Van Hale's "Mormon Miscellaneous" Radio Talk Show

bob mccue
September 20, 2004
Version 3
http://mccue.cc/bob/spirituality.htm

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> All religions, arts and sciences are branches of the same tree. All these aspirations
> are directed toward ennobling man's life, lifting it from the sphere of mere physical
> existence and leading the individual towards freedom. Albert Einstein

Introduction

Van was kind enough to invite me to initially appear on his show on September 5, 2004 and the exchange was enjoyable enough and listener response strong enough that I was invited back for a return visit. That occurred last night, on September 19. Recordings of both shows can be found at www.mormonwiki.org. I thank Chris Runyan for making them available.

On the whole, I was not as happy with how the show last night went as I was the first show. There were numerous technical problems that cost us perhaps 25% of our airtime. Those were not Van's fault. He told me before the show that the Internet connection was iffy, and the station's technicians have some kind of major fix planned for today. Van spent much more time in "testimony bearing" mode than he did last time. And he returned over and again to a few points that I had (from my point of view) already rebutted, leaving me with the choice of repeating myself and so burning time, or allowing his words to stand. I choose the later. And then, to ice the cake, I used a big chunk of time to explore an example that was overly complex, and hence I did not get to pull it together and make the point I was trying to make in the way I had hoped to make it.

I also note that talk radio is designed to maximize listenership. Education is an important but peripheral function. Hence, the emphasis is on simple sound bites that deal with a diversity of issues raised by the host and those who call or write in. Complex issues are difficult to deal with in that context. I do not doubt that with more experience in that medium I would be better as getting my point across within its strictures.

As a result of all of the above, we did not cover anywhere near as much territory as we did during our first show, and it felt to me a little like slogging through a swamp. Oh well. We do what we can.

My Take on Van Hale

I give Van full marks for being prepared to host dialogues of the type he and I had. He is committed to free speech and believes that good will come from allowing as

great a diversity of opinion as possible to be aired. I believe the same, but think the good will be of a type quite different from what Van likely expects.

I enjoy interacting with Van. Each time he and I speak (and we have had a couple of long telephone conversations in preparation for the first show we did together) I learn something from him. In particular, he is helping me to better understand part of the intellectual, but still more or less faithful, Mormon mind set. Since understanding is an important step for me toward making peace with the tradition that I recently left, this process is important to me and I am grateful to Van for facilitating it.

Van is a relatively rare bird – someone who is well read respecting Mormonism, committed to it, and yet not so emotional about his beliefs that rational, relatively polite disagreement is impossible. I have found far too often that respectful disagreement respecting these matters is not possible with those still in the faithful camp, regardless of how well read they are. In fact, the better read the worse this is in many cases.

Van takes a lot of flak in the apologist community both for doing what he does, and for holding some of his relatively liberal beliefs respecting Mormonism. So, it is at some personal cost that he continues to host his show and have people me on it. I respect him for that. He is doing that what he thinks is important and is paying a price for it. I am doing something similar.

So, overall I am a Van Fan while disagreeing with most of his beliefs and occasionally marvelling that my explanations are so poor that even after three or more tries I can't get a bright guy like Van to understand me, let alone agree with me. I do not go into discussions with people like Van expecting to change their point of view.

The Three Themes of the September 19th Show: Logic, Perspective and Meaning

There were three points that came up over and again during my discussion with Van that I was not able to address properly due to the program's format. The issues are as follows: First, the use of logic to elucidate religious matters; second, how the nature of religious experience is affected by perspective; and third, how the connection between a belief in god and our perception of life's meaning or purpose works.

Logic

I will deal with the easy one first. This is easy because I have attached a lengthy appendix that deals with the question of how logic is relevant to religious matters in some detail.

For the moment, it is sufficient to point out that Van and I were simply using the term "logical" in different ways. Van was using it, I think, in the loose sense that a

particular and bad (from his point of view) outcome was possible in the situation with which he was concerned. That is, Van indicated a number of times that if a person had an evolution based, agnostic or atheist point of view and took it to its "logical conclusion", life would be without meaning, and that the "logical consequence" of that would be the kind of immorality displayed by the Nazi and Stalinist cultures.

I was using the term "logical" in the sense scientists use it. Logic works as follows. It sets out "premises" and from them derives a conclusion. We say that something is "logical" if the conclusion must flow from that premises. A simple example of this is as follows:

> P: All Canadians are humans.

> P: All humans are mammals.

> C: Therefore, all Canadians are mammals.

A theory expressed in the form of a logical argument such as the one above can be shown to be faulty by showing that its premises are incorrect. Evidence might be brought, for example, to show that some Canadians are androids or otherwise subhuman. I am Canadian, and we have often wondered about some of our politicians and lawyers in this regard. An argument might also be shown to be faulty if its conclusion is not required by its premises if they are true. For example, maybe there are people who believe that there is a subcategory within what is considered "Canadian" that is not mammalian. If so, we might need to debate the merits of that position.

Logic is used extensively in the development and testing of scientific and other theories. It is a thinking tool. I find it helpful to break theories of the sort Van and I were talking about here down into premises and conclusions drawn from them so that they can be more easily analyzed. Reformatting arguments or theories in this way makes it clear what kind of evidence needs to be produced in order to support an argument, and also exposes the reasoning linkages that must be tested in order to see if each part of the argument is sound.

I alluded to a few of the above ideas on Van's show, but did not want to take the time to make him try to construct his argument as a series of premises that led inexorably to the conclusion for which he was arguing. And in any event, he said several times that there are many atheistic cultures that produce things that are good from his point of view, so it was clear to me that he just did not understand how the term "logical" is used in scientific or epistemic discourse.

Because of its connection to the discussion of meaning in life, in that section of this essay below I have broken Van's logic chain up into premises and conclusions and analysed it in light of my ideas respecting how we are privileged to choose our life's meaning and destiny.

Appendix A below breaks down some typical Mormon arguments into premises and conclusions and shows why they do not work from a logical point of view.

Perspective

Several times during the course of the show I used examples that were designed to show how perspective to an extent creates meaning. This is will known in artistic and musical circles, as well as all aspects of intellectual endeavour. For example, see Appendix B for an interesting exercise in how listening to different types of music while look at a painting will alter your perception of the painting. The same kind of thing can be done with colours (putting certain colours beside each other radically changes their hue), patterns (perception of a figure's size, distance etc. is radically affected by the pattern in the background), etc. One of my favorite stories from anthropology relates to some jungle pygmies who were taken out of the jungle onto the flat lands for the first time. They thought the animals they saw grazing on the plans hundreds of yards away were miniatures; they were terrified of the open spaces and the sky, etc. They had no frame of reference within which to make sense out of what they were seeing.

In the intellectual millieu, the information that we bring to a situation will radically affect how we perceive it. One of my favorite examples in this regard has to do with Paul Dunn, the former Mormon General Authority. I used to feel what I thought were powerful manifestations of God's spirit as I listened to his amazing stories. Then I found that they were false. Now, when I listen to his stories I feel quite differently.

I had a similar experience with Joseph Smith and his stories. I used to feel thrilled when I heard them. After finding out how often Smith lied in order to get people to do what he wanted them to do, I was not longer prepared to believe the miraculous things that he said, even though they have not been proven 100% false. His character, and many of the circumstances related to the stories as well as the nature of the stories themselves, are enough for me to feel confident in dismissing them as the artifices of a con man or the sincere but deluded visions of someone who was so brilliant he was a few bricks short of a full load. Both personalities have been shown to be common among the ranks of those who start new religions. And an amazing number of these men (they are almost all men) end up having sex with many of their followers, as did Smith.

During Van's show I tried to use an example involving four boys from different cultures that Van had trouble following. My intent was to illustrate how context influences meaning when it comes to religion. Here are some of my notes dealing with that example, and my lead in to it.

Humans Dislike Uncertainty and Change Their Opinions Slowly

People don't like uncertainty. Certainty makes us feel comfortable; safe. And the more uncertain the world seems, the more attractive ideas become that make us feel safe.

We have a long history of people being certain about things, and then as more information becomes available, changing their beliefs and often becoming just a certain of their new beliefs. This happens slowly. And painfully. Many people simply cannot change fundamental ideas they have accepted, no matter how obviously wrong they seem to outsiders.

Think about Galileo. The Earth seems flat and the Sun seems to go around the Earth. It took the information provided by telescopes etc. to show us that the Earth is round and it rotates around the Sun. But, for many generations after this information became available, many people on Earth refused to accept it because the idea that the Earth was at the centre of the Universe had become Christian dogma. Perspective slowly changed belief in this case.

Think about the age of the Earth. Christian dogma said 6,000 years. Many Christians were certain that was the case. Some still are. Science clearly says otherwise. Perspective is slowly changing on that point.

Darwin said man descended from lower life forms. Christian dogma says otherwise. Science clearly sides with Darwin. After about 150 years, many religious people have still not accepted what science says is reality on this point.

Think about the conception of black people. For a long time many Christians were certain that they were subhuman, and Biblical passages were used to support that idea and the slavery it justified.

The beliefs of faithful Mormons regarding the book of Mormon are changing right now. Many of Mormonism's most educated members no longer believe that it is real history. They see it as inspired fiction or something less than that.

This reminds me of the transition the Reorganized Mormon church went through. One of their foundational beliefs for many years was that Joseph Smith was not involved with polygamy. Eventually, the evidence on that point became so clear that their belief changed, and that is likely what caused many other things to change within that religion.

Even scientists are affected by this. Thomas Kuhn, the great historian and philosopher of science, said that science changes on funeral at a time. This is because the old guys can't let go of their ideas, even when the evidence clearly suggests that they should. They have to die before new and better ideas can take their proper place.

In each case, something that was considered a certainty has gradually changed as more information has become available. Why would we think that many things of which we are certain now will not also change?

A Thought Experiment – Five Boys From Different Religious Cultures

Let's walk though a thought experiment to illustrate how the information available to us affects how we might be expected to form our religious beliefs. Van objected to this experiment as "speculative", "burdensome" and hence not useful. I agree that it was too long and complex for the talk show format. You live and you learn. However, I still suggest that this thought experiment demonstrates precisely the kind of abstracting from reality (simplification) that is used to develop scientific theories. The next step in the development and testing of a theory would be to find a group of people who roughly fit the description I have given, and administer attitudinal tests at various stages during the process I am about to describe. My experience, in rough terms, follows that of the boy in this thought experiment who is thoroughly conditioned and moved from his secure environment to one where he must deal with conflicting points of view.

Imagine that a group of four boys born into devoutly religious families in a JW community, a fundamentalist Mormon community, a Muslim Taliban community, and a 12th century Catholic community. Let's deal just with the Catholic boy for the moment.

- He is born into a community where he finds people who are loving; who treat him with kindness and teach him to treat others within their community with kindness; and who teach him that their way is the only right way to live.
- He is also taught that it is so important that everyone live in this way that if anyone chooses not to live that way, they can no longer be part of the community.
- He is taught to try to know God through studying his community's scripture, praying etc.
- Over the course of time he has many experiences of a spiritual nature and becomes certain that God is communicating with him, and that he being told he is doing god's will, and most importantly, that the way he is living is the only right way.

Neurologists have shown beyond reasonable doubt that spiritual experiences of the type just described are real and that they occur in many cultures as a result of similar processes related to prayer, meditation and the typical human reaction to come kinds of stress. I can't overemphasize that the strength of the spiritual experience people have in different religious communities is as powerful as what Mormons have if not moreso. There is a myth in many religious communities to the effect that they have the one true way – that their spiritual experience is better is some way than that of other people or that the others have been deceived whereas they have not. This is circular logic. Only one answer works. If you don't agree that I am right and everyone else is wrong, your experience is invalid. No real attempt is made to determine the nature of the experience other people have, and in fact information about the experience of others is usually kept out of the community. This is certainly the case with Mormonism in general, although it is not fair to tar Van Hale with that brush.

Scientists have now done comparative studies, and the data they have produced is compelling in its indication that the spiritual experience people have in different cultures is very similar both in terms of the way in which it is experienced, and the neurology and other measurable physical aspects of the experience.

Now imagine that another boy who knows nothing about religion is trying to find a religion to join. Let's call him Bill. Imagine three things in this regard.

First, imagine that Bill only meets the Catholic boy, is impressed with what he hears, and goes to live in his community. There he experiences all of the things that the Catholic boy did. Is it not likely that Bill would think that Catholic boy is correct in his assessment of things?

Second, imagine that Bill meets with all four boys, hears a similar story from all four, and then has the change to go for a time to live with each of the four, and finds out through experiences that what each of them says is correct, with the exception of what they each say about having the one and only true way.

- How is Bill in this case likely to interpret the feelings he gets as he thinks he is communicating with God?
- On what basis would Bill decide that any of these people were right when they say that theirs is God's only true way?
- Is it not much more likely in this case that Bill would decide that each group was having some kind of powerful experience that perhaps involved a God of some kind, but that given how similar the experiences were, it did not make sense to conclude that only one of these experiences was valid; that all of the groups but on was deluded; etc.?

Let's extend this thought experiment a bit further. Assume that Bill then visits Dr. Michael Persinger and undergoes the experimental treatment he has been performing for years. This involves having Bill's brain bombarded with a certain radio frequency that is designed to stimulate what is called the "God spot" in the brain. That is a spot that appears to be active while people are having spiritual experiences. And low and behold, Bill has the same kind of amazing spiritual experiences that he thought were only possible as a result of fervent prayer, fasting etc. as a result of this treatment.

And then assume that Bill takes a few university courses in world religion, anthropology, sociology and psychology and learns a lot about how common the kind of experience he and his four friends had is both in religious and many other types of non-religious communities.

Will this additional information likely change how Bill perceives the experience he had in each of the four communities he visited? I suspect so.

Let's change our experiment again a bit. What if instead of Bill, who had no experience with religion, we used one of the other boys who grew to maturity within one religious community and only one, and ran him through all of the same

experiences Bill had? He is certain he is right. Then we take him to visit the other boys and allow him to really get to know them, live with them, etc., and then to Dr. Persinger, then to study the things I just mentioned. How is he likely to react when faced with three other people who recount the same experiences as he has had, and are all certain they are right and he is wrong? The typical responses from religious people (like Van, and me until about two years ago) include the following:

- Other people don't have the same kind of experience he did.
- Satan deceived them, but not him.
- They have some truth; he has all truth.

Is he more or less likely to react as did Bill? I would say much less likely, because of the weight of the social consequences that will befall him if he recognizes that his community's way of doing things is not the only right way. A summary of how cognitive dissonance works in this regard can be found at http://www3.telus.net/public/rcmccue/bob/documents/rs.do%20smart%20mormons%20make%20mormonism%20true.pdf   Another thought experiment is found in Appendix C.

The thought experiments involving the five boys and in Appendix C demonstrate how people's ability to perceive is affected by their prior experience. That experience creates an information environment in their minds that is the context for their new experience just as the background is for seeing a figure in a painting. And, as that information environment changes, beliefs change. That was the case historically for non-Mormons. Think of Galileo etc.   It was also the case for Mormonism. Many fundamentally important things have changed. Many doctrines Brigham Young and Joseph Smith taught and were accepted as rock solid Mormon doctrine for many years have now been quietly abandoned, for example. Smith himself was wrong about many issues, and said that even the prophets when prophesying should be expected to make mistakes. Mormons don't talk about these things, and so most are aware of how many important aspects of Mormonism have changed.

Are Mormons Justified in Being Certain of Their Religious Beliefs?

So, on what basis are Mormons justified in being certain aspects of that their experience is valid and that of all others who disagree with them are wrong? After all, they acknowledge that other people are often mistaken about religious and irreligious things.   They acknowledge that prior Mormons were mistaken about many things. They even acknowledge that Mormon prophets make mistakes, and even serious mistakes.

Van's response to this point was to indicate that just because lots of people have different experiences regarding religion, that does not mean that they are all wrong and hence that God does not exist. He used an example to illustrate his point. He said that when witnesses see an automobile accident, it is well known that their perceptions will often be different, and that they are each often quite certain that their version is correct and all others are wrong. This does not change the fact that

there is one "reality" as to how the accident happened. Van implies (using his Mormon belief in a One True Church as an analogy), that one of them will be right and the others will be wrong. On this basis, he dismissed my overlong example before I could finish it. He indicated that my approach was so burdensome and speculative that it was not worth pursuing.

Later in the show, I asked Van how he accounted for the following pattern that has been observed in a wide variety of religions. That is, some well-educated, smart people stay with the religion of their youth, and use their education to defend it. Many other people leave or reduce their participation to nominal levels. These are both well educated and not, and the best way to predict who will do this is to find out who are the most open to new experience. The open-minded tend to decline in religious belief as time passes more than the closed-minded. And, it is very rare to find a well-educated person who joins a religion like Mormonism after becoming fully apprised of its history and social structure. So, just looking at the pattern of well-educated, well-informed people, you see some who stay, some who leave, and virtually none who join.

Van again indicated that just because this kind of pattern is apparent in many religions does not mean there is no God. This was essentially the same argument as I outlined above. And, he said that we should expect most people who join Mormonism to be uneducated because that is the case with most religions. And at that point the show ended.

Why Do Many More Well-Informed People Leave Than Join Mormonism?

I will deal with the easiest point first. I agree that most people who join religions are relatively uneducated. The Book of Mormon alludes to this. These people need to improve themselves. Religion offers to help with that. In some cases it does, and in others it does not. There is a rich academic literature in this regard. But that does not address my point.

A lot of well-educated people like me leave religions like Mormonism, and almost none join. Van did not address that issue. I explain this using the "scales" analogy below. The better educated you are, the more opportunity the process described in this analogy has to work in your case. That is why well-educated people tend to leave. And, the broader one's education and hence perspective, the less likely it is that a narrow-minded point of view like that espoused by Mormonism would be attractive. Hence, relatively few well-educated people who are also well informed respecting Mormonism join the Mormon Church. I am aware of a few well-educated people who were not well informed about Mormon history etc. who joined the Mormon Church, and in some cases they were socialized thoroughly enough before that information came to them that they stayed. In other cases, they quickly left Mormonism. The cases with which I was familiar in this regard baffled and disturbed me while I was a practising Mormon leader.

To understand how our "scales" work, we first must understand that our psychology seems to be designed to promote stability – and in particular to make it unlikely that we will change basic social groups unless the cost-benefit advantages are obvious, and often not even then. This makes sense in light of the importance of being part of a well functioning group to our survival throughout most of humankind's evolutionary history. Hence, the threat of expulsion from our primary social group causes profound fear. This buttresses cognitive dissonance and makes information that challenges our beliefs more difficult to rationally evaluate. This irrational fear of leaving the group is exploited to a tee by Mormonism and other similar groups.

It takes a massive amount of learning for even a personality type predisposed toward adventure and change (as mine is) to overcome the weight I have described in the case of a well-conditioned Mormon (as I was). I visualize this as an old fashioned set of scales, like the scales of justice. Disconfirming experience and evidence has to be piled on the side of our scales opposite religious belief until they begin to tip. That is, we have to experience enough cognitive dissonance to make us finally question the reality we have assumed to exist. A person's degree of openness to new experience can be thought of as how freely the scales move. Some scales have a rusty hinge that makes movement difficult. More disconfirming weight will be required to move such scales than would be the case with well-lubricated "open to new evidence" scales.

The epiphany experience many people have as they leave a controlling religious faith is related to what happens when we reach the "tipping point" on our scale. Then, suddenly, it is as if a switch were thrown and we can see all kinds of things that have been building up just out of view as a result of the work our mind has been doing to keep us in denial. Suddenly, much of this information and insight is released into the conscious mind because the unconscious can no longer hold it back. It is as if the lights suddenly came on. This experience changes most people irrevocably. Afterwards, they can perhaps fake being who they were, but they are and always will be different in fundamental ways.

For the reasons just indicated, I doubt very much that I could have thought my way out of Mormonism without several years of decompression after my stint as Bishop, which ended just over a decade ago. I needed that much time, space and energy to slowly take weight off the Mormon side of the scale and to experience cognitive dissonance producing things that would add weight to the other side.

And, perhaps most importantly, I needed time to become sentient again. I was so busy for so long that I no longer felt much outside of a narrow range of the emotional spectrum. It was the realization that something had died inside of me that got my conscious attention first. I was depressed but not so badly that I could be diagnosed as such. I went to various doctors, assuming that something was physically wrong with me. I checked out clean in each case. Only as I emerged from Mormonism did my vitality come back.

The term "rebirth" is often applied to this process. I think it is apt.

How Are We to Interpret Our Perceptions and Those of Others?

I agree with Van as to how tricky perceptions are. I have read summaries of many psychology experiments (some involving staged traffic accidents or other similar events where was happened was known to those controlling the experiment but not the witnesses) that are designed to show just how faulty our perceptions are, and how they are influenced by things like our prejudices and other biases. However, Van's "true belief" structure of thought becomes apparent in the way he reasoned from the common ground between us I just described. Van's starting and hence conclusion is that Mormonism is true, and hence all other perceptions (like those of people like me who leave Mormonism or the multitude who look at it and laugh in the same way Mormons do at the JWs, Young Earth Creationists, Amish etc.) are wrong. It is only possible to determine that you are wrong, and learn, if you accept the possibility that you may be wrong. Van, interestingly, has accepted that certain aspects of Mormonism are wrong, but he has not accepted that it may be wrong at its foundation.

The psychology experiments to which Van alluded show that the most common case is that few if anyone accurately perceives even concrete and relatively simple events such as car accidents or thefts. Did something "real" happen? Yes. It is necessary that one of the various discreet accounts given of the accident is "true"? No. And, what happens when we allow the various witnesses to talk to each other instead of interviewing them separately? We find that their "certain" accounts of what happened quickly change while converging toward a much more narrow range of possible versions of what happened that the separate interviews would indicate. This occurs because the witnesses provide information to each other, and change each other's perspective. And what happens if we allow the witnesses access to more information about what happened? Their accounts change again.

In short, the most likely scenario is that none of the witnesses is 100% correct in their assessment of what happened, and that is the conclusion toward which I was pointing in my example involving the five boys. I do not say that their experience proves there is no God. I suggest that it points to the likelihood that people frequently become certain of things that are incorrect. Did something real happen to make each of those boys experience what they did? In my view, yes. Was it the same thing? In my view, likely not. This is not like a bunch of people watching one car accident. Instead, we have four boys in four different human groups who are all wrestling with similar phenomena. What is life about? Why do humans die? Why do they suffer? How do I get along within my social group? The similarity of these issues and of human biology makes for a similarity in their reaction to their groups' belief systems and the notion of god, which in the groups I used in my example is similar. Were the notion of god radically different, as it would be had I used certain Eastern based groups in the example, the experience of the boys would have been quite different, or at least so indicates the anthropology literature. That is, by changing the notion of god (as it does change from society to society), we have changed a car accident into a shipwreck from an experiential point of view.

As the caller from Vancouver noted (Blair, I think), religious ideas are social and psychological constructs.

I am comfortable saying that when humans try to get along within social groups (particularly those of the fundamentalist religious kind like Mormonism) and wrestle with life's great mysteries related to death, suffering, meaning etc., they will have powerfully moving experiences. The evidence I have seen supports the view that these phenomena are so powerfully moving and so important to the maintenance of social structures that people tend to become certain of their conclusions and are relatively unwilling to question them. That alone makes me doubt the accuracy of the conclusions reached by any of these groups. See again the essay referenced above respecting cognitive dissonance.

As noted below, I am much less sure about what god is, or whether there is a god than is Van. But, I believe that the kind of spiritual experience people such as the boys in my example is a very important part of life. I think we can harness the power it displays to do things that unify mankind by helping diverse groups to understand that this is one of our common bonds.

How Does a Religious or Irreligious Worldview Affect Life's Meaning?

This was Van's theme for the show. He started off by indicating in several different ways that if a person has an evolution based, agnostic or atheist point of view and carried that to its logical conclusion, then he must conclude that man is just one species among many, life would hence be without meaning or purpose, there would be no absolute right or wrong, and that the logical consequence of that would be the kind of immorality displayed by the Nazi and Stalinist cultures. He repeatedly returned to this theme throughout the show. I responded to him by explaining my point of view perhaps four or five times, and then did not bother to respond the remaining several times he repeated his belief because I not wish to spend more time repeating myself.

I first note that Einstein had views regarding the nature and existence of god that are similar to mine. And here is what he had to say about meaning etc.

> What is the meaning of human life, or of organic life altogether? To answer this question at all implies a religion. Is there any sense then, you ask, in putting it? I answer, the man who regards his own life and that of his fellow creatures as meaningless is not merely unfortunate but almost disqualified for life. (Albert Einstein, "The World as I See It")

If we are to believe Einstein, the determination of meaning is of fundamental importance, and he did not require a belief in a personal god of the type Van feels is so important in order to deal with that.

What Can We Know About God?

Is there a God? I don't know, and don't believe I can know. I believe that there is some kind of organizing principle that set in motion the wonder of which we are a part. Did it intend us; have a purpose for us, etc.? I don't know, and don't believe we can know that. Hence, it is moot until it becomes knowable.

Van said during our first show together that he believes God could give certain (that is perfect) knowledge to people like Joseph Smith of things like God's existence, purpose for man, etc., and that that knowledge was not repeatable and hence not communicable. It must be accepted on faith. As I pointed out to Van, that is not knowledge. It is speculation accepted on faith. And many people who have said (or perhaps even believed) they had such knowledge were deluded and have done horrible things to those who followed them. One of countless stories in that regard is of the children's crusades in the Middle Ages. On at least two occasions, a child had a vision that he would lead a march of children into Jerusalem to reclaim that city from the Muslims, and persuaded thousands of children to follow him. In both cases, almost all of those children either died or were taken into slavery by people who took advantage of them while they were travelling and hence vulnerable. The certainty of their leader, whether well-intentioned or not, proved disastrous for them. This is a close analogue to those who followed Jim Jones, David Koresh, the Heaven's Gate Cult, and I would say, Joseph Smith in many cases. This is particularly true of those women and girls of whom Smith and many other Mormon leaders took sexual advantage on the pretext that it was God's will.

During our first show, Van and I talked about why smart people remain Mormons, Young Earth Creationists, Holocaust deniers etc. That topic is dealt with at length at
http://www3.telus.net/public/rcmccue/bob/documents/rs.do%20smart%20mormons%20make%20mormonism%20true.pdf and so I will not get into it here, except to note that as painful as it initially will be to do so, in order to connect with reality, educated Mormons need to bring their professional training to bear on their religious beliefs; to join the two solitudes that religious belief has caused to exist in their mind; to require that professional standards of honesty to govern their spiritual behavior. Matt Berry, a writer I find insightful, said something with which I am suspect most thoughtful Mormons will agree - that one of the most important measures of spirituality is honesty. One of the things this implies is that the more spiritual we are, the more able we will be to bear the seemingly hard truths of reality as opposed to the comforting myths with which we were raised. And on the basis of personal experience, I have no hesitation saying that once we become accustomed to what might initially seem like "hard truths", they reveal an existence sweeter than anything I could have previously imagined.

Absolute v. Relative Values

As I noted above in the section on "Logic", Van admitted that he is aware of many cultures that tend toward agnosticism or atheism that do admirable things. His concern is that without the assurance of an absolute value system, anchored in

God, the kinds or atrocity he noted in certain Communist or Fascist societies were possible. When I pointed out that many atrocities have been committed in religion's name and that perhaps the real problem is people who abuse power and use religion and other ideologies to do so, he admitted that was at least part of the problem. And then he reaffirmed his Mormon testimony, and expressed his concern again about the consequences of a loss of belief in the kind of personal God Mormonism posits.

I take it from Van's discussion of this point that he believes that the risk of behaviour he thinks is bad is greater if a belief in the Mormon or Christian kind of God is discarded, and that this relates to the loss of the absolute values that the existence of this kind of God who made the cosmos and us implies.

How Absolute are God's Values?

If we stay just within Mormonism, it seems that God changes his mind fairly often. As Karen Armstrong points out in Appendix A below, it used to be that people were not conscious of much that had gone on in the past. That is, they were "ahistorical". That made it easy for the rulers to tell the people what happened in the mythic past, and hence control the behaviour of the people in the present. Hence, the idea that "God's word is eternal and unchanging" could be maintained while His word, as interpreted by the men who were his mostly self appointed agents, could change pretty much to suit the needs of the day. As the people became more conscious of what went on the past and began to write it down and keep track of it, this became much harder to do. And we can now see how God's word has changed in other faiths, and within the Mormon faith.

For example, polygamy was an eternal, unchanging law. Christ was coming right away back in the mid-1800s. Blacks had the priesthood, then Brigham Young took it away, and they were to never to have it again. Along with this came terrible racial attitudes towards things like mixed race marriages and a variety of other things. Young taught that death was the appropriate penalty for a black man caught having sex with a white woman, for example. Then the blacks got the priesthood back again.

Young taught that a variety of sins must be atoned for by the sinner's death – the old Biblical concept warmed over. Young even said that we did such sinner's a favour by killing them. That one is gone, thank goodness. Birth control was prohibited. Having as many children as possible was essential, but family sizes within Mormonism are falling, just not as rapidly as in the non-Mormon community, and birth control is commonplace. Etc.

When we look at the broader religious community, we find that God's attitudes have changed radically over time and from community to community, and that what God says seems peculiarly close to what the society (or at least its rulers) wants or needs to hear. In societies where resources are scarce, war is common any many people are killed, the gods tend to sanction war and killing, and polygamy is "God's way" since there are often not enough men to go around. In

primitive societies of abundance, the gods often say quite different things about the acceptability of war and killing, and women have a much greater say in both how god's word is interpreted and how the societies are run.

So, on what basis do we conclude that God's values are absolute? And who can we rely upon to tell us that God says? If we believe the person who seems the most certain and charismatic, we are breaching a basic rule of human behaviour. In all other contexts, the people who are unrealistically certain and promise the impossible are almost always out to take us for a ride. In my view, the same is true in the religious world. I believe that history bears me out on that point. And most religious believers agree with me, except when it comes to their religion. That is almost always an exception to the rule. It is certainly an exception with most Mormons I know.

Relative Values and the Laws of Cause and Effect

Van was quite disturbed about the consequences of living with relative values. Over and over again he said that if values are relative, then people could just start killing other people and there would be no basis on which for anyone to be critical of them.

My reply, which Van puzzlingly failed to grasp after hearing it several times, was that there are laws of cause and effect that govern social interaction. We can decide what kind of society in which we wish to live, and then adopt behaviours that will bring that society into existence. By making that decision, we define good and bad. They are relative – that is, something is only good or bad in light of an attitude someone holds. But if, for example, as a group we decide that each adult human being (even gays and women) is equal, then we will define certain behaviours that discriminate against gays and women as bad. We can create laws and social mores to reinforce our values, just as laws and social mores are in some cultures used to reinforce what is believed to be God's laws. And so we can bring into being a certain type of society.

Van implied numerous times that morals defined relative to things that humans have freely chosen because they want a certain kind of society are not as good as, or are less likely to be effective than, morals that are dictated to the majority of the people by some minority that purports to, and is believed to, speak for God. I tried to provide examples (China; Japan; Scandinavian countries; etc.) where people have gotten along just fine without a personal god, and in some cases have chosen their own values, but Van again did not seem to grasp my point. He indicated regarding Denmark and Sweden in particular that many would disagree with my assessment that they are doing "good". Fair enough. But the point is that the people there have freely decided the kind of society that they want, and whether we agree with what they are doing or not, they are doing it and it is working pretty well within the terms they have defined for it. And even in Christian North American terms, those godless Scandinavians with their loose morals etc. are beating the North Americans at their own game in some respects in terms of drug use rates, alcoholism rates, the spread of venereal disease, etc.

<u>Van's "Logic" regarding the Atheist/Agnostic Position and Meaning</u>

Here is a more detailed treatment of Van's logic chain related to atheism etc. and meaning in life. It will soon become apparent why I did not attempt to do this on the air.

Remember the brief discussion of logic above. Sound logic requires that if the premises are correct, the conclusions must follow from the premises. Logic is tested by examining the correctness of the premises, and by determining whether the conclusions are required by the premises or not, and by making sure that a conclusion is not merely the restatement of some of the premises, thus making the argument circular and showing that is proves nothing that was not established when the premises themselves were critiqued. We will run through this process with Van's argument.

Van's position regarding the atheist/agnostic point of view, broken down into premises and conclusions in his words to the best of my ability (with my comments at each step), is as follows:

> *P1   Humans are an evolutionary accident.*

Most atheists and agnostics would agree. Some would not. I am agnostic on the point, but this that this premise is likely correct. I believe that something caused the wonderful order we see around us, but do not know, and do not believe I can know, what it was, how it relates to us, whether it intended us, etc.

Let's assume that the accident hypothesis is correct and see where that leads us. Many meaningful things in life begin as what most people believe are accidents. For example, the chance events of life that lead people to move to one place or another, take or leave jobs, etc. often lead to marriages, friendships and other close relationships. Many people can say something like, "Without the accident of dropping that file during a stressful day for my old boss, he wouldn't have fired me, I wouldn't have gone to work for company X, and I wouldn't have met my lovely wife. I bless the day I dropped that file!" Does the accidental origin of many of our relationships take away from their ultimate meaning?   Or to make them meaningful, must we see God's guiding hand in even the smallest and most apparently random events of life? Some Mormons and other religious people take God's influence to that degree. I doubt that Van does.

> *P2   Humans have no purpose or destiny.*

Van contradicts himself later on this point. What he really means here is that humans have no purpose of destiny irrevocably dictated to them by a god of the type in which he believes. As I point out below, and Van accepts, humans have chosen for themselves manifold purposes and destinies. I suggest that nothing is more characteristically human than the act of choosing a purpose and destiny,

whether this is linked to a god of some kind or not. We seem not to be able to get along well without perceiving that our lives have meaning.

> P3 Our lives are a series of meaningless events.

Again, Van is using his language in a loose and confusing fashion. What he means is that an atheist/agnostic life is a series of events without the kind of meaning that is given by the kind of god in which Van believes. There are many other kinds of meanings that have sustained a huge variety of human cultures. Van admits this, but argues that a chosen meaning is not as valid as a meaning mandated by the kind of God in which Van believes. Van acknowledges that there are many bad kinds of religion, and so not any meaning mandated by any god will pass muster. The only kind of god that is guaranteed to produce a legitimate, reliable meaning is the kind of god in which Van believes. Oddly enough, virtually all religious people take the same kind of position. Only their God is a "good" God.

> P4 We are nothing more than primates that evolved differently than other primates and thus we are just another species of animal life.

Van is probably right. Let's look a little deeper at what his statement means. Man is self conscious in a way that no other species, to our knowledge, is. This self-consciousness produces a kind of intelligence that enables us to behave in ways that no other species can, and to make choices regarding complex things like morality in ways no other species can. So, yes, we did evolve differently than other species and that makes all the difference. That is why we can choose. As will become clear when we get to Van's conclusion, his failure to deal with the concept of choice in his premises causes some real problems. In P4, he alludes to choice by pointing out that man is different than other animals, but does not do what he needs to do in this regard.

It is, interestingly, man's self and other consciousness that makes him capable of conceiving of something like god and using that notion to control other people, and to help us avoid addressing some of the things about life of which we would sometimes rather not be conscious. Self-consciousness is a heavy burden for many humans. Many push it off as far as they can. Some notions of god help to do that.

> P5 Within the various species, there is a degree of individuality. For example, some dogs are vicious and will kill without any provocation, while others are mild and gentle. Among walruses, some males kill their offspring and others do not. Etc.

Agreed. Again, Van fails to address how the ability to choose differentiates humans from other species. This is particularly enlightening given both the primary of agency (choice) in Mormon theology, and its suppression as a matter of fact among Mormon people.

> P6 Humans are the same as other species insofar as variability is concerned.

Not agreed. Again, Van misses the concept of choice.

Sure there is variability among individual humans. But, as Van pointed out above (with a little help from me), there are vast differences between humans and other animals due to our intelligence and in particular the fact that we are self conscious and are aware of the self consciousness of other humans. Our consciousness, self-consciousness etc. gives us latitude for choice that other species do not have. Daniel Dennett's book "Freedom Evolves" is particularly interesting on this point. This is what makes possible the formation of highly moral, or immoral, human societies based on choice. One form of the exercise of such choice is to believe that morality is dictated by any of the multitude of gods that humans have worshiped throughout history. Many societies formed on that basis have been immoral relative to the values adopted by Judeo-Christian society of which Mormonism is a part. And as pointed out above, the values of the immutable, unchanging God of Christianity have changed radically over time. This is clear on the basis alone of a reading of the Old and New Testaments. The religionists hypothesize that this is because God was giving the people what they needed. People like me interpret the same events as indicating that society was simply evolving and society's rules were changing to accommodate that evolution. Occasionally, a voice like that attributed Christ emerged to articulate, or perhaps even advance, that evolutionary process.

As society continued to evolve, we reached or are reaching the point where we can face the reality of making choices about what we value, or wish to value, as we evolve. We can even choose how we will evolve, instead of blaming what is happening on a god of one kind or another who changes his mind from time to time in accordance with what is best for us. See Paul Ehlich's fine book "Human Natures" on this point, and in particular see his final chapter on the evolution of human values. See also the World Value Survey website at http://wvs.isr.umich.edu/.

> *C1   Therefore, how one member of the human species behaves cannot be judged moral or immoral, ethical or unethical, good or bad except by some standard devised by other humans.*

Van's argument is already in tatters as a result of the way in which his premises do not stand up to scrutiny. However, this conclusion is correct in my view. A much shorter logic chain to get to the same conclusion would be as follows:

> P1   Human moral and ethical standards were either devised by humans or by god.

> P   There is no god.

> C   Therefore, human moral and ethical standards are devised by humans.

So, I agree with Van's first conclusion, and would add that even when humans think that they are obeying a god, they are obeying other humans.

> *C2 Therefore, however a human lives her life is simply the nature of the human beast. Some are gentle and some are vicious. Some steal and some do not. Some communities expand their territory by killing others and taking their land and possessions and some do not. For some, war and domination is a prime objective, while for others peace is. For a few, personal freedom has been granted and protected, but for most, the society dictates and enforces its will.*

This conclusion does not flow from Van's premises. For example, he said that humans are different from other species because we evolved differently, and is here concluding that we are just like all other animals without allowing for the differences evolution caused. He hence ignores our ability to shape our own destinies in the way other species cannot. This is why human choice and freedom to choose is so critical. Van appears to be concluding that humans cannot choose how to behave. He says other things that contradict this conclusion. I don't believe he means what he is saying here in its entirety. However, this conclusion contains a disturbing undertone that is consistent with many other things Van said. He appears to believe that people who do not believe as he does are less inherently inclined to treat other people as they wish to be treated themselves than he and others like him are. He says that such people are more animal like than he and his co-religionists are. This amounts in my view to saying that people who do not believe as he does are less human then he is. Karen Armstrong has written extensively about this tribalistic tendency, and how it flourishes within fundamentalist leaning religious cultures. See Appendix A for a taste of her work. Van's assertions fit this pattern, as does Mormonism generally in my view.

> *C3 Therefore, there are, and have been, many standards for many communities and the best we can logically say, from an atheistic perspective, is that we prefer one ideology or standard of behavior over another. There is no universal standard for declaring anything right or wrong.*

Finally, Van brings choice into a conclusion. And I agree with him. All we can do is decide on the kind of society that we wish to bring into being, and choose the values that will do that. This conclusion, however, contradicts his earlier conclusion C2 and some of his premises.

Had Van chosen to frame his argument as I indicated it could have been framed above, I would have agreed with him whole-heartedly. That is:

> P There is no god.

> C Therefore, human moral and ethical standards are devised by humans.

The problems with his argument flow from the premises he chose to adopt, and the other conclusions he attempts to draw from those premises.

After laying our his argument, he went on to use the former Soviet Union and other closely related cultures a number of times in an attempt to illustrate how bad things can get without a god like his. He said that he has had considerable association with immigrants from the former Soviet Union and have experienced first hand what he would describe as an absence of what is called "conscience" in our society which is the result of a belief in God and His Divinely instituted set of standards. My son recently returned home from serving his mission in the Ukraine and tells quite a different story about the nature of the people he met there than Van does. I doubt that Van feels that the existence of the Italian Mafia proves that all Catholics have no morals. Perhaps he is deceived by a small and skewed sample.

Van has said on other occasions that he knows immigrants from the former Soviet Union who are prepared to do anything that serves their personal interest even if it goes against the standards and laws of American communities where they reside and that their only remorse comes when they are caught and punished for their actions and that:

> "… the obvious and logical tendency of a community of such individuals is to live their lives in such a way as to avoid undesirable consequences or punishment, not to strive to live up to a standard which transcends the brief fleeting moment of their accidental existence." (Van Hale, private correspondence, September 20, 2004)

Van did not once during our show refer to probabilities, but here he does. And this puts the question as it should be put.

As I indicated above, Van believes that moral standards dictated by his kind of god are better, more sustainable, etc. than those that a community of people can agree upon. That is, a people who believe in the kind of god he does are more likely to live in a fashion that accords with the kind of morality he favours. Let's look at that statement.

First, Van and most other Mormons do not accept that there is more than one right way to do things. Mormonism is God's one true religion. Therefore, anyone who does not accept their interpretation of what god is and what god wants, is in the wilderness and subject to the problems Van suggests go along with that. This means that while humans can choose, there is no wise or right choice to be made except in accordance with the will of the Mormon god, which is similar to the Christian god.

This makes it hard to debate with them on what most people would regard as rational terms. For example, how can you discuss with a believing Mormon the pros and cons of accepting a gay lifestyle, or pre-marital sex? The laws of social or biological cause and effect are irrelevant to the debate for a believing Mormon, and

they are the entire debate for many members of all western societies, and most of many such societies such as those of the Scandinavian countries.

For example, what if it is true (as many people allege) that gay people who live in places like the United States and particularly within social groups like Mormons and Orthodox Jews, tend to commit suicide at higher rates than those in other groups? And what if we can be established that gays are physiologically different that heteros? And what if it can be established that if gays are accepted as human beings equal to all others and entitled to the same rights and respect as all others, that their suicide rate goes down, their life satisfaction goes up and society makes out just fine? If these things can be established with a high degree of probability (many people they have been), then the "right" thing for a society that values each human being equally to do would be to change its attitude regarding gay people.

What if it can be established with a high degree of probability (as many people say that it has) that young people tend to have sex before they get married and in most cultures always have, and that divorce rates tend to be lower and marital harmony rates tend to be higher in cultures where marriages occur later? In that case, maybe young people should be taught about what it means to enter into a sexual relationship; when in one's life most people seem to be ready for that; how this can be done so as to enhance life; how sexually transmitted disease passes from person to person; what marriage means as compared to an intimate sexual relationship; etc. I just more or less described how these issues are dealt with in many parts of Europe.

As noted above, Mormons are precluded from this kind of debate. And they used to be precluded from the debate as to whether a man should have one, or more than one, wife. Times change, and Mormon dogma changes. But Mormons do not feel they can choose what they value in this regard. They are required to wait until they are told to change what they value. It saddens me immensely that so many members of my family and others I love are stuck and that dark, subservient place.

Second and more substantively, let's consider the evidence as when the kinds of atrocities tend to happen that Van used repeatedly to illustrate the probable consequences of atheist belief. From a broad Judeo/Christian point of view, we have many examples of societies that were religious and good or bad as well as atheistic and good or bad. I told Van on the show (as noted above) that it seems to me that the abuse of power correlates to most of the bad we have seen, whether within religious or atheistic societies. And in recent history, it is clear to me that the use of democratic principles based on the value that all human beings are equal correlates most strongly to good done in both atheistic and theistic societies.

I note in particular that many of the founding fathers of the United States ranged somewhere between atheistic and deistic. Deists believe in a god of some kind, but do not believe in that he can communicate with man. Hence, they would not believe in the kind of god-mandated moral code that Van feels is so important. Thomas Jefferson, in particular, was widely accused of being an atheist during his day, likely because it was well known that he did not believe in Christ's divinity nor

did he believe that the Bible was god's word. It seems likely, however, that he was a deist (See http://www.sullivan-county.com/id3/jefferson_deist.htm).

And I pointed out to Van that Buddhist, Taoist and a variety of other Eastern based societies disavow the notion of god. Even without democracy, they seem to have done well in many respects. Western society is borrowing with increasing frequency from the wisdom of Buddha, the Tao, Confucius, etc.

So, I question Van's assertion that people who do not believe in his kind of god are less likely to live their lives by moral standards that many human beings would find admirable. Van and other Mormons might not find them admirable, as Van intimates was the case respecting Denmark, Sweden etc. But many others people around the world would disagree. And a question much more severely Van's assertion that people who do not accept his kind of god would tend to be only be governable by fear of penalty as opposed to a desire to create something of they value. He is saying, in effect, that people who do not believe as he does are less human and more animalistic. They will incline, he says, toward their baser instincts because their way is not lit by God's mandated values. He is saying that people who do not believe in his kind have a "logical tendency" to be unable to agree upon a moral standard that will enable them to create, for themselves and their posterity, a society that is safe, nurturing, ecologically sustainable, etc. I do not find his assertion persuasive either in light of the broad sweep of history, or in light of current affairs worldwide, and particularly in the democratic west.

Van disagreed with my assertion that there is a broad human consensus about thinks like the golden rule, the need to avoid killing other people except in extraordinary circumstances. In this he disagrees with many people whose opinions are widely respected. For example, Algernon Black, the noted ethicist, put it this way:

> Why not let people differ about their answers to the great mysteries of the Universe? Let each seek one's own way to the highest, to one's own sense of supreme loyalty in life, one's ideal of life. Let each philosophy, each world-view bring forth its truth and beauty to a larger perspective, that people may grow in vision, stature and dedication.
>
> The religions of humanity should be a unifying force, for all the great religions reveal a basic unity in ethics. Whether it be Judaism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism or Confucianism, all grow out of a sense of the sacredness of human life. This moral sensitivity to the sacredness of human personality — the Commandments not to kill, not to hurt, not to put a stumbling block in the path of the blind, not to neglect the widow or the fatherless, not to exploit the servant or the worker — all this can be found in the Bibles of humanity, in all the sacred books. All teach in substance: "Do unto others as you would that others should do unto you." There is, then, a basic unity among the great religions in the matter of ethics. True, there are religious philosophies which turn people away from the world, from the here and now, concentrating life-purposes on salvation for one's self or a mystic

union with some supernatural reality. But most of the great religions agree on mercy, justice, love — here on earth. And they agree that the great task is to move people from apathy, from an acceptance of the evils in life, to face the possibilities of the world, to make life sweet for one another instead of bitter. This is the unifying ethical task of all the religions — yes, of all the philosophies of humankind. There is no need to force our own theological points of view upon one another or to insist that the moral life grows out of final, absolute authority. (Algernon Black, "Are We Religious?" http://www.ethicalculture.org/uer/arewe.html)

This does not mean that there is one universal ethic that covers all points. Different cultures still differ as to many aspects of when, how, etc. things like death or harm to others are justified. But as Black and many others have pointed out, broad common values can be identified. See Appendix D for an analysis I did some time ago regarding the Golden Rule in that regard.

The most important value difference between modern western democracies and most of what has preceded us relates to our belief that each human being is of equal value. This innovation towers over all else from the point of view of human values, in my opinion.

Van's Logic in Simplified Form

The logic chain summarized above was constructed using Van's own words, and in fairness to him, he was not thinking in terms of premises and conclusions when he said what he did. So, below I have attempted to clean up his ideas for him, and put them into a format that makes it easier to pin down what works and what does not. So, here my reframing of Van's logic.

Pa Humans and all other animal species were either created by Darwinian evolution or by a god of the Judeo-Christian variety.

Pb Human moral and ethical standards were either devised by humans or by a god of the Judeo-Christian variety.

Pc There is no god of the Judeo-Christian variety.

Pd From a behavioural point of view, humans resemble other animal species in some ways, and differ from them in others.

Pe Both individual humans and individual members of other animal species display behavioural traits that differ within their species.

Pf Human moral and ethical standards affect human behaviour.

Pg The effect of human moral and ethical standards on human behaviour can be measured with sufficient certainty to make choosing one moral or ethical

standard instead of another on the basis of such consequences justifiable on rational, probabilistic grounds.

Ph Individual humans are capable to some extent of choosing their behaviour based on both what they wish to avoid (such as penalties or other things that they perceive to be undesirable) and what they wish to obtain (such as rewards or other things that they perceive to be desirable).

Ca Therefore, humans and all other animal species were created by Darwinian evolution.

Cb Therefore, human moral and ethical standards were devised by humans.

Cc Therefore, there is no point of reference from which all moral and ethical standards can be judged as either good or bad. (But remember Pf – Ph. We have assumed in those premises that moral and ethical standards may be judged and either chosen or rejected on the basis of whether a person or group of persons prefers, or does not prefer, the probable consequences of adopting a given set of moral or ethical standards).

Cd Therefore, it is likely that human behaviour will tend toward the behaviour of animals instead of toward the behaviours that most human societies have prized, such as those commended to us by the Golden Rule and those humans recognized by sages from many societies who have been variously monotheistic (believing in the existence of one and only god who can and does communicate his will to humans), deistic (believing in a god or an undefined nature that cannot communicate with humans), pantheistic (believing all kinds of things about many different gods), atheistic (not believing in god), agnostic (no knowing if there is a god or not), and who knows what else.

Pa and Pb simplify the argument to suit the usual Christian point of view with which we in the Western world generally have to deal. It is of course possible that many things other than a white-haired-old-guy god gave rise to humanity or human moral systems. The most likely source of each, in my view, is some kind of evolutionary system. But what caused it? Who knows. I can't even hazard a reasonable guess.

None of the rest of the premises is controversial from my point of view. Pf - Ph would, however, be disputed by many. Pf and Pg raise the long standing debate about how reliable any knowledge produced by science is. It is not as reliable as we often like to think, but it is the best we have and so I am prepared to rely upon it until something that appears more reliable comes along.

Ph raises the free will v. determinism debate. I side with free will. Those interested can see my recent post on that topic. In general, I subscribe to Daniel Dennett's "elbow room" theory (See his book by that title, and also his "Freedom Evolves") that shows to my satisfaction that we have enough agency to be responsible for

what we do.   Much of what you said was pointed toward how little we actually choose and how much of our behaviour is determined by genes, acculturation etc. I agree with a lot of that line of theory.

Also, many people admit the existence of free will but indicate that its conscious component is so small that it is not worth a lot. That is, our moral decision-making is not responsible for much.

While I agree that the unconscious part of our mind is much more determinative of our behaviour than our conscious mind, I don't think that discounts the importance of our moral decision making or system, which is largely unconscious.   When we attribute behaviour to acculturation are we not often talking about the effect of morals, which are imbedded in culture? What is "right" and "good" varies from culture to culture to an extent and is usually reflective of the conditions that existed where and when the culture in question developed. That is why authoritarian cultures like Mormonism's tend to find their origins in scarce resource environments. Hebrew culture came from that kind of environment. The well documented differences between Eastern and Western culture and even psychology are attributable to environmental conditions on a defensible basis (see for example Richard Nisbett, "The Geography of Thought").

I think it is fair to say that moral systems influence behaviour from this macro point of view, and hence some of the unconscious factors to which you refer can be attributed to moral systems. And over time, various aspects of morality or altruism manifest themselves in geneticly based behaviours as well. The theories I find most persuasive tie altruistic behaviour into group level evolutionary theory, and show how such behaviour makes the group more fit, and hence groups with individuals that exhibit such behaviours outperform those without them. Lots of studies have shown how these behaviours work in animal populations. See, for example, David Sloan Wilson's "Darwin's Cathedral".

Steven Pinker ("How the Mind Works" and "The Blank Slate") and many others say that our major personality characteristics are about 50% genes and 50% acculturation. Again, we find a way to say that at least some of our unconscious or instinctive behaviours are part of the moral code. So, I don't think you need to find a conscious decision making mechanism to speak about the affect or influence of morals on our behaviour.

So, despite the relatively small effect that moral decisions have on us through our conscious decision making mechanisms, it is in view that what we refer to as morality is hugely influential in our decision making processes.

Ca through Cc are logically required by Pa – Ph. Cd is not.

The content of Cd requires additional premises to support it. The premises could, for example, lay out data collected through various experiments or data collection projects to show a correlation between belief or disbelief in the Judeo-Christian god, adherence to various moral or ethical codes, and crime rates and other social

attributes of the various societies in which these measures were taken. The premises would have to deal with the causal relationship between the various factors observed and hence how such data can be used to project future behaviour. For example, does a belief or disbelief in a god of some kind cause the social behaviour in question (good or bad) or are there other factors that better explain both social problems and ills (such as the advent of democracy in the case of many social goods and the abuse of power in the case of many social ills)? Is data related to historical and experimental behaviour that is centuries old more or less reliable, and more or less likely to predict future trends, than more recent data? Etc. There is a near endless stream of issues of this sort to be dealt with. My friend Scott Tippets forwarded to me a bibliography for those we are interested in getting a taste of this research. It is included in Appendix E, with a few books I thought might be usefully added to it.

The meat of the debate (and this debate and others similar to it have been conducted within the social sciences in various ways for well over a century) would be regarding the justification of these premises. Such premises could be constructed to either lead to the logical conclusion that an atheistic/agnostic belief was likely, or unlikely, to lead mankind toward the kind or animalistic behaviour some Christians suggests await us if we do down that road.

In my view, it is highly improbable that either history or the experience within contemporary society supports the premises that would be required to make Cd logical. The Orient is mostly atheistic and has been for most of recorded history. Most of the contemporary Western democratic world is either agnostic or atheistic, except for the United States. And oddly enough, the founders of America mostly did not believe that god could communicate a moral code to man. That was in part at least the basis for the separation of church and state and the system of checks and balances to restrain power in the US that has been copied throughout the democratic world. It was recognized that power tends to be abused, and the notion that god tells some men what other men should do had been a particularly common form of abuse by those in power throughout most of recorded history. And we don't have to talk about the extensive history religion of various stripes has of causing (or at least aiding and abetting) death and destruction.

The kind of system embodied by American democracy (in broad terms) is likely, in my view, to be what causes healthy society to have its best chance whether based on the kind of atheism promoted by Buddha and Confucius, the kind of deism (there is a god but we can't tell what he is like and he has left us to devise our own moral code) advocated by Jefferson et al., Christian fundamentalism, my kind of agnosticism or anything else.

This issue is, however, highly complex. And it is perceived to be important because of its connection to the foundations of various social groups and hence the security the members of those groups feel. So, it is precisely the kind of issue that causes those who address it to become fearful. The psychologists tell us that humans will tend to resolve this kind of issue on the basis of what the majority of the members of their dominant social groups believe. Individuals will accept this belief on

grounds that are perceived by people outside of their group to be irrational, but will be accepted as rational inside the group. This phenomenon has been carefully studied. Easy to deconstruct (for us) examples include the young earth creationists, UFO believers, Holocaust deniers and Mormons who continue to believe that Joseph Smith literally translated the Book of Mormon from golden plates, translated the Book of Abraham from Egyptian papyri, saw and communicated with God and angels, etc.

The more a group is governed by fear, the more susceptible to the influence just described. Hence, it is not surprising to hear those within fundamentalist religious groups make frequent use of the language of fear. This is promoted by religions leaders who wish to keep the group together and hence preserve their authority.

Groups of this nature divide the world into "us" and "them"; "inside" and "outside"; "member" and "non-member"; "saint" and "gentile" (the Jews really like that one); "clean" and "unclean" dichotomies. They are taught to stay away from, or at least hold at a distance, that which is "outside". They can be "in", but not "of" the world. All of this helps to sharply distinguish the group from the rest of the world, and hence help to keep it together, functioning as a unit and under the control of its authority structure.

Anthropologists have shown how this social structure evolved in times and places where the environment was dangerous, resources were scarce and such a social structure had great utility. One of the consequences of this structure is the concentration of power in the hands of a few. Hence, those who hold power and wish to keep it or who aspire to power, often seek to create the perception of danger where there is none in order to persuade people that they should retain, or receive, the power the wish to wield.

It is also helpful to recall when dealing with people who are locked into the kind of worldview just described that the psychologists have told us that the first opinion people reach on a given point tends to be hard to shake. That is, our current opinions make it harder for us to be rational about new evidence that comes before us respecting a matter we have already "made up our minds about" than people who are not already "biased" by such an opinion. This applies as well to post Mormon opinions as to Mormon opinions. Most interestingly, it has been shown that the "smarter" a person is, the stronger her confirmation bias tends to be. This is thought to be because smart people are better at finding patterns in data (correct or not) that support their current opinion, and are more likely to persuade other people to their position. Both of these things cause smart people to feel secure in erroneous beliefs. This has been shown to be a problem even in scientific endeavour, and caused the noted historian and philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn to say that science progresses "one funeral at a time" as the old guys finally die off and stop talking about the theories that they should have let go of long ago.

And so also progresses religion. I feel most fortunate not have had to die off to see the light, and am prepared to acknowledge that this means I am not the sharpest

knife in the draw, and certainly am not a sharp as all those Young Earth Creationists with PhD's and brilliant Mormon apologists.

For this and many other things I am most grateful.

Advancing Freedom and Choice

The trend I see is that as mankind becomes richer and more knowledgeable, we become more in control of our time and environment. This means that we have more choices to make. And each generation is frightened by these choices and sees mankind spiralling downward toward the bottom of a moral abyss. And yet most recent generations have managed to learn more and improve (by some measures) the lot of most human beings on the planet. The clear trend during the last several generations has been in this direction, although there are many things of which we have reason to still be concerned.

In light of what I just said, it is not surprising that the trend in the developed world is toward more individuality and personal choice when it comes to what we value, and people are becoming less inclined to follow the dictates of institutional religion. See http://wvs.isr.umich.edu/fig.shtml for example. The institutional religions that are likely to do the best in the future are those that facilitate individual growth and a broader choice of individual values. Many religions are moving in this direction. And, as noted in Appendix A, some religions of a fundamentalist bent are moving in the opposite direction. They attempt to prey upon those who are fearful of change, and offer the kind of certainty that is attractive to the fearful. There will always be a market for this kind of religious belief. But if we are to believe the data produced by the World Value Survey and similar studies, the broad trend is in the opposite direction. This is a hopeful sign from my point of view.

This brings me to what I feel is the most important point of this discussion. Because of the evolutionary nature of human freedom, it is my view that recent history is a much better guide to what we can and should do that ancient history. That is, the fact that for most of recorded history mankind killed each other, were subject to despotic kings and religions leaders who took advantage of them etc. is not as relevant as what has happened during the past several hundred years of human history since the advent of universal human rights and democracy. Those humans who have lived within that system have prospered. The various conceptions of god have declined in influence. Power of all kinds has been restrained, and its exercise has been made more transparent and accountable to the common people. More people have had more choice than even in history. And things are working out for the most part, just fine. There still plenty of problems, but when we compare what we in the democratic west have now to what mankind in general had several centuries ago and what most of the rest of the world still have, we are doing great.

I suggest that we encourage this pattern to continue. In fact, I believe that it will in any event regardless of whether we encourage it or not. The array of physical and cultural issues over which mankind will both feel able, and be able, to exercise

choice will continue to expand. The creation and maintenance of systems that relate to moral values is a small, but important, part of this. And as always, as we begin to make choices regarding new things, we will feel fear.

Fear

In what I felt was the show's highlight, a caller named Joan, with whom I have previously corresponded, told Van that after over 70 years as a member of the Mormon Church she has resigned her membership. She indicated that she felt that Mormonism and other religions like it were crutches used by those who needed to remain isolated from the uncertainty of reality. She told a story of a woman who years ago in Salt Lake City had told another talk show host that she understood why people committed suicide after reading in the Salt Lake Tribune about changes that had been made to the Book of Mormon, and that such information should not be published in newspapers for that reason. She noted that Van used the word "terrifying" or "terrified" seven times during his introductory monologue, and suggested that he was one of those people who was hiding from reality.

Before returning to the substance of this discussion, I note that it was a particular pleasure to hear Joan's kind, positive, enthusiastic voice. This adds a wonderful dimension to the nice picture I had already formed of her. My impression, until hearing what she had to saw on air, was that she was a mature woman - perhaps somewhere between 50 and 60. She has a wealth of experience in many fields, and a tremendous intellectual vitality. I aspire to the same when I reach her age.

I agree with Joan's perception of Van. Mormonism, as is the case with many fundamentalist leaning religions, uses fear extensively to control its members. I explore this in some detail in http://www3.telus.net/public/rcmccue/bob/documents/rs.religious%20faith%20-%20enlightening%20or%20blinding.pdf starting at page 39. Much of that fear is unconscious. But some of it is conscious as Van's example shows.

I explained to him that I had felt that same fear as I left Mormonism, and then had been wonderfully surprises as I plunged deeper into how many other cultures functioned and found a beautiful tapestry of human behaviour. I now feel privileged to take what makes the most sense from the boundless pool of knowledge and experience by which I am surrounded.

The history of modern man can be understood to some extent as the gradual rolling back of the fear of our own freedom as it has become apparent that that the common rabble (that is, people like me) are capable of dealing with the best available knowledge of their reality without falling into the abyss of chaos and nihilism. There can be no doubt that this process is driven by innovations such as the continuing expansion of scientific and cultural understanding, the printing press, democracy, general access to education, and the Internet that have progressively broadened both man's ability and opportunity to understand the world around him (See "A History of Knowledge" by Charles Van Doren; "The Lexus and the Olive Tree" by Thomas Friedman). Mankind has slowly become accustomed to greater

degrees of freedom, and as that happens the very nature of human freedom changes (See "Freedom Evolves", Daniel Dennett). But each time advancing knowledge questions the status quo or gives us new power, it causes fear. And in time, what we feared becomes commonplace. Then the process repeats itself.

So, What is My Purpose or the Meaning of My Life?

If I have a special purpose other than what I choose for myself, but there is no way of knowing what it is, it does not do me any good. And I am certainly not going to take anyone else's word as to what my purpose is unless they bring me compelling evidence that they speak for God, and that He exists. It is not enough to tell me that some guy several thousand (or several hundred) years ago said he talked to God, and somehow on that basis persuaded a whole bunch of people to obey him, and so I should obey him too. My reading of history shows that most people who have said and done things like that have had ulterior motives (conscious or not) and have either been relegated to history's trash bin as losers or have become notorious for the bad rather than good things they have done. I have decided that following people who pretend to that kind of divine connection and certainty is unwise. The leaders I trust are those who are frank about how little they know (usually after having learned a great deal more than I have) and who endeavour to harness the wisdom and energy of those they lead by empowering and educating them to the greatest degree possible.

I am comfortable choosing my own purpose and meaning. I am excited by the idea that I can decide what I feel is important and order my life so as to help to bring the kind of world I wish to see into being.

Van indicates that he is free to choose his values much as I am and that he has freely chosen to adopt Mormon values because they are mandated by God. For my thoughts on that attitude in general, see http://www3.telus.net/public/rcmccue/bob/documents/rs.the%20mormon%20concept%20of%20freedom.pdf

My short reply to Van on this point is as follows: How do you feel about the Mormon Church's current attitude respecting: Gay people, the role of women in society, the importance of democracy and the freedom to use his time in the best way he sees fit? I believe that during the next 50 years Mormon beliefs on these points will move radically toward the mainstream of society, as so many Mormon beliefs have already. I do not want to wait for permission from some old men in Salt Lake City who act more concerned about how their words will affect their continued influence over the Mormon membership than they are about reality and the lives of those who are deeply affected by their actions.

Gay Rights

I am not, by the way, gay and nor do I have any gay family members of whom I am aware.

Gay Mormons regularly commit suicide at much higher rates than the general population. I believe that this would slow dramatically if Mormon leaders accepted the best scientific evidence we now have and told gay people that they do not have to fit into the same shoe as the heterosexual majority who have quite a different physiology. The Mormon attitude on this point is based on superstition and ignorance in my view. And it does terrible harm to many human beings who deserve to be respected, loved and treated as our equals in all-important ways.

The article "Solus" – written by a gay Mormon man in the 1960s (I think) and reprinted in a recent anniversary edition of Dialogue – remains one of the most touching things I have read. It moved me to tears.

Women's Rights

Mormon women are still shut out of community leadership positions in a manner that is not justifiable in my view. One of my fundamental values is the equality of all human beings. That does not mean that they must be the same as men. It means that they should have the same opportunities to choice what they will become.

And I fully recognize how tricky that value is to implement in practise, and how far short Canadian and American society fall in that regard. I believe that women should have all of the social leadership opportunities that men have. That includes religious leadership.

Democratic Processes

If there is any lesson that history teaches, it is that power will be abused. The best human governance systems use extensive checks and balances to restrain those in power from abusing it. Where humans are given power without such checks and balances, power is virtually always abused. The democratic election of leaders and accountability to the electorate though the disclose of information designed to enable the electorate to see what is being done with the mandate they gave the leaders is an essential pillar in every effective power controlling structure with which I am familiar. Those who lead the Mormon Church are not subject to such controls. I hence expect them to abuse their position of power, and in my view the historical record bears this out. I do not trust and do not cooperate with leaders who are not democratically elected and accountable to those they lead. That applies to religion as well as any other human group.

My Discretionary Time

Mormon temple covenants require that Mormons commit all of their time, talent and other resources to Mormonism. From my point of view, that meant I did whatever I possibly could when asked by Mormon leaders. This led me to provide countless hours of what I now deem largely useless (or worse) service within the Mormon community. I enjoyed many relationships in that regard that I still treasure. But much of the influence I had over people was designed to inculcate

obedience to Mormonism in them. I deeply regret having been used for that purpose by the Mormon Church.

I now have relatively speaking huge amounts time to do things with my family and pursue the things I value. This fills me with joy.

These are but four significant reasons for which I am most grateful to be able to choose my own values and how I will try to bring the world they point toward into existence. There are many others.

Where Does All of This Leave Me?

Overall, my worldview is primarily science oriented. I am a naturalist, secular humanist, etc. in that sense. However, science cannot and does not try to answer the most basic "whys" of our existence. Why do we exist? What happens after death? Why is there so much suffering and evil in the world? Etc.

Science is great when it comes to elucidating the few "hows" it has gotten to so far, and sometimes its "hows" make certain "whys" extremely improbable, at least if taken literally. But science leaves the "whys" up to us for the most part, and by posing far more questions than it asks it fills the world with wonder and mystery. This puts us in a position to marvel at that miracle that is our life and circumstances, decide what we value, and choose our "whys" so as to bring into being the kind of existence we value. This idea – of choosing my own meaning and using that to shape my behaviour so that I help to bring into being what I value – excites me more than anything else I have discovered during the process of reconstructing my worldview. And yet I recognize that in many faith traditions, this is the ABCs. I am happy to acknowledge how far behind I am, start where I am, and be thrilled with the simple things I am finally able to see.

I also note that approaching our deepest "whys" as a matter of choice is in my view a natural (and frightening as usual) part of the evolution of human freedom that so many scholars have illustrated for us. And suggest that just as has been the case with many frightening freedoms that have come to man in the past, we will become accustomed to this on and then our children will be frightened by the new freedoms the advance of knowledge will thrust upon them.

The more I learn (and I have learned little when compared to many other people), the more fundamentally important questions I find, the smaller my knowledge appears, and hence the more humble I feel. Einstein and other greats have said as much. I will certainly never approach their stature, and so should be much more humble than they. And I seek teachers and associates who are sufficiently knowledgeable to have become humble, are still teachable, and hence are likely to find more wisdom.

All this reminds me of something a friend once told me while I was working through my "Mormon issues" with him. He was the first person outside of my family in whom I confided after I began to get seriously into my study about two years ago.

I went to him because in Mormon circles around here, he is thought of a bit of a Mormon history expert. I was disappointed to find that I was already well beyond what he had looked at by the time I went to him. But he was intrigued by what I was doing, and for months he looked at the same things I was. We probably spent at least three hours a week either on the phone or in person for a couple of months.

Somewhere during that time, my friend told me that he had read that there are three types of conversation. The first is the most common, and is conversation about other people. It is useful to a point, but often drifts into gossip. The second is more useful and still quite common, and is conversation about important things. This is often related to news, or education etc. and is an important part of what we communicate. The third is by far the least common, and is conversation about meanings – the big "whys". We seem to fear talking about meaning. It shakes us up; makes us feel unsure of ourselves. But good conversation about meaning also both satisfies and enlivens us like nothing else can.

My friend asked me whether I could remember even talking about things of meaning during the course of our 20+ year friendship, but prior to my "crisis" of faith, as the Mormon community calls it. I thought about that for a moment, and said I could not remember ever doing that. He indicated the same, and remarked that it was sad, strange, ironic, baffling, etc. that it took my departure from Mormonism to jar him and me into a space where we could do something both so important and satisfying. I agreed. We continue to be friends, and although our conversations are less frequent now, still regularly talk about things of meaning.

It is my view that the very Mormon attitude Van exemplified toward being told what we mean stifles talk about meaning. That is why my friend and I, while Mormon, never spoke about those things. Our meaning was already determined. The most we had to do was look it up.

I cannot adequately express how exciting it has been for me to move into a mental space where I feel free to determine the ultimate questions of meaning and value.

Conclusion

I think the dialogue between Van and me was useful. We were respectful of each other for the most part, and explained pretty clearly (I hope) our points of view. That means that those in the faithful Mormon camp who heard us likely felt vindicated by Van's presentation of their case, just as those who already agreed with me did not likely find Van persuasive. And hopefully both sides understand each other a bit better than they did before.

Having spent some time with Van now, I think that I understand both him and intellectual Mormons better that I did before. Hence, while I still do not agree with his conclusions, I better understand why he and others hold them. I hope he still feels the same thing about me and others like me.

Understanding is often the first step toward peace. And I am still in the process of making peace with my Mormon heritage and the Institution that fosters it. I hope to reach a point where I can feel at peace while continuing to do all I reasonably can to limit the influence of an institution that continue to deceive its members and others, and so limit the choice of many humans beings as well as doing a variety of other things I find abhorrent.

 I am not there yet.

Appendix A - The Use of Logic and Reason Relative to Religious Issues

As a preliminary issue, one might say with some justification that the kind of reasoning contained in this essay is irrelevant to questions of faith – that faith is beyond reason. And, some religious people with whom I deal make this very point. But I note that even they seem to only be prepared to go so far in that regard. That is, for example, they are comfortable ignoring the language in the Bible that clearly indicates those who wrote it believed the Earth to be at the centre of the Universe because science long ago trumped faith on that point. It is only regarding the issues of this nature that are still disputed with their religious community, such as attitudes respecting homosexuality for example, that they say that science, reason etc. are irrelevant.

In any event, most of us do use reason to defend faith, and this has been the case since "mythos" was brought into conflict with "logos" as science became our primary way of "knowing" things.

As Karen Armstrong puts it:

> We tend to assume that people in the past were (more or less) like us, but in fact their spiritual lives were rather different. In particular, they evolved two ways of thinking, speaking, and acquiring knowledge, which scholars have called mythos and logos. Both were essential; they were regarded as complementary ways of arriving at truth, and each had its special area of competence. Myth was regarded as primary; it was concerned with what was thought to be timeless and constant in our existence. Myth looks back to the origins of life, to the foundations of culture, and to the deepest levels of the human mind. Myth was not concerned with practical matters, but with meaning. Unless we find some significance in our lives, we mortal men and women fall very easily into despair. The mythos of society provided people with a context that made sense of their day-to-day lives; it directed their attention to the eternal and the universal. (Armstrong, "The Battle for God", page xv)

She then summarized how myth was tied into the Jungian world of dreams and the unconscious; how it was not rational but rather was intuitive; and how it related to religious ritual, cultic practises and meditative disciplines. She concludes her preliminary definition of myth by bringing out an important point respecting history. In pre-modern society history was not the science of finding the truth about what happened in the past. Rather, it was about meaning; it was mythic, and it was controlled by the powers that controlled the rest of society. It was tool used to keep the herd together, for better or for worse.

> Historical events were not seen as unique occurrences, set in far-off time, but were thought to be external manifestations of constant, timeless realities. Hence history would tend to repeat itself, because there was

nothing new under the sun. Historical narratives tried to bring out this eternal dimension. Thus, we do not know what really occurred when the ancient Israelites escaped from Egypt and passed through the Sea of Reeds. The story has been deliberately written as myth, and linked with other stories about rites of passage, immersion in the deep, and gods spitting a sea in two to create a new reality. … One could say that unless an historical event is mythologized in this way, and liberated from the past in an inspiring cult, it cannot be religious. To ask whether the Exodus from Egypt took place exactly as recounted in the Bible or to demand historical and scientific evidence to prove that it is factually true is to mistake the nature and purpose of this story. It is to confuse mythos with logos. (Armstrong, "The Battle for God", page xvi)

Armstrong defines logos as follows:

Logos was the rational, pragmatic, and scientific thought that enabled men and women to function well in the world. … Unlike myth, logos must relate exactly to facts and correspond to external realities if it is to be effective. … We use this logical, discursive reasoning when we have to make things happen, get something done, or persuade other people to adopt a particular course of action. Logos is practical. Unlike myth, which looks back to the beginnings and to the foundations, logos forges ahead and tries to find something new: to elaborate on old insights, achieve a greater control over our environment, discover something fresh, and invent something novel. (Armstrong, "The Battle for God", pages xvi, xvii)

She continues to note how in pre-modern society mythos and logos were complementary. Mythos provided the meaning and context within which logos provided the nuts and bolts of daily life. She mentioned the First Crusade as a classic of example of mythos and logos both in operation. This Crusade started out as pure logos. In the twelfth century C.E. Pope Urban II wanted the knights of Europe to stop tearing their society apart by fighting each other, and to instead expend their energies in the Near East to extend the Church and Europe's power. As long as the Crusade proceeded on this basis, it was militarily successful. However, Armstrong notes: "When … Crusaders started making a mythical or mystical vision the basis of their policies, they were usually defeated and committed terrible atrocities." (Armstrong, "The Battle for God", page xvii)

For example, think about the following mythic ideas in the context of that Crusade:

- The Biblical lands were sanctified by Christ during his time or earth.
- It was god's will was that they be returned to Christian hands.
- God was all powerful.
- God would deliver the Holy Land from the Infidels into the Crusaders' hands if they had the faith to go take it.

Any battle plan based on this kind of reasoning in the absence of intelligence about the strength of the opposing force, etc. would be foolishness. Armstrong notes this

as an illustration of the principle that mythology taken literally is a poor guide to many of the practical aspects of life.

Mythology can be used to provide meaning and context, and hence help us to make better decisions, but is almost always disastrous when mistaken for logos. The meanings that can be drawn from any one myth can range from the sublimely inspired to the ridiculous and evil. A myth is little more than a window that we can use to look wisely, or not, into our souls. And sometimes when we go back to the root of the myth we find spurious cause and effect relationships that have been codified as myth, and are in fact poor guides to behaviour in any context. Once these are rooted out, however, the myth may still be useful. Many biblical metaphors fall into this camp. The Book of Mormon, in its entirely, is likely the same. It is highly unlikely to be real history. Hence, it would only be accurate in a literal sense by coincidence. But nonetheless it contains some useful mythology.

The Christian Crusaders simply appropriated the Holy Land myth for themselves. That myth in my view was, and is, bad for the Jews when taken literally, and it was even less suited to the European Crusaders. Hence, the consequences of their use of this myth were predictably bad. The Machiavellian side of me says that Pope Urban could have done much more with his Crusade had he recognized the motivating power of this myth, and then made sure that it did not influence any strategic planning related to what he wanted to achieve, which was the conquest of new territory. This was a military manoeuvre, not a spiritual matter. To confuse the spiritual with the practical is, in my experience, to court disaster.

Armstrong notes that by the eighteenth century logos was causing mankind to make such progress, and the weaknesses of mythology as a practical guide to decision making were becoming so apparent that logos became the primary lens through which many people saw life. In particular, the logos approach to history when applied to mythic history was exposing what appeared to be outright falsehood. The Bible, for example, was not what it had been purported to be. It was not written by whom it was purported to have been written. Many of the stories it contained did not appear to accord with "real" history. The actions on which it was based were inconsistent with the newly discovered laws of nature (the flood and Noah's ark; the creation; the virgin birth; the resurrection; the ascension into heaven; etc.). In short, the myths that had given form and meaning to Christian and other forms of religious life were subjected to the rational tests that are at the core of the scientific method, and were "falsified". Those who understood and agreed with the falsification process accordingly rejected those myths.

But logos did not provide the "whys" mythology had been designed to provide. This left many people struggling with existential despair. Largely as a reaction to the primacy of logos and this lack of meaning in life, some religious bodies adopted a logos orientated interpretation of their mythology in an attempt resuscitate the old meanings. This is the literalism that today characterizes fundamentalists of all religious stripes within Christianity (including the Mormons), Islam, Judaism and elsewhere. That is, the logos paradigm is accepted, as are the old myths. This

means that the Bible must be an historically accurate record, that the miraculous things it describes literally happened as they were described, etc. This is a difficult position to hold in light of the evidence. Hence, a great deal of organizational effort is expended to first suppress information that runs counter to this theory, and to find any information that might support it. Hence, we have scientists trying to explain why carbon 14 dating does not work and how the earth is only 6,000 years old, where the dinosaurs fit into that picture, etc. Michael Shermer in "Why People Believe Weird Things" devotes an entire chapter to young Earth creationism and its loony arguments, and explains from a psychological point of view why some humans need to, and do, believe such things. For the moment, it is sufficient to note that mankind needs to find meaning in life, and the ascendancy of logos over mythos was so threatening to some that fundamentalist religious movements resulted. These movements are based in fear, and in their extreme forms are dangerous, evil things.

Some religions, such as Mormonism, mix mythology with literalism and so seem at least at first blush to be more palatable than the hardest core fundamentalist groups. For example, Joseph Smith's theology accommodated much of the science of his day. Therefore, it made sense to the people of Smith's time and place. It answered important questions many of them had about what happened to children who died innocently, but unbaptized, and how the earth was created over a long period of time and through some kind of process instead of as a miraculous event. It made sense out of seemingly senseless arguments about the nature of god. However, Mormonism remained literalistic at its base. Hence, as logos continued to advance it soon began to falsify certain of Smith's dogmatic claims, such as those about how he "translated" ancient records and so produced the Book of Mormon and Book of Abraham, and the Mormon church went on the defensive and became just another fundamentalist organization dissembling, obfuscating and suppressing logos based theories and evidence, and using psuedoscience (a misguided form of logos) to defend its dogma and other faith based claims.

From the dysfunctional nature of fundamentalist organizations and their adherents, we glean solid evidence that just as mythology applied in the sphere of logos produces disaster as it did in the case of the first Crusade, so does logos when applied to the realm of mythology. This leads, for example, to the "science of creationism", as well as the Mormon (and other conservative Christian) attitudes towards the role of women, race, and sexual orientation. It also causes the Mormon authoritarian induced tendencies toward the suppression of information and poor scholarship in any area that might "threaten testimonies". Much worse, it resurrects "whys" that were created in different times and places, were of questionable value during their own time and are completely out of step with modern life. For example, the idea that God prefers any race or type of people over the others, or has "given" any land to a particular group and justifies the use of force to take it away from others, causes humans to continue to act inhumanely. Karen Armstrong concluded "The Battle for God" by observing that:

> Fundamentalists have turned the mythos of their religion into logos, either by insisting that their dogmas are scientifically true, or by transforming their

complex mythology into a streamlined ideology. They have thus conflated two complementary sources and styles of knowledge, which the people in the pre-modern world had usually decided it was wise to keep separate. … By insisting that the truths of Christianity are factual and scientifically demonstrable, American Protestant fundamentalists have created a caricature of both religion and science. (Armstrong, "The Battle for God", page 366)

My knee jerk reaction upon becoming familiar with the ideas Karen Armstrong articulates so well was that the atheists had it right – there is no god, religion is a massive fraud perpetuated by those in control to make sure that their power is not diminished, and that I should distance myself from it as quickly as possible. However, as I became familiar with the writings of Joseph Campbell ("The Hero of a Thousand Faces", "The Power of Myth" and many others), I found other more constructive ways to approach mythology in general, and the mythologies that have framed my life in particular.

I then went back to re-read Armstrong, and found that near the end of "The Battle for God" that she notes that the worst of fundamentalism seems to have been a reaction to a form of logos based secularism that tried to wring spirituality out of life entirely. She wonders whether the leaders of that secular movement, who so decry religious fundamentalism of all types, might not have been wise to use the fundamentalist movement to diagnose a real human problem: many people need the meaning provided by mythology, and are not being provided with that by secularism and logos on their own.

I see in the typical Mormon defence of Mormonism the tension between mythos and logos being played out. Mormons attempt to defend their faith against the advancing tide of logos in ways that look silly now, and will become more so as the evidence continues to mount. And by so doing, they miss opportunities to plumb the depths of many Mormon ideas that are genuinely useful as mythos. That is, by taking a logos approach to Mormonism, Mormons miss what I believe is its only feature of enduring value. And they will lose playing the logos game in any event. I scratch the surface of the use of Mormon mythos in an essay on my website titled "The Metaphor Game and Depression". I don't suggest that Mormon teachings are great mythos. They are tepid compared to much that I have found elsewhere. But for those within the Mormon tradition, they have a special place and can be put to good use.

Mythos is still very important to me. It helps me find the "whys" of life that are of foundational importance to me. Science and the logos it employs can only show me the "hows" and give hints as to possible "whys". I doubt that this will change within my lifetime.

Mormon mythos is still a large part of me. The importance of education and knowledge. The importance of relationships, family and community. A certain mystic bent no matter how hard I try to rein it in. That is me. However, my Mormon leanings are now supplemented by the mythos of many other cultures and

times. Science, to a point, is simply another form of mythos. I walk by faith, acknowledging uncertainty at each step, more than at any other time in my life.

In any event, Mormons like to use of logic, reason etc. to defend their point of view, and so I will respond in kind.

Testable Premises and Reasoned Conclusions

I would like to frame this discussion in the context of the kind of theory testing that occurs in the scientific world. And I do this knowing that many of my Mormon friends will respond that this is inappropriate because we are dealing with a matter of faith, not science. However, if they will indulge me, I believe that through the use of a few of the various thinking tools that scientists and others who take seriously the challenge of winnowing truth from error use, I can demonstrate that is it difficult from an outsider's point of view to distinguish between what often passes for faith based "knowledge" on the one hand, and ignorance that has been sanctified by tradition on the other. I also note that this sanctification is facilitated by leaders in whose interest it is that such sanctification occurs. I finally note that the kind of analysis I propose cannot give us a certain conclusion, but at a minimum it is safe to say that it will help us to better understand both the strengths and weaknesses of any position we eventually decide to adopt. In this regard, I think that the use of this kind of reasoning is consistent with what many Mormon leaders have said in the past, such as J. Rueben Clark who said,

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

Scientists develop theories about how things work, and then test them in various ways. This testing, broadly speaking, does two things. First, and most important, it tests how well a theory predicts future events. For example, if my theory is that the oldest child in a family will tend to have certain behavioural characteristics that his other siblings do not have, I can go out to a population of children, test them, and find out if the predicted personality trait pattern exists. Second, the theory may be explanatory of things already observed – of history. This is not testable in the way that current experience is by way of repeatable experiment, but if a theory is consistent with past experience, that provides at least some support for it.

Logic is used extensively in the development and testing of scientific and other theories. It is one of the "thinking tools" I mentioned above. Hence, I find it helpful to break theories of the sort we are talking about here down into premises and conclusions drawn from them so that they can be more easily analyzed. Reformatting arguments or theories in this way makes it clear what kind of evidence needs to be produced in order to support an argument, and also exposes the reasoning linkages that must be tested in order to see if each part of the argument is sound. And, the structure of logic itself can be used to isolate, and test in a way, otherwise untestable premises in much the way mathematical equations can be used to test certain things.

"Premises" are the assertions that provide the foundation for a theory. Once the premises are understood, a conclusion can be drawn from them. A simple example of this is as follows:

P: All Canadians are humans.

P: All humans are mammals.

C: Therefore, all Canadians are mammals.

A theory expressed in the form of an argument can be shown to be faulty by showing that its premises are incorrect. Evidence might be brought, for example, to show that some Canadians are androids or otherwise subhuman. I am Canadian, and we have often wondered about some of our politicians and lawyers in this regard. An argument might also be shown to be faulty if its conclusion does not logically follow from its premises. For example, maybe there are people who believe that there is a subcategory within what is considered "Canadian" that is not mammalian. If so, we might need to debate the merits of that position.

So, lets first consider the theory faithful Mormons employ, and then an alternative theory. The Mormon theory can be stated as follows by way of premises and a conclusion.

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

P2: God communicates His will to mankind.

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

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

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

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

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

C: Therefore, anyone who does not, after reading the Book of Mormon and praying about it as indicated above, receive confirmation from God that it is His word etc., either did not have sincere intent when asking for God's

guidance or is subject to sin of some kind that prevents him from hearing God's voice.

What is set up as a conclusion in this theory is not really a conclusion. As my example above involving Canadians, humans and mammals indicates, the nature of a conclusion is to use reasoning based upon known characteristics of the premises to suggest something that is the logical consequence of those premises. The Mormon theory just stated uses no such logic. Rather, the conclusion simply restates the premises – "The cat is black, therefore, the cat is black". This is a common logical error and is referred to as a "circular argument" or "tautology" – an argument that draws a conclusion that is merely a repetition of one the assumptions the argument asks us to make. Hence, the argument contains no reasoning. This is often hard to spot because of the way in which assumptions are buried in, or even only implied by, the premises used to create the argument's foundation. Such is the case with the Mormon theory set out above. At the conclusion of such an argument, and with a flourish, one can say "therefore" and state what sounds like a dramatic conclusion – making it appear like something has just been proven – when all that we have done is restate our premises using different language. When this is understood, the argument collapses. It amounts to nothing more than an invitation to believe in unprovable premises. Such arguments are more persuasive tricks (witting or not) than sincere efforts to find out what "is".

It is important to note that the testability of premises is not a black and white matter. Some premises are perfectly testable. 2+2=4 and other mathematical equations are either true, or false, and there is an agreed upon and precise method for definitive testing. The boiling point of water at a particular attitude is similarly testable for practical purposes. However, whether a particular historical event occurred or not will always be open to question. The reliability of any conclusion we may draw in this regard depends upon how solid our evidence is, and this is something of which we can never be certain. But, certain historical events (as noted above) are much easier to assess than others as a result of the number of witnesses to them, and the manner in which their evidence was collected and preserved. Finally, some premises are very difficult, or impossible, to test. Is there life on other planets or in other galaxies? Does God exist? Etc.

It is also important to note that the structure of logic itself sometimes provides the means for testing otherwise untestable premises. Logic attempts to model itself on mathematics. For example, we might have a number of premises that are "known" to be true that yield a logical conclusion, and to them we might add another premise that is "unprovable" and find that logic requires a conclusion that is "known" to be false. This would suggest that the premise added at the end of the process is likely false. I used bracketed words because what is often assumed to be "known" with certainty is not certain, and so the mathematical precision for which logicians reach is not attainable, and can itself be misleading. That having been said, the logic tool I just described (and many others of similar sort) are in my view useful.

Much of the useful work that is done as a result of logic-based argument is a result of finding, and then weighing, evidence related to the establishment of premises. Let's briefly review in this regard the premises that underlie the above Mormon theory.

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

> Consider the difference between this premise, and the premise "Grizzly Bears live in the Banff National Park near Calgary, Alberta". We can't go find God to see if he exists. Nor do we have any way to confirm that there is only one god. Hence, this premise cannot be reliably tested. However, we can look at many societies to see how they conceptualize God. What we find in this regard supports Goethe's wise dictum:

> > As man is,
> > So is his God,
> > And thus is God,
> > Oft strangely odd.

> Durkheim, the great sociologist, said something similar: "God is the deification of society" and religion is "the sacrilisation of society's requirements for human behaviour." (See http://www.hewett.norfolk.sch.uk/CURRIC/soc/religion/funct3.htm)

> That is, the notion of God appears to be used in a many societies to justify societal practises. While this does not prove that there is more than one God, or that God does not exist, it points out one of the principal risks of belief in God – that we will simply use that belief to justify what may be seen in the light of historical time as short-sighted social practises or attitudes. Many former Mormon beliefs now fall into this camp, such as those related to the sinfulness of mixed race marriages, the need to kill people to help them to atone for certain sins, the eternal and unalterable nature of the Mormon practise of plural marriage, etc. I predict that other current Mormon beliefs and practises will go the same route.

P2: God communicates His will to mankind.

> Many people tell us that they have received communication from God. However, when we probe the nature of this communication, we find that it could have been caused by any number of much more likely phenomena ranging from indigestion, to normal dreams, to normal emotional experience, to the use of psychotropic drugs. Dreams and visions of a religious sort, for example, have been shown to be producible by stimulating particular parts of the brain. Powerful ideas, or "impressions", come to us all the time as a result of the functioning of our subconscious mind. This premise cannot be reliably tested.

And, consider again the fact that religious beliefs that are thought to be certain as a result of having been communicated from God regularly change. Think of how each of the following has changed over the years: Attitudes respecting the Earth being at the centre of the Universe; Attitudes respecting the age and formation of the Earth; Attitudes respecting biological evolution; Attitudes respecting race relations; Attitudes respecting the need to atone for certain sins by shedding the sinner's own blood; Attitudes respecting dietary restrictions; Attitudes respecting the causes of mental illness; Attitudes respecting the role of women in society and religious communities; Attitudes respecting gay people.

Here again we find great support for the wisdom of Goethe's view. Many of these attitudes were at one time perceived to be eternal, unchanging truths communicated by God to his leaders, and are no considered to have been foolish dogma.

My conclusion is that if God communicates with religious leaders, they have a poor track record in the listening department.

P3: God gave JS His exclusive authority in modern times.

We must rely in this regard primarily on Smith's testimony as to whether an historical event occurred, or did not occur. As noted in the essay "Should I Join (or Leave) the Mormon Church" on my website, there is a high probability that Smith lied on a regular basis in important ways in order to get people to do what he wanted them to do, and so in my view he should not be believed. As also noted above, his story with respect to his visit with God appears likely to have changed dramatically over time.

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

A great deal of evidence as to the historical accuracy and other attributes of the Book of Mormon is available, and can be tested. Scholars faithful to Mormonism now admit that many things Smith and other Mormon prophets have said about the Book of Mormon are likely false, such as that the story told in the Book of Mormon was played out over most of both American hemispheres. The evidence overwhelmingly indicates that this was not the case. Mormon scholars and leaders have responded to this development by redefining the premises to make them as untestable as possible. This is, for example, what the retreat toward the "limited geography" theory does with respect to the Book of Mormon. This theory suggests that the entire Book of Mormon story was played out in such a small area that it is possible that we have not, and may never, find it. Hence, the theory is not testable, but some faithful Mormon scholars admit that this theory is less likely to be correct than the theory that the Book of Mormon is not a real history. For more on this idea, see the now somewhat out of date essay on my website "The Book of Mormon DNA Controversy: A Case Study in How Not to Think". Any

testable premises in the Mormon theory that appear likely to be disproven are redefined so as to be untestable.

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

> Since we can't identify God, and for a variety of other reasons, this premise is not testable. And, the conclusion repeats this premise, thus making the argument circular.

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

> This is not testable. It infers an unprovable cause for events most humans experience. It is the equivalent of the local witch doctor saying, "When you feel good or good things happen to you, it is the result of my Voodoo. When you feel bad or bad things happen to you, it is the result of your enemies Voodoo. You should hire me to use my Voodoo to fight your enemies' Voodoo." This kind of approach preys upon basic human fears and desires.

P7: Those who are sinful, including those who are inadequately humble or lack faith, cannot hear God's voice.

> This premise asserts that only evidence that supports the argument is valid evidence. Hence, it attempts to mislead those who are trying to decide which evidence does, or does not, support the argument. Premises of this sort are sometimes referred to as being subject to the "No True Scotsman" fallacy. For example, I might say, "No true Scotsman puts honey on his porridge." If I accept that premise, and then find that Scotty McScotsman puts honey on his porridge, I must conclude that Mr. McScotsman is not a true Scotsman. Another way to look at P7 is as a stronger form of P6. P6 attempts to make the theory untestable by saying that it is easy to be mistaken when God speaks to us. P7 says that if we don't hear what Mormon leaders tell us we should hear, it is because we are defective.

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

> As noted above, the conclusion is not really a conclusion. It just restates some of the premises.

> Hence, this argument boils down to an invitation to accept untestable premises based on faith. And, an unwillingness to accept the premises will itself disqualify the seeker of truth as "unfaithful" and hence "unworthy" for

the promised divine evidence since the failure to accept the argument's premises evidences inadequate humility.

This theory is constructed so that it cannot be disproven, and at the same time so that any human being who after reading the Book of Mormon has a positive emotional experience should conclude that this is a communication from God that is evidence that the theory is correct. The theory does not allow for the possibility that a positive experience associated with reading the Book of Mormon could have any number of other explanations that are more probably true than the one this theory suggests.

It is important to remember that evidence is only useful to the extent that the premise to which it is related is testable. That is, I have little interest at this point in Earth bound evidence that they may be life in other galaxies. The evidence we have is simply not relevant to that question, which at the moment is untestable. I react similarly to evidence as to God's existence. Such evidence cannot prove that God exists, but by focusing my attention on irrelevant alleged relationships to God's existence that happen to be connected to many of my most primal hopes and fears (what happens after death?; why do I exist?; etc.) this exercise has a high probability of misleading me. Hence, I am better off ignoring the entire debate and using my energies to understand matters that are susceptible of human understanding and then using that understanding to accomplish the things that I can do, and that I have decided are important to me.

Here is another famous bit of Mormon illogic. On February 8, 1843 Joseph Smith's journal notes:

This morning, I read German, and visited with a brother and sister from Michigan, who thought that "a prophet is always a prophet;" but I told them that a prophet was a prophet only when he was acting as such. (B. H. Roberts, History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Second Edition, Revised (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1967) Vol. 5, page 265)

On anther occasion, Smith received a revelation that he was to sell the copyright to the Book of Mormon. He sent some of his colleagues to Canada for this purpose, and they failed in their effort. Upon their return, they accused Smith of falsely prophesying. He responded:

Some revelations are of God: some revelations are of man: and some revelations are of the devil. (Comprehensive History of the Church, Vol. 1, page 165)

That is, Smith had been deceived. What he thought was a revelation was not a revelation.

This and other statements of Joseph Smith form the backbone of the Mormon position that prophets are fallible. Let's break this idea down into premises and a conclusion.

> Pl: There is a God.
>
> Pm: God reveals his will to prophets.
>
> Pn: Prophets sometimes make mistakes.
>
> Po: If a prophet makes a mistake, it is because he was not acting as a prophet when he made the mistake or because he was deceived by the devil.
>
> C: Therefore, when a prophet makes a mistake it does not mean that he is not a prophet.

Once again, we have a conclusion that simply repeats its premises. The term "prophet" is defined to fit the facts as Smith found them. Since he made mistakes, and he was a prophet, it was OK for prophets to make mistakes. In fairness to Smith, we are able to point to numerous examples of Biblical prophets who also lied, made mistakes etc. So, I am not critical of Smith of failing to meet a biblical standard of some kind. Rather, I am saying that all prophets are of the same ilk – they make mistakes. Hence, they should only be relied upon to the extent they demonstrate predictive power, trustworthiness etc. That is, they are just like all other humans and should earn their respect instead of being placed in a privileged, untouchable category that is designed to produce blind obedience instead of informed choice. Contrast this sensible position with that advocated by Mormon leaders. For example, Dallin Oaks said:

> It is one thing to depreciate a person who exercises corporate power or even government power. It is quite another thing to criticize or depreciate a person for the performance of an office to which he or she has been called of God. It does not matter that the criticism is true.
>
> As Elder George F. Richards, President of the Council of the Twelve, said in a conference address in April 1947,
>
>> … when we say anything bad about the leaders of the Church, whether true or false, we tend to impair their influence and their usefulness and are thus working against the Lord and his cause.
>
> ... The Holy Ghost will not guide or confirm criticism of the Lord's anointed, or of Church leaders, local or general. This reality should be part of the spiritual evaluation that LDS readers and viewers apply to those things written about our history and those who made it. (Dallin Oaks, "Reading Church History," CES Doctrine and Covenants Symposium, Brigham Young University, 16 Aug. 1985, page 25).

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

Since I know how difficult it is for all of use (Mormons included) to recognize the nature of the world in which we live, let me suggest another theory that suffers from precisely the same problems as does the main Mormon theory outlined above.

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

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

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

> Pz: Those who do not receive the Irish fairy's manifestation in the manner indicated have not developed adequate faith, and should continue to exercise their faith in this regard.

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

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

However, Mormonism itself is much more than a silly theory. Mormonism is the glue that is used to bind a group of people together. It is a mythology in that sense, and the use of fear, illogic, tricks of mind, social pressure and a host of other forces of this dark type are standard operating procedure for the systems that hold groups of people together. And because it is so important to us that we belong to a group and have a sense of meaning, the insiders of each group are not capable of being as critical of the irrational aspects of the glue that holds their group together as are outsiders. The importance of remaining in the group, and allowing the group to continue to function properly, outweigh logic and reason in this regard. More on this topic will follow.

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

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

Pb: Many humans believe in different types of gods.

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

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

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

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

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

Ph: Beliefs of this sort tend to be abandoned as populations become better educated and more secure, and as a result, their relationships with their neighbours tend to improve.

Ca: Therefore, a belief in an exclusive relationship to god is an important aspect of human psychology and sociology within many social groups, but the function this belief performs can be performed by other cultural institutions once the groups in question become aware of alternatives, and this change often improves the well being of both the groups in question and their neighbours.

Each of the premises just stated is testable to a reasonable degree, while the results of such tests would be disputed among many social scientists. The conclusion is derived using principles of logic. It too would be disputed. In the course of arguing about the premises and conclusion in this theory, much data would be collected and many arguments made as to how such data could be interpreted. In the course of this dispute, a lot would be learned about how and why people hold certain religious beliefs, and what consequences these beliefs have. That is, the development and testing of this theory would help us to understand the nature of the reality of which we are a part.

I note that the theory just stated does not conclude that there is no God, or no God of a type in which Mormons believe. This is not something that can be proven using

evidence or logic. All it does is offer an explanation of the human experience we see all around us in the religious world, and it therefore suggests that the Mormon experience is part of this whole. Also, by comparing how this theory functions to how the Mormon theory functions we are brought face to face with the reality that the Mormon theory assumes very dubious causal connections between routine emotional experience and the existence of things like a particular kind of God. Those causal connections are not testable, and hence can't be disproven. However, once many people have walked through the exercise of comparing these two theories and realize the nature of the assumptions and leaps of logic they have been making, they are not longer prepared to assume the premises that support the Mormon theory to be correct. This decision is based on a realization that this assumption is not more reasonable than that made by believers in Irish fairies or Voodoo.

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

At each step of the discussion that follows I suggest that we consider which of the two primary theories just discussed, the "Mormon theory" or its naturalistic counterpart, is a more reasonable explanation of the experience we see around us in the religious world. This is an application of what is known in the scientific world as the "principle of parsimony". Most of the best decisions humans make conscious or unconscious use this principle (sometimes also called "Occam's Razor" after the Bishop of Occam who in the 14th century was one of its early and best know practitioners) as a criterion for deciding among competing theories or explanations. This principle states that we should always choose the simplest explanation of a phenomenon – the one that requires the fewest leaps of logic.

Another way to think of parsimony when it comes to decision-making is that it makes use of probabilities. That is, it requires us to ask something like, "given all we know about the question "x", what is most likely to be the correct answer?" It recognizes that certainty is not possible in answering most if not all questions. This is how scientists, lawyers, judges and others in the business of decision-making try to think, and I will use that approach in this essay.

I have four points to make. First, the experiences many of us are encouraged by our social structure to interpret as "religious" are of a type that have a powerful effect on us. Hence, they constitute a form of evidence that is beyond the ordinary and so often overpowers our rational processes. Second, the combination of these experiences and our social reality causes the forces of cognitive dissonance to screen much information that would cause a more objective person to reject our beliefs. Third, two aspects of cognitive dissonance theory called the "principle of insufficient justification" and the "confirmation bias" are particular helpful to our understanding of Mormon behaviour. And fourth, the nature of an individual's personality type is of fundamental importance in how he reacts to things like the Mormon environment and disconfirming evidence that he encounters once fully conditioned as a Mormon.

Appendix B - The Affect of Music on Visual Perception

Go to http://www.pbs.org/wnet/gperf/shows/tchaikovsky4/index2.html Click on "Keeping Score". Let it load. Then click on "Primal Moves". Let it load. Then click on "Emotional Roots", do the little bit of reading required there, experience the types of music illustrated and feel them work up and down your emotional spectrum. No surprises, but it is interesting to feel so many of your buttons pushed so effectively in sequence.

And then go back one page and click on "Matching the Music" which is where the fun begins. This page allows you to match various famous painting with different types of music in the manner set out below. It is fun to play with by mixing and matching in different ways.

This page allows you to construct a six frame video clip with music accompaniment. Each frame lasts a few seconds, and allows you to match a distinctive style of music with a painting. When you drag a painting and then a music clip over toward the relevant space on the page, you get to watch a piece of the painting while you listen to the music. If you "save" that combination, it will occupy the first frame in your little video. Then you are invited to do the same thing with the second frame, and so on until the six are filled. Then, you can press "play" and it will run through the entire piece for you. Instead of seeing only part of the painting while the clips run at this point, you are treated to different views of the painting while the music plays.

Before you start playing with this, I recommend the following experiment:

Select Edvard Munch's "Scream" as your painting for the first frame, and match it with the music clip from the bottom right hand corner of the selection, which is from Alban Berg's "Three Orchestral Pieces". Save this as frame one. Make the same selection for frames two and three. For frames four through six select "Scream" but match it with the first music clip (top left hand corner), which is a Brahms violin concerto. You will have a sense of what the radically different combinations of painting to music do by virtue of having set up these matches, but try to listen to as little of the music as possible while you set this up, to allow for maximal new experience as you listen to the combined clips. Then, sit back, relax, and play the sequence of six short music clips while looking at Scream.

Appendix C - Another Thought Experiment Illustrating Changes in Perspective

Assume that Mr. A is a history professor who is a member of the 7th Day Adventist or Jehovah's Witness faith, and that he finds himself in either of the following situations:

1.	He finds out that his children are being taught at school that the holocaust did not happen; that the story of the holocaust is a lie perpetuated by an international conspiracy of Jews that secretly controls most of the world; and that Hitler was a misunderstood historical figure whose teachings are worthy of reconsideration and whose example should be emulated.

2.	He finds out that his children are being taught at school that the United States government many years ago discovered extra-terrestrial life; that the US president has since then been in touch with such extraterrestrials and is their puppet; and that all of the stuff we see on the news etc. regarding man walking on the moon, space probes on Mars etc. are just propaganda designed to mislead us as to the real state of the Universe.

Each of the two theories just summarized as having from time to time been taught by what would be regarded by most people as the lunatic fringe of our society. At least one school teacher in Alberta (Jim Keegstra) lost his job for bringing theory No. 1 into the curriculum he taught as a public school teacher.

My question is, how would Mr. A, being a history professor, likely respond in the cases just noted? My guess is that were he not well informed, he would make himself well informed, and he would then use his skills as a historian to educate his children as to the probabilities that one set of data as opposed to another should be believed respecting each of these situations. And, if he found that those who were teaching his children had acted irresponsibly in the manner in which the presented the data, he would attempt to have them change their ways, and if they would not do so, he would seek to have them removed from their posts. Failing that, he might remove his children from their charge.

Let's then put up another couple of examples. Assume that this same Mr. A finds himself in either of the following situations:

A.	Evidence is presented to him that strongly suggests that his religious leaders have misrepresented to him and his children the history of the religious movement of which they are a part, and that these alleged misrepresentations are of fundamental importance in that they impugn the credibility of the person on whose testimony the validity of the entire movement rests.

B.	Mr. A comes to the conclusion that his religious leaders have misrepresented to him and his children the history of the religious movement of which they are a part, and that these alleged misrepresentations are of fundamental importance in

that they impugn the credibility of the person on whose testimony the validity of the entire movement rests.

Now assume that Mr. A does not react in either of cases A or B in the rational fashion he did in cases 1 and 2. Assume that in case A he decides that no investigation is necessary, and that in case B that he does not need to share his conclusions with anyone, but rather that he should keep them to himself.

I suggest that it is fair to call Mr. A's behavior in cases A and B pathological when compared to his behavior in cases 1 and 2. When pathological behavior is observed, it makes sense to look for the pathogen. I suggest that given the connection between Mr. A religious belief and the difference between his behavior in cases 1 and 2 as compared to cases A and B, that this religious belief should be accepted as the pathogen until compelling evidence too the contrary is produced. Hence, it would be fair to conclude on the basis of the evidence before us that Mr. A's religious belief has impaired his normally acute reasoning abilities respecting historical matters.

I have respectfully suggested to my historian father that his Mormon belief is responsible for the manner in which he failed to teach his children Mormon history in the manner he would have taught them any other kind of history, and has been prepared to stand silently by while others filled his children's heads with things he later acknowledged to he knew to be inaccurate, and I suspect understood in many cases to be gross misrepresentations.

Much of the reading I have done during the past year and a half has been an attempt to understand how people like my father, my wife, and me, who I know to be relatively bright, educated people who are committed to finding the truth in all other areas of life, could have ended up behaving as rationally as we have respecting most things, and in such a different manner respecting Mormonism. I hope that framing the examples I did above respecting other religious belief systems will help others who are faithful to the Mormon belief system to understand that. I have no doubt that if most well educated Mormons observed the behaviour I noted in a JW history professor, they would chuckle about how that guy is in deep denial, and how sad that is. And those belief systems have a problem very similar to that of Mormonism respecting the credibility of their early leaders and the manner in which information respecting that was whitewashed by modern leaders. The Adventists, for example, have been for some time de-emphasizing the teachings of their founder because of the manner in which it has been shown that many of the "revelations" she allegedly received from God were plagiarized from 19th century sources. So, the Adventists have for some time been headed toward a more mainstream posture within Christianity. Again, the parallels to Mormonism are extensive. In addition to whitewashing Mormon history, Gordon Hinckley and others have been moving Mormonism toward the mainstream for some time by attempting to shed things like "man can become God", and emphasizing Christ's role within the Mormon faith while de-emphasizing other things. Once enough perspective is gained, this stuff starts to make sense.

Appendix D – The Value Pyramid and The Golden Rule

The Value Pyramid

It is my reading of the theory of moral philosophy that it is not possible to establish universal good or bad unless religious or some other authority is accepted as the source principle. I am no longer prepared to accept such authority. Hence, I believe that good and bad only exist within a construct of values or objectives established by a particular society. Since these are all over the map from society to society, so are conceptions of good and bad. We might prefer our conception of good and bad, but as philosophers have wrestled with this question, they have not been able to build a persuasive case for a set of values that can be universalized. Hence in this discussion, I will not attempt to refer to moral absolutes. Rather, I will recognize that when we talk of moral rights or obligations, we are doing so within the framework created by Western democratic, and mostly Christian, society.

Our principal values are that individuals are equal and deserving of equal treatment and that each has certain inalienable rights (such as freedom of expression, conscience, association etc.). In this we differ from most other societies that have existed throughout history, and most that exist today. The strength and amazing "progress" (as we define it) our society has achieved is widely believed to have come from our unusual values.

The Mormon Church, as part of Western, democratic society, shares these values.

The Golden Rule

The Golden Rule (do unto others as you would have others do unto to you) and its Kantian correlate (the categorical imperative) is near the foundation of our value complex, deriving special force in our society from the "individuals are equal" idea.

It is interesting to note that the Golden Rule, while a part of most societies, will itself reflect deeper societal values. For example, the Golden Rule is an important part of traditional Hindu society ("This is the sum of duty, heed it well: Do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you, and wish for others too what you desire and long for, for yourself." Mahabharata 5:1517). However, within the caste system it would be unthinkable to treat someone in a way other than that required by his caste status. Hence, the rules binding caste behaviour would cause the Golden Rule to be applied quite differently in Hindu society than in our society. In fact, we would feel that much of what they believe to be in keeping with their conception of the Golden Rule would be in breach of our conception of it. In fact, we would say that they do not keep the Golden Rule at all. An understanding of this difference between the Christian and Hindu approaches illustrates nicely the powerful influence a fundamental difference in worldview or perspective exerts on us. A Christian would completely misunderstand what a Hindu means by the passage of scripture referred to above, which seems to say the same thing our Golden Rule says. I see this same powerful perspective effect, by the way, on most

occasions when I try to discuss anything with a faithful member of the Mormon Church that threatens his or her view that the Church is "true".

I also note that within a particular society the Golden Rule also reflects other values. If I am a socialist, I might do unto a capitalist things that the capitalist will not want and would violate his conception of the Golden Rule.

Despite its weaknesses, the Golden Rule is powerful force with most societies. The research of Dr. Martin Seligman (See "Authentic Happiness" and other works) and others indicate that many behaviours that are consistent with the Golden Rule produce joy. And this principle of human behaviour is arguably the most significant common denominators of the world's great religious traditions, and in fact is found near the core of most of them. For example:

1.   Modern Western Civilization – See the references to Kant in "Out of My Faith" and "Christ's Moral System …" at http://mccue.cc/bob/spirituality.htm.

2.   Zoroastrianism – Do not do unto others whatever is injurious to yourself. Shayast-na-Shayast 13.29

3.   Jainism – In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self, and should therefore refrain from inflicting upon others such injury as would appear undesirable to us if inflicted upon ourselves. Yogashastra 2.20

4.   Hinduism – This is the sum of duty, heed it well: Do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you, and wish for others too what you desire and long for, for yourself. Mahabharata 5:1517

5.   Judaism – What is hateful to you do not to your neighbour; that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof; go and learn it. Babylonian Talmud, Shabath 3la

6.   Taoism – Regard your neighbour's gain as your own gain, and your neighbour's loss as your own loss. Lao Tzu, T'ai Shang Kan Ying P'ien, 213 – 218

7.   Confucianism – One word which sums up the basis of all good conduct … loving kindness. Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself. Confucius, Analects 15.23

8.   Buddhism – Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful. The Buddha, Udana-Varga 5.18

9.   Sikhism –As thou deemest thyself so deem others. Then shalt thou become a partner in heaven. Kabir

10.   Christianity – In everything, do to other as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. Jesus, Matthew 7:12

11.   Islam – Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself. Mohammed, Hadith

12.   Baha'i – Lay not on any soul a load that you would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself. Baha'u'llah, Gleanings

13.   Unitarianism – We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. Unitarian principle

14.   Native Spirituality – We are as much alive as we keep the earth alive. Chief Dan George

15.   Game Theory – Do not act so as to maximize benefit to you. Rather, act so as to maximize your benefit in light of how others will likely react to what you do. This will maximize the benefits for all. John Nash

(Most quotes from Matt Berry, "Post-Atheism", p. 7 and "Religions of the World – A Latter-day Saint View", Palmer, Choi, Keller, Toronto, p. 245)

Appendix E – Is Mankind Inherently "Good" or "Bad": A Brief Bibliography

The questions addressed by the books in this bibliography are as follows:

First, what is "animalistic behavior" and in what ways is it qualitatively different from human behavior?

Secondly, is this "animalistic behavior" in fact 'bad', or even inferior to theistic human behavior or to human behavior in general? If yes, by what criteria?

Thirdly, do non-human animals display apparently moral or ethical behavior?

Fourth, must morals/ethics necessarily stem solely from religion?

Most of those questions can be answered with sociobiology/evolutionary biology, cultural anthropology, mathematics and game theory, and philosophy.

The following may be of general interest in this regard:

- The View from Nowhere (by Thomas Nagel);
- Ishmael (a fictional 'parable' by Daniel Quinn);
- A Devil's Chaplain: Reflections on Hope, Lies, Science and Love (by Richard Dawkins);
- The Selfish Gene (by Richard Dawkins);
- Darwin's Cathedral (by David Sloan Wilson);
- One River, Many Wells: Wisdom Springing from Global Faiths (by Matthew Fox);
- Our Kind (by Marvin Harris);
- Cannibals and Kings (by Marvin Harris)
- Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches (by Marvin Harris)
- The Moral Sense (by James Q. Wilson)
- Human Society in Ethics and Politics (Bretrand Russell);
- The Descent of Man (Charles Darwin);
- Darwinian Natural Right: The Biological Ethics of Human Nature (by Larry Arnhart);
- Taking Darwin Seriously: A Naturalistic Approach to Philosophy (by Michael Ruse);
- Atheism, Morality, and Meaning (by Michael Martin)
- Can We Be Good Without God?: Biology, Behavior, and the Need to Believe (by Robert Buckman);
- Godless Morality: Keeping Religion Out of Ethics (by Richard Holloway)
- The Science of Good and Evil (by Michael Shermer);
- The Origins of Virtue (by Matt Ridley);
- Cheating Monkeys & Citizen Bees (by Lee Dugatkin);
- Sociobiology (by Edward O. Wilson);
- On Human Nature (by Edward O. Wilson);

- The Moral Animal: Evolutionary Psychology and Everyday Life (by Robert Wright);
- Evolutionary Origins of Morality: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives (a compilation, edited by Leonard D. Katz);
- The Third Chimpanzee (by Jared Diamond);
- The Expanding Circle: Ethics and Sociobiology (by Peter Singer);
- The Possibility of Altruism (by Thomas Nagel);
- Issues in Evolutionary Ethics (by Paul Thompson);
- The Evolution of Morality and Religion (by Donald M. Broom);
- Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics (by Mark Johnson);
- Research on Altruism & Love: An Annotated Bibliography of Major Studies in Psychology, Sociology, Evolutionary Biology, and Theology (a compilation, many authors/contributors);
- Evolution of Cooperation (by Robert Axelrod);
- Do No Evil: Ethics With Applications to Economic Theory and Business (by Michael E. Berumen);
- Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought (by Pascal Boyer);
- Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion and the Appetite for Wonder (by Richard Dawkins)
- The Question to Life's Answers: Spirituality Beyond Belief (by Steven Harrison)
- The Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality Presented in Four Paths, Twenty-Six Themees, and Two Questions (by Matthew Fox);
- Atheism, Morality, and Meaning (by Michael Martin);
- Post Atheism (by Matt Berry);
- Man's Search for Meaning (by Viktor Frankl).