not adequately address that issue given space constraints, so I admit that my shorthand definition for an "adequate but not sufficient cause" must be more fully fleshed out. However, since Sears took causation as a basic term in its common-use sense, I treated it the same way.

It seems to me that Sears still misses the point as to why God cannot respond to prayer if causal determinism is true if *God himself is within the material world as Mormonism claims*. It is true that Sears does not *explicitly* say that God must also foresee what his own response will be to human prayers. However, Sears misses my point. I claim that such a claim is *implicit* in his position. If God sees all of the causes as the basis of his decisions, then he also sees that the causes necessitate a specific decision will be made by him in response to a prayer. *The key is that the causes of God's decision are already there in full detail before God can "deliberate" or review the causes.* God is thus stuck with a causally determined future as much as we are. It follows that God's "answer" to the prayer is the result of causes prior to God's deliberations rather than God's deliberations about it. It seems to me that Sears must either take God out of the sequence of cause and effect, which contradicts the Mormon view that God is in some sense a part of the material world, or he must deny universal causal determinism.

Sears also seriously misrepresents William James by equating a discussion of "chance" in nature and human choices with "random indeterminism." They are not the same. James would reject any notion that human actions

are merely arbitrary or random. However, space simply does not allow for a competent discussion about this side-note on one of my favorite philosophers.

Sears also asserts that I uncritically assume that if determinism is true, then no one ever deliberates. That wasn't my argument. My argument was that persons may deliberate, but if determinism is true then their actions are never the result of *rational* deliberations, nor are human choices guided by rationality; rather, every act is the result of causes that existed before the person ever thought about it. Sears does not respond to my argument for that conclusion. Further, it is incorrect to say that I "uncritically assume" that view because I give a detailed argument for that view. However, the nature of rational deliberation is also a deep-seated philosophical problem that merits further discussion. Thus, I am grateful for Sears' comments on these subjects and look forward to further dialogue—after all, that is what *Dialogue* is for!

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A Fan's Notes

Around and around it goes, the great game continues with Blake Ostler's response ("Mormonism and Determinism," *Dialogue* vol. 32, no. 4: 43-71) to Rex Sears's stimulating exercise in theological evangelizing ("Determinist Mansions in the Mormon House," *Dialogue* vol. 31, no. 4: 115-141). Now I love a good argument as much as anyone, and the Ostler/Sears debate is no exception. I also love

watching a good football game, struggles of mind and body, the physical and the mental. On behalf of those of us spectators with only average intellectual/athletic abilities, I watch in amazement at the beauty of these human dramas. However, after the contest I'm satisfied with the entertainment value; I'm cognizant of the cheap thrill and eagerly await the next occasion to open my wallet for another fix. Thank you, Blake; thank you, Rex, for the match.

As a skeptic, I adhere to Occam's dictum that no more things should be presumed to exist than are necessary to explain a phenomenon. With the Ostler/Sears debate, we are treated to an example of the ethereal meandering that for centuries has accompanied religious questions. Most people live on the surface of profound questions, engaging in polite social niceties, performing perfunctory rituals, never scratching below the fuzzy, thin skin holding the massy ooze together because to breach simplistic religious systems may suffocate the honest inquirer. To embrace a theology intellectually, one must become an intellectual contortionist. The alternative—for the free will/determinist struggle—is at once simple and terrifying, rendering the debate empty. With just four words I challenge the countervailing arguments—"there is no God"—and thus the deep, cutting razor of William of Occam bleeds and deflates all such wrangling. Compare this simple stroke with the complex assumptions that must proceed the Ostler/Sears quagmire. In descending order: 1) that God exists, 2) that God cares a wit about this spec of dust we inhabit, 3) that God's interest in us is beneficent, contrary to the preponderance of evidence, 4) that God's will is embodied in free floating, a-historical holy writ,

5) that the Mormon canon is more authoritative and correct than any other, allowing Ostler to embellish heavily from it, even though the best and brightest of Mormons (Ostler, Sears, et al.) with all the tools of modern revealed religion cannot agree on these "plain and precious" matters.

At the end of the match, we may feel invigorated by intellectual adrenaline, we may perhaps have increased hope that, even should a giant asteroid

slam into Earth, wiping out all life, that snuffed-out life will have had meaning. A pessimistic view? Perhaps. But believing that Uri Gellor can bend metal by the power of his mind does not make it so. When asked about God's self sacrifice on the cross, Tertullian answered "*Credo quia absurdum*": I believe because it's absurd.

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