

Roundtable

THE NATURE OF MAN

*Participants: George Boyd
Rodney Turner
Kent Robson*

This Roundtable presents man's view of himself in the world and of the ways in which he can hope and seek to improve himself. George Boyd, Director of the L.D.S. Institute at the University of Southern California, leads off with a claim that the Mormon concept of man is extremely positive and optimistic. Rodney Turner, Associate Professor of Religious Education at Brigham Young University, counters with a discussion of Mormon writings and scriptures which would seem to take a more negative view of man, especially in his mortal condition. Finally, Kent Robson, who is completing a doctorate in philosophy at Stanford University, concludes with a critique of the use of sources, the logic, and the conclusions of the two preceding essays.

A MORMON CONCEPT OF MAN

George T. Boyd

I

Mormonism has often been described as the most completely indigenous of all the religions originating in America. The Mormon movement has been called the typical American religious movement. Mormons do not object to these descriptions because they believe that America is a "promised land"; that its discovery and its religious and political developments were divinely inspired for the purpose of preparing the land for the restoration of the gospel of New Testament times, which had been perverted during the long centuries of Christian history. Mormonism claims to be that restoration.

Students of cultural history may question these typical Mormon beliefs, but they should be interested in the fact that in Mormonism are to be found, within a new religious setting, many American secular and religious ideals which antedate the founding of the L.D.S. Church. Mormonism as a modern American religious movement was in part a theological articulation of a number of typically American emphases. Among these was the rationalism of men like Franklin, Paine, and Jefferson, who gave reason the leading role in human endeavor. The high estimate of man which in the Transcendentalism of Emerson raised man to the rank of deity

is found in Mormon theology, and the materialism and naturalism of the nineteenth century were given a theological reorientation in Mormonism. America's sense of destiny, progress, history, freedom, and democracy all found religious expression in Mormon thought.

This means that for the historian and sociologist Mormonism presents an interesting case study in cultural history. It is beyond the purpose of this essay to make such a study, but when adequate studies of this kind are made it will be found that Mormonism embodies much pre-Mormon American thought, raised to the level of religion, which was considered secular and heretical by traditional Christian standards. In Hegelian terms Mormonism may be thought of as the synthesis growing out of the tension between the extremes of traditional orthodoxy and modern secular scientific and philosophical thought.¹

The purpose of the present essay is less ambitious than to trace these antecedents to traditional Mormon theology. It is merely an attempt to describe the Mormon concept of man as it has found expression in the theological pronouncements of Church leaders and has been entertained in the attitudes and feelings of the vast majority of Mormons. It is not to be overlooked, however, that Mormonism did have its origin in the midst of a general religious agitation, much of which centered around the question of man's nature. The dogma of human depravity was being questioned, and the Mormon doctrine of man was influenced by dissension from the traditional view as well as by acceptance of the Hebrews' positive assessment of man and the affirmative view of man expressed in the teachings of Jesus.

That man is essentially good by nature has been one of the most characteristic teachings of Mormonism. The positive affirmation of man, which underlies and therefore determines the Mormon doctrine of salvation, is implicit in the Church's teachings relative to man's original, uncreated status in the universe, his present dignity and high moral and spiritual possibilities in this world, and the exaltation he may achieve in the hereafter. The optimistic tone of the Mormon doctrine of man becomes clear when contrasted with the pessimism inherent in the doctrines of the fall, original sin, and total human depravity of much traditional Christian theology.

II

Any definition of the word "man" or description of human nature within the framework of Mormon philosophical and theological thought must of necessity be guided by a number of other basic Mormon ideas, among which are the non-absolutistic God concept, which includes the idea that God has achieved divinity by progressing through time;² the doctrine that man is of the same species as God, and in his ultimate nature is uncreated, self-existent, and coeternal with God; the belief that reality, including our physical world, is dynamic and capable of moving upward and onward; and the position that there is no sharp bifurcation of reality into the natural and supernatural, with the result that the natural order described by

¹This is not to deny the claims to revelation made relative to the origin of the Church. As will be indicated later, nature and supernature are merged in Mormon thought, making possible horizontal as well as vertical revelation.

²"If there was a point where man in his progression could not proceed further, the very idea would throw a gloom over every intelligent and reflecting mind. God himself is still increasing and progress-

time and space is continuous and includes both God and man (Doctrine & Covenants 93:29; 88:7-13; 130:22).

Therefore, any description of the Mormon view of the moral nature of man based solely on what is known of him in mortality will be fragmental. For example, the moral nature of man cannot be described in terms of "the fall." This has been a common Christian error. In fact, "the fall" must be understood in terms of the moral nature of man as it is known from the perspective of his eternal existence. Man is a "becoming" as well as a "being." His destiny as well as his origin, his potentiality as well as his actuality, must figure in any description of his total nature within the context of Mormonism. We propose, therefore, to discuss man in terms of what he was in his pre-mortal existence, what he is in mortality, and what he may become in his post-mortal state as the only adequate way of dealing with the Mormon position.

The knowledge Mormons claim to have of man in the pre-existence is limited and is based principally upon what is found in Mormon scripture. Yet, these scriptures tell considerable, and imply a great deal more, relative to the status and nature of man in his pre-earth life. Among other things, all men are said to have been in the beginning with God as uncreated, self-existing egos, or "intelligences" as the Prophet Joseph Smith referred to these ultimate, individuated, conscious entities. The ground of man's being, therefore, is in himself, giving him permanent ontological status in the universe. The use of the term "intelligence" may seem awkward, but if one thinks of the term as it is most commonly applied to man, as capacity or potentiality, then man defined as "intelligence" is an insatiable capacity to know, to will, and to feel in a universe which offers inexhaustible opportunities for knowing, willing, and feeling. The term "intelligence," therefore, is well adapted to the expression of Mormon thought at this point.

These primordial selves, or "intelligences," are defined in terms of the same psychic activities or functions, i.e., thinking, willing, feeling, oughting, and desiring, which define the person for us today, however embryonic these functions may have been; otherwise there seems to be no basis for the continuity of the person throughout eternity. It was the presence of these functions, either actually or potentially, which made it possible for God to enlarge the experience of "intelligences" by bringing them into a "spiritual estate" where the original "intelligences," or centers of consciousness, were clothed with spiritual bodies—allowing a greater range of psychic activity. Living as a community of spirits, they had increased opportunities for mental, moral, and emotional development. Spirits were free agents, capable of making moral commitments and capable of breaking them. As free agents they had the power to distinguish the good from the bad and were responsible for their choices.

Now, what can be said of the moral nature of man in his pre-earth life? Let it be remembered that his possession of rational and volitional power implies that he

ing in knowledge, power, and dominion, and will do so, worlds without end. It is just so with us" (Wilford Woodruff, *Journal of Discourses*, VI, 120).

"And is it too bold a thought, that with this progress, even for the Mightiest, new thoughts and new vistas may appear, inviting to new adventures and enterprises that will yield new experiences, advancement and enlargement even for the Most High" (B.H. Roberts, *The Seventy's Course of Study*, pp. 69, 70).

can be described in moral terms. Was that nature essentially good or essentially evil? On what grounds is one to say that by nature pre-earth man was inclined toward the good, or the evil? On the basis of conduct reported in Mormon scripture some spirits were good and some spirits were evil (Abraham 3:22-28; Doctrine and Covenants 29:36). Is the reported fact of evil conduct grounds for a doctrine of pessimism? Is the reported fact of good conduct grounds for a doctrine of optimism?

It is difficult to imagine any Latter-day Saint holding that all the spirit children of God were evil by nature. This characterization, when it is used, is reserved for mortal man. Yet, if evil is thought of in terms of that which is contrary to the will of God, certainly all pre-earth men, as well as all mortal men, were capable of evil. And, just as mortal man is actually involved in evil, vast numbers of the spirits in the pre-existence were involved in evil. What is being emphasized here is the fact that in Mormonism evil in man is not necessarily a derivative of the fall, or man's carnal and sensuous nature.

It is obvious that the original "intelligences" always possessed the potentiality of becoming the spirit children of God, for such they became. It also follows (from the Mormon doctrine of the uncreated nature of "intelligences," coupled with the doctrine of individual continuity and identity throughout all time) that, however dependent upon God, all future development was potentially present in the original "intelligence." As a spiritual child of God, pre-earth man was "added upon" and inherited further attributes and possibilities of becoming like the Father. And mortality was anticipated as a necessary means for moving toward that ultimate goal. Such popular statements as "man is a God in embryo" or "man belongs to the same species as the Gods" express the fundamental Mormon belief that it has always been the nature of man to have the capacity to move toward divinity.

Mormonism teaches that all that is known about pre-earth man suggests that a dynamic expansiveness was characteristic of life in the pre-existence, just as it is characteristic of life in mortality. This dynamic expansiveness or drive toward integrated wholeness, which, from the Mormon point of view, simply means the inherent power within man to become Godlike, is taken here to be the key to an understanding of the true nature of man in his pre-existence, and for that matter in his present and future existence as well.

It follows without qualification, therefore, that since the highest potentiality in pre-earth man was to become Godlike, this potentiality revealed pre-earth man's true nature even though it was impossible for him to reach his full stature in the spiritual state. In answer, then, to the question raised above relative to the moral nature of pre-existent man it must be said that he was good by nature because, as indicated, it was his nature to become Godlike. To say that he was bad by nature would be equivalent to saying that to have the power to become like God is bad.

If the question is raised how one is to account for the evil of Lucifer and his followers on the basis of a doctrine of innate goodness, the answer is that the fact of actual evil exhibited by the rebellious spirits does not prejudice the question relative to the capacities for good with which they were naturally endowed. It does not necessarily follow that because evil was present in pre-earth man that evil was the true expression of his nature. The argument is that from the Mormon point of view only the good was expressive of man's total nature in the spirit world. Evil,

then as now, was evidence of fragmentation, abnormality, and stunted growth, and thus was unnatural, because it thwarted the natural fulfillment of the spirit children of God.

It must be concluded that the Mormon view of pre-earth man is expressed by the term "optimism." If there are those who object to this terminology being employed in relation to pre-existent man on the grounds that it has relevance only to mortal man, our reply is that they have missed the point of the discussion and can only be reminded that there is no discontinuity between the natural and the supernatural orders in Mormon thought. If there are others who are in agreement with the conclusion but feel that our efforts have been unnecessary since the conclusion has never been doubted in Mormon thought and only arises as a question in relation to mortal man, we can only suggest that what has been said should take on more meaning as we turn now to the consideration of man in this mortal life as he is seen from the Mormon perspective.

III

As we shift our attention from the pre-existence to mortality, in an effort to arrive at a description of the moral nature of man, we must again admit the limitations of our knowledge. Our knowledge of mortal man is limited, among other reasons, because he is not merely a static result of the past and, therefore, cannot be studied and defined as a finished product. Man is a personal being, a knowing subject still in the making, and any description which ignores his future will be unacceptable. It is also obvious from the point of view already presented that any knowledge of man in mortality, whether empirical or scriptural, considered independently of what is known of him in his pre-existence, will throw into disorder an understanding of the Mormon position. We therefore repeat that the truth about man from the Mormon perspective must include knowledge of his past, present, and future existence.

With some exceptions it has been a common practice among Christians to refer to man in this life as the "natural man." In this usage the word "natural" is employed not only as the opposite in meaning to the word "spiritual," but also to indicate a basic metaphysical and moral opposition of the natural to the spiritual. Generally in Christian thought the word "natural" has described the material world, including man as a biological organism, and connotes evil. The word "spiritual" has described the supernatural realm to which the spirit of man belongs, but from which it is temporarily exiled, and connotes the good.

The pitting of the natural against the spiritual in Christian thought may have been in part an inheritance from Judaism and its constant fight against the animism and idolatry of its neighboring tribes. Because of the constant threat of idolatry, which was always associated with natural objects, there was a tendency for the Jews in some sects to look upon nature as an enemy of the spirit. This tendency did not dominate Jewish thought, which in the main was optimistic, but it was influential enough in New Testament times to have possibly figured in the formation of the thinking of Paul, who seems to have held the view. One need only mention Gnosticism to suggest a possible non-Christian source of such negativism.

Whatever the source, or combination of sources, of the thinking which split reality into the mutually hostile natural and supernatural realms, the result was

a pessimism which has characterized much of Christian thought about man. This negative attitude toward nature and the "natural man" led to the unhappy conclusion that the religious life is abnormal and unnatural and, hence, incompatible with the nature of man. Religion, for many, was thus reduced to the hope of being transported out of this evil, natural environment to a state of blessedness in the supernatural realm. It is well known, however, that Catholicism modified this view, which found its extreme expression in Augustine, and that, while the Reformers borrowed from Augustine, many Protestants today refuse to accept the doctrine of human corruption and depravity. Nevertheless, the traditional orthodox view is still very much alive; it is the source of Protestant revivalism and in a rebaptised form constitutes the basis for the neo-orthodox movement.

In the following attempt to describe the natural or mortal man from the Mormon point of view, it will be seen that Mormonism is fundamentally opposed to the position described above and insists that the moral and spiritual laws, represented in the commandments of God, are not merely *prescriptive* but also *descriptive* of the conditions of personal and social development in this life and as such are as natural as the laws of the physical world.

While we must abandon traditional meanings in our efforts to define mortal man within the context of Mormonism, there seems to be no reason why we cannot make use of the term "natural man." In fact, we have already employed the words "natural" and "nature" in reference to man in our discussion of his pre-existent state. And the appropriateness or the necessity of using these terms in any treatment of the Mormon view of the pre-existence argues against the natural-supernatural dichotomy in Christian thought and suggests something of the character of the non-dualistic position of Mormonism. We shall therefore use the term "natural man," but we shall attempt to give it a distinctive Mormon meaning.

It should become clear as we proceed in our discussion of the natural man that much of the difficulty which at times compromises the basic Mormon position is largely verbal rather than theological. The confusion stems, in part, from certain passages of scripture which are sometimes interpreted to express a negative doctrine of man. But most of these passages, when understood in context and against the meaning of the gospel as a whole, are quite in harmony with Mormon optimism.

Perhaps the most quoted single passage misused in this connection is the statement of King Benjamin, "For the natural man is an enemy to God . . ." (Mosiah 3:19.) The first question to be settled is what Benjamin meant by the term "natural man." After this has been determined it may also be asked whether Benjamin's appraisal of man is to be taken as exhaustive and final without weighing it against what other religious leaders have had to say on the subject. Another question related to the first is whether we are limited to the meaning he chose to give to the expression "the natural man."

The passage is generally misunderstood because of the erroneous assumption that the phrase "the natural man" includes all mortal men as being enemies to God simply because of their humanity, but we shall see that Benjamin taught that some men are enemies to God and that others are not. Therefore, the term "natural man" as used by him does not mean a universal class into which all men fall as enemies to God just because they are human, but the term applies to a limited class of men who are enemies to God because they have chosen to disobey the Divine

Will. In other words, Benjamin's meaning of the term "natural man" can be understood only in terms of what he meant by "an enemy to God."

A careful reading of the statement under consideration coupled with the reading of Mosiah 2:36-38 which follows, supports the position just stated and clarifies Benjamin's meaning:

And now, I say unto you, my brethren, that after ye have known and have been taught all these things, if ye should transgress and go contrary to that which has been spoken, that ye do withdraw yourselves from the Spirit of the Lord, that it may have no place in you to guide you in wisdom's paths that ye may be blessed, prospered, and preserved—I say unto you, that the man that doeth this, the same cometh out in open rebellion against God; therefore he listeth to obey the evil spirit, and becometh an enemy to all righteousness; therefore, the Lord has no place in him, for he dwelleth not in unholy temples.

Therefore if that man repenteth not, and remaineth and dieth an enemy to God, the demands of divine justice do awaken his immortal soul to a lively sense of his own guilt. . . .

It is significant to note that King Benjamin says, "And now, I say unto you, my brethren, that *after ye have known* and have been taught these things, *if ye should transgress* and go contrary to that which is spoken" then one *becomes* "an enemy to all righteous," and, "if *that man* repenteth not, and *remaineth and dieth an enemy to God* . . . mercy hath no claim on that man" (italics added).

The meaning seems clear. The term "natural man" as employed by Benjamin is equivalent to "the incorrigible sinner." It is also clear that all men are not included in this category. Furthermore, it is clear that those who are outside the class to which the "natural man" belongs include not only those who have not heard the gospel, but also all those who have not become enemies to God by the process he described. Sin, here, has to do with acts, not with an inherent condition of depravity due to the fall. To interpret these passages otherwise is to defile Mormonism with a doctrine of original sin.

The meaning suggested here finds support in Alma's statement, ". . . and now, my son, all men that are in a state of nature, or I would say, in a carnal state, are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity . . ." (Alma 41:11). The important point here is that the phrase "all men *that* are in a state of nature" seems to imply that there are some men who are not in a state of nature, which state of nature is the condition of those who "*have gone contrary to the nature of God*" (see above) and not an original condition of all born into mortality (italics added).

Those who err in the interpretation of these passages assume that in becoming mortal, man became devilish. The Doctrine and Covenants is instructive at this point.

And that he created man, male and female, after his own image and in his own likeness, created he them; and gave unto them commandments that they should love and serve him, the only living and true God, and that he should be the only being whom they should worship. *But by the transgression of these holy laws man became sensual and devilish, and became fallen man.* (20:18-20; italics added.)

It seems from this passage that devilishness in man is the result of breaking “holy laws,” not the result of partaking of the “forbidden fruit” which resulted in man’s becoming mortal. Another passage on this point is found in the Pearl of Great Price, Moses 5:12-13:

And Adam and Eve blessed the name of God, and they made all things known unto their sons and their daughters. And Satan came among them, saying: I am also a son of God; And he commanded them, saying: Believe it not; and they believed it not, and they loved Satan more than God. *And men began from that time forth to be carnal, sensual, and devilish* (italics added).

It is clear that the conditions here ascribed to “fallen man” are the results of individual volition in following Satan rather than God and not the result of Adam’s transgression. It is also to be understood that the description of man in the above passage does not apply to all men, as one can readily think of exceptions—Abel for example.

The argument here is not that our use of the term “natural man” is the same as King Benjamin’s. We have chosen to use the term differently. Our point is that these passages do not necessarily express the kind of pessimism they are frequently made to serve and are misused when they are employed to do so.

If the reader is not satisfied with this interpretation of Benjamin’s statement, “the natural man is an enemy to God,” and insists that this is an expression of pessimism, as we have used the term in this paper, then it can only be said that, if this is the case, the passage is inconsistent with both the spirit and content of the traditional Mormon doctrine of Man.

Statements of Benjamin suggesting that man is nothing and worthless (Mosiah 4:4) are taken here to be incompatible with the Mormon position. It might be argued that man is worthless without the help of God because he is helplessly and eternally lost, but our reply is that it is because of the intrinsic worth of man that God is so ready and anxious to save him.

The infant in the crib might also be said to be worthless in that it has done nothing for its parents. Surely it is absolutely helpless and would soon be nothing without their attention. But this is a poor basis for deciding the worth of the infant. This is to confuse means with ends. The child as an end in itself is of infinite value and as a person not only evokes the highest human responses from its parents but also fulfills their deepest needs if they are to be fully human. It is strange that men praise God for doing that for which man would be condemned if he failed to do. The parent who neglects the helpless babe in the crib is condemned as not being worthy of parenthood.

If the passage referred to above, along with a few others in the Book of Mormon (see also Mosiah 16:1-5; Mosiah 27:25; Helaman 12:4-7) should find increasing use in defense of pessimism, then we may well anticipate an official doctrinal exposition for the purpose of squaring their interpretation and meaning with the established Church position on the subject.

The word “natural,” as it is frequently used in ethical discourse, is highly ambiguous and has come to mean almost nothing because it has come to mean almost everything. The word “natural” often stands for whatever happens to be, or what-

ever transpires. It is said, for example, that it is natural for man to kill and lie, but it is also said that it is natural for man to discipline himself so that he refrains from killing and lying. Since these forms of behavior are equally natural in that they frequently occur in human experience, the word "natural" in this sense has little meaning, and distinctions between the good and the bad are obliterated. In this sense it was natural for the Nazis to torture their victims at Dachau, or for the unprincipled man to seduce his neighbor's wife. We are mentioning this aspect of the problem not only to indicate the need for a clarification of the meaning of the word "natural," but also to warn against the identification of the Mormon position, simply because of its naturalistic characteristics, with those philosophies or psychologies which encourage men and women to follow their urges and do whatever is natural. Such views lead to the glorification of license and only those who are completely insensitive to the principles of morality would uphold such "natural" acts. Mormonism disclaims both the traditional Christian use of the term "natural man" with all its negative connotations and the use of the word "natural" with its ambiguities in those modern philosophies of life which suggest that man do whatever is "natural."

The Mormon view of mortal man, or natural man—for we shall use these terms interchangeably—is found in scripture and in the elaboration of scripture by the theologians of the Church. In the Doctrine and Covenants 88:15 is the statement, "And the spirit and body are the soul of man." James E. Talmage, expounding on this scripture, remarked, "It is peculiar to the theology of the Latter-day Saints that we regard the body as an essential part of the soul. Read your dictionaries, the lexicons, the encyclopedias, and you will find that nowhere, outside of the Church of Jesus Christ, is the solemn and eternal truth taught that the soul of man is the body and spirit combined."

In Mormon thought, man as he exists in mortality is a dual being composed of the body and the spirit. The body and the spirit united in this life constitute the soul. The word "soul," therefore, is used in Mormonism as synonymous with the word "man." It follows that the Mormon definition of man must include the spiritual side of his nature; otherwise it would be incomplete, because the spirit is as essential to the nature of man as is the body.

The Mormon position is that the whole man, body and spirit, constitutes man in mortality. Mortal man is the natural man. Limiting the meaning of the term "natural man" to the physical aspect of man's nature is a misuse of language in Mormon discourse, resulting in ambiguities which lead to confusion and misunderstanding. In the natural man the physical and spiritual dimensions of reality merge. The natural man then is not to be understood as the spiritually dormant or the "unredeemed man."

IV

A matter of primary importance to our problem of determining whether the good or the bad is to be taken as expressing the true nature of man is *the relation of function to responsibility*. The presence of functioning powers within any living thing requires the actual functioning of those powers at the appropriate time and place if that thing is to maintain itself. The plant, for example, has certain functioning powers in relation to its environment. If the plant fails to use its functioning

powers in a natural response to its environment, it exhibits an abnormal, and therefore unnatural, condition. The farmer who knows something about the nature of wheat and the conditions under which it will grow and mature looks upon the field of wheat which is the victim of some parasitic growth as abnormal and unnatural. This is not because the wheat is not a natural host for the parasite, but because the wheat is thwarted in its inner drive to express itself in full fruition. In other words, the nature of wheat is known in terms of its highest possibilities. Wheat has the functioning power to reproduce itself into fully ripened grain. When it has achieved this it has expressed its true nature and in a sense has fulfilled its responsibility in relation to its functioning power. The wheat, of course, is not conscious nor free to function or not to function in accordance with its environment. Man is free and can determine how he will respond to his environment, and the presence of spiritual and rational powers within him demands that he function spiritually and rationally if he is to live the only kind of a life which may be considered normal and natural. Not overlooking his emotional and physical needs, it is only spiritual and rational functioning that can insure the natural fulfillment of man and clothe him with the personal power and dignity necessary for the achievement of his ultimate destiny.

The natural man, then, is the righteous man. And to live naturally means to live in accordance with moral and spiritual laws, the observance of which is the only way man can actualize his divine potentialities. The sinful, wicked life is the abnormal, unnatural life for the simple reason that wickedness and sinfulness thwart the natural growth and eventual fulfillment of man. Mormonism holds, therefore, that the man who conforms his life to the will of God is involved in a natural process, and is giving the highest and truest expression to his nature.

What has just been said about the meaning of the term "natural man" and about the Mormon view of the moral nature of man finds support in the spoken and written expression of the leaders of the Church. The following quotations are typical of many others which express the thinking and feeling within Mormonism on the nature of man. President Brigham Young in an address given in the Tabernacle in 1862 said:

It is fully proved in all the revelations that God has ever given to mankind that they naturally love and admire righteousness, justice, and truth more than they do evil. It is, however, universally received by professors of religion as scriptural doctrine that man is naturally opposed to God. This is not so. Paul says in his Epistle to the Corinthians, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of God," but I say it is the unnatural man that receiveth not the things of God. That which was, is and will continue to endure is more natural than that which will pass away and be no more. The natural man is of God. We are the natural sons and daughters of our natural parents, and spiritually we are the natural children of the Father of light and natural heirs to his kingdom; and when we do evil, we do it in opposition to the promptings of the Spirit of Truth that is within us. Man, the noblest work of God, was in his creation designed for endless duration, for which the love of all good was incorporated in his nature. It was never designed that he should naturally do and love evil. (*Journal of Discourses*, IX, 305.)

Elder James E. Talmage, after indicating that man may become, even in mortality, in a measure Godlike, says, "But 'Mormonism' is bolder yet. It asserts that in accordance with the inviolable law of organic nature—that like shall beget like, . . . the child may achieve the former status of the parent, and that in his mortal condition man is a God in embryo" (*Articles of Faith*, p. 529). Such a statement is logically consistent only with the doctrine that man in mortality is essentially good by nature.³

If the question arises as to why the natural man so often falls short of functioning to the full capacity of his spiritual and rational powers, the Mormon answer is that freedom is the only condition under which personal fulfillment can be won. It is only by the voluntary operation of the will in choosing the right over the wrong, the good over the evil, that man moves toward his ultimate goal. If man has the potentiality to become Godlike it must be through the free, normal functioning of all his powers. With such freedom man may sink to lower levels and thus fail to achieve the only end which answers the full requirements of his nature. When this happens, as it frequently does, there is a tendency to regard man, in thus sinking to the level of animality, as being natural. Such behavior, however, far from being natural, is unnatural and a perversion of man's nature. The divine attributes and capacities of man demand the divine life, and these highest attributes of man's nature determine his fullest, truest nature.

It may seem that the foregoing indicates that man's potentiality is contingent. Perhaps this statement itself is redundant, if not tautological. Whatever the case,

³Additional statements by Church leaders which are typical expressions of Mormon "optimism" are the following:

. . . it may be well to remember that man, however low and debased we find him in this world of trial, is not naturally vicious, nor would he of his own inclinations seek to destroy human agency. God made man, and he is, therefore, naturally good. (*Journal of Discourses*, XXVI, 209).

The natural woman clings to her husband, keeping sacred the covenants made with him, and loving with undying affection the fruits of the union. The unnatural wife and mother is true to neither. Cain as the murderer of his brother, was an unnatural man whose soul was sold to Satan under the provisions of an unholy alliance (*Ibid.*)

. . . We are the offspring of God, born with the same faculties and powers as He possesses, capable of enlargement through experience that we are now passing through in our second estate . . . (Lorenzo Snow, *Millennial Star*, LVI, Dec. 3, 1894 772).

The principles of justice, righteousness, and truth, which have an endless duration, can alone satisfy the capacious desires of the immortal soul (John Taylor, *Journal of Discourses*, I, 221).

A correct understanding of man's place in the universe . . . places a man in full possession of his natural powers, and [he] becomes subject to a normal continuous unfolding of his every natural, inborn gift. When this happens man is moving on to his highest possible destiny (John A. Widtsoe, *Program of the Church*, p. 20).

In all people, save a very few, virtues outnumber faults. The world is essentially good in character, though often adrift with respect to truth. The rank and file, the average of us are deserving of respect and good will (*Ibid.*, p. 169).

We are exhorted to develop and perfect those attributes of God that dwell within us in embryo, that we may more and more approximate to that high state of perfection that exists in the Father and the Son (Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses*, XIX, 320).

Mormonism does emphasize man's dependence upon God. But dependence does not mean evil, impotence, or depravity. The fact that man must recognize the need for God's help and assume an attitude of receptivity toward Him should not lead to self-depreciation and false humility. A genuine, reverent attitude toward God and insight into His relationship to humanity does not find expression in scoffing at man's capacity and power, but in the kind of moral and spiritual behavior, growing out of both a sense of personal worth and a sense of self-subordination, which bespeaks the dignity of man as a child of God.

The Mormon doctrine of the Atonement holds that man is essentially dependent upon God for his fulfillment. But it is also held that while the Atonement is a necessary condition for "salvation," it is not a sufficient condition for that fulfillment which is referred to as "exaltation." At least part of the meaning of the worth and dignity of man must reside in the fact that man, as a moral agent, is responsible for his own growth and development. Certainly little worth or dignity could be ascribed to a person, however exalted his status, if that position were not in some way the product of his own efforts. In Mormonism Satan seems to have erred at this point in that it is held that he thought he could save man in the absence of human freedom and effort.

The Mormon doctrine of the Atonement and man's dependence upon God do not follow from a doctrine of original sin and human depravity. Mormonism, therefore, rejects the pessimism which has been employed to describe the general condition of humanity.

Mormonism also rejects the pessimism which is based upon the evil behavior observed in man, insisting that the identification of the observed fact of evil with a pessimistic doctrine of human nature is completely neutralized by the observed fact of good behavior. The Mormon belief that it is the natural, normal expressing of mortal man, as a free agent, to do good is supported by scripture, of which the following is an example:

For behold, it is not meet that I shall command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward. Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; for the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward. (Doctrine and Covenants 58:26-28.)

The late John A. Widtsoe expressed the Mormon view of man as capable of initiating and creating the good when he said:

There is a power within man, divinely bestowed, by which the issues of life may be met successfully. As this is cultivated, conquest over earth conditions is increased. One of the main duties of life is to cultivate and strengthen this inborn, natural power of man, to battle against and to overcome the difficulties presented by earth life. (*Program of the Church*, p. 204.)

For Mormonism, man's freedom includes the power to will the good. And, as we have seen, man must give expression to all his functioning powers, including his

rational and spiritual powers, if he is to live naturally. To live solely on the physical or biological level may be natural for animals, but it is unnatural for man. The natural man, then, is not the one dominated by sensuous pleasures. The natural man's life is rationally and spiritually oriented and the one perfectly natural man, Christ, is taken as the inspiration and norm of his conduct. To be motivated by this inspiration is to achieve the experience referred to in the scripture as a rebirth. But such an experience does not change man's nature essentially—it is to give response to the spirit in terms of the potential spiritual receptivity within the depths of man's soul. This spiritual response and rebirth, far from being unnatural, is the natural process which establishes man's proper orientation to the spiritual dimension of life outside himself. It is then that the spiritual and rational aspects of human nature find their proper place in the ordering of life. And the fruits of the spirit, love, joy, peace, long-suffering and the like, are the normal products of the functioning soul, for such are also written into nature as a part of the constitution of reality. The possession of capacities for spiritual living is the proof that man by nature is divine, and that his eternal vocation is to realize his goodness rather than merely to control his badness.

V

It would seem that there could be little or no objection to the claim of the preceding section that the spiritual and rational capacity of man should determine his behavior. But it is often insisted that in the majority of men this is not the case, and inasmuch as most men yield to emotions and physical urges they are, in spite of what has been said, still dominated by the "flesh," with the result that much of their conduct is immoral and, therefore, the physical body, as the source of the difficulty, is evil.

Mormonism recognizes both natural and moral evils as real, but it rejects the doctrine that the physical body, as such, is evil. From the Mormon position the fall did not change the moral nature of man essentially but was an act calculated to actualize potentialities eternally present in him, one of which was the possibility of joining the spirit with a physical body in mortality. The physical body, no less than the spirit, is Godlike. Mortal man was created in the image of God. One of the necessary requirements in man's progression toward God is the possession of a physical body, for the simple reason that God possesses a physical body. That the possession of a physical body may make possible additional ways of sinning in mortality in no way alters the basic moral structure of man. It is simply one of the conditions on which the ultimate fulfillment of man rests. The perpetuation of the union of the body and the spirit is so important for the fulfillment and perfection of man in Mormon thought that the one automatic and inevitable result of the atonement is the resurrection, assuring the reunion of the body with the spirit after their separation by death. It seems that God would not trust this part of man's future to man by making it in any way conditional.

While Mormonism is aware of the vast amount of moral evil in the world and is conscious of its own responsibility to help diminish and overcome evil, it does not hold that moral improvement is achieved by radically changing human nature. To improve morally for the Mormon cannot mean to change what we call human nature into something else, nor does it mean to cease being involved in those impulses

and drives, frequently described as evil, without which we would not only cease to be human, but cease to be altogether. Moral improvement in Mormonism is to be achieved by bringing all the facets of human nature into proper balance with each other, and the whole person into proper relationship with his total environment—which includes God. This is not merely adaptation or adjustment to the world. This is to overcome the world in the only way open to man. To improve morally means to bring drives and habits under the critical dominion of the rational and spiritual powers of human nature so that the significance of good and evil, right and wrong, in relation to the expanding personality is understood. This is not to be less human. This is to be more human. This is not to change or destroy human nature, but to bring human nature to its full fruition through progressive stages or levels of expression. In this process the physical organism plays an essential role from the Mormon point of view and cannot be ignored even at the higher rational and moral levels of expression, even though it becomes less dominant.

The Mormon appraisal of the physical body is expressed in the following statement:

We have been told, as many of us know, and knew before, that this life is a necessary part in the course of progression designed by our Father. We have been taught, again, to look upon these bodies of ours as gifts from God. We Latter-day Saints do not regard the body as something to be condemned, something to be abhorred, and something to be subdued in the sense in which that expression is oftentimes heard in the world. We regard as the sign of our royal birthright, that we have bodies upon this earth. (James E. Talmage, *Conference Report*, October 1913, p. 116.)

Nature, therefore, as it is represented in man's physical body is not an enemy to God. The various specific drives, i.e., hunger, thirst, sex, combativeness, acquisitiveness, and others which supply biological needs, are all in some degree essential to life and as such are good. The following quotation is pertinent:

The lusts and desires of the flesh are not of themselves unmitigated evils. On the contrary they are implanted in us as a stimulus to noble deeds rather than low and beastly deeds. . . . Every instinct in us is for a wise purpose in God when properly regulated and restrained by the Holy Spirit and kept within its proper legitimate bounds. (Erastus Snow, *Journal of Discourses*, XXVI, 217.)

All the drives are capable of a high degree of functional malleability in human living. Hunger may turn to gluttony, thirst to drunkenness, acquisitiveness to theft, and sex to lust and adultery. Nevertheless, each of these drives is also capable of modifications in the other direction to the extent of serving the moral and spiritual interest of man at the higher levels of human endeavor. For example, sex at the physiological level may be nothing more than an excretory function. But at a higher level, as an act of genuine love, it is capable of reaching lofty psychological and spiritual dimensions of expression. The drive for food, likewise, is rooted in the biological organism but may be refined and connected with a number of valuations which are only indirectly related to the basic drive, such as fellowship at the family meal and the practice of giving thanks for the bounties of life.

The Mormon position is that even though some specific drives are connected with individual organs they are potentially something more than mere drives of animal nature. Such modifications, as suggested, are possible only because in addition to these specific drives there is the over-arching drive for self-fulfillment—the dynamic expansiveness which pushes toward integrated wholeness, or the Godlike life. This drive for self-fulfillment is not one with the other drives. It is doubly anchored in the physical and spiritual sides of man's nature and is capable of integrating and correlating all specific drives. When properly integrated the specialized drives work in the interest of self-realization and are the means of expressing the expanding self. The individual, then, is not lived by his instincts—he lives. And his life is made meaningful, against a background of faith in God, by the projected ideal self he pursues.

The specific drives are deficient in themselves because it is the whole person which is at stake in self-realization. When any single drive is so emphasized that it becomes all-absorbing, the result is the frustration of the drive for self-fulfillment. Yet, when equilibrated under the control of the rational and spiritual side of man's nature these specialized drives give much of the content to the basic drive for fulfillment, even though it remains distinct and over-arches them. Mormonism has never depreciated the physical side of man's nature.

At his self-conscious best man's moral behavior is an expression of the whole self. Morality is the natural, normal expression of human nature when all its parts function cooperatively in the interest of the whole. The focus of morality is in man, and the moral commandments of God are descriptive of human nature in its individual and social dimensions. If this were not so, why does nature deprive of life the man who eats and drinks in violation of the laws of health? Why does the liar find that people do not believe him? Why is it that engaging in falsehood so distorts his own mind that the liar is deceived by his own lies? The thief robs himself of his own integrity. The cheater cheats himself. The betrayer betrays himself. All this is so because ours is a moral universe in which only the highest and best possibilities are in keeping with the natural order. The laws of human behavior which are to be understood in terms of man's total nature are as unavoidable as the laws of physical science.

The natural life, as it has been described to include the physical and spiritual in proper balance, is the abundant life of which Christ spoke, because it brings self-fulfillment. And progressive self-fulfillment is the only source of lasting joy. The Book of Mormon teaches that “. . . men are that they might have joy,” and in the achievement of joy the physical body is an essential element. In fact, without it Mormonism holds that man cannot find self-fulfillment. “For man is spirit. The elements are eternal, and spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fullness of joy; and when separated, man cannot receive a fullness of joy” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:34,35).

VI

As we look now to the future and to what man may become we find that here, too, Mormonism is characterized by optimism. In fact, from what has already been said about the nature of man it would be inconsistent and contradictory for Mormonism to hold any other than an optimistic view of man's future. We have em-

phasized throughout the foregoing that man as a child of God has the potentiality of becoming like the Father. The future, not unlike the past and present, is an extension of the opportunity to achieve that enlargement of soul which moves man nearer this goal.

In any discussion of the future life from the Mormon point of view a clarification of the Mormon concept of time is necessary. Contrary to the notion commonly held in theological circles that time is a product of God's creation sandwiched between a timeless eternity of the past and a timeless eternity of the future, Mormonism holds that eternity *is* endless time including the past, present, and future.

The word "eternity" for most Christians has meant the absence of time in the sense that there is no passage from past to present to future. God is said to be an eternal being in the sense that he lives in an eternal now, which means that what is past or future for man is ever present in His consciousness so that there is no sequence of past, present, and future for Him. This is not to be understood that God's hindsight and foreknowledge make it possible for Him to look into the past or future from the present with such precision that He is able to remember or predict with absolute accuracy. It means that the past, however long gone, and the future, however distant, are forever transpiring in the ever present now of God. God is said to exist in this non-temporal realm beyond or outside time, or the temporal realm of man's experience. Time is said to have had its beginning when God created the universe and will come to an end when God decides to close the curtain on the final act of human history. The sources for this view of eternity are recognized in Plato's world of eternal forms and its Neo-Platonic modifications.

Inasmuch as time and motion go together in the sense that time is measured in terms of motion, then it would seem reasonable that an eternal realm, as just described, would be a realm in which there is no movement. Consistent with this concept, the traditional view of heaven depicts an inane lotus land where nothing ever happens—where the saved passively enjoy the beatific vision. This is to be saved. And such salvation is achieved not by any progression through time but by a trans-temporal act of God, who, as it were, reaches down from eternity and lifts man vertically out of time. Man is thus saved by the unmerited grace of God, which consumes no time in its accomplishment as it is non-temporally executed.

In Mormon thought time is real, however relative, and eternity, as already stated, is not the absence of time but the indefinite totality of time as it is composed of past, present, and future. Consistent with the belief in the reality of time is the belief that movement, progression and retrogression, are also real. God is in time and is time-conscious, having himself progressed through time. With this belief in a dynamic, growing universe which includes the future, the Mormon looks forward to a life after death where growth and progress are possible. Heaven is not a place of inactivity but one of enlarged opportunities for the soul's further fulfillment.

With this concept of time and eternity, salvation, in a sense, for the Mormon, is a process which had its beginning in the pre-existence and continues through mortality to the future life, which has for its goal man's reaching a Godlike maturity. Salvation as fulfillment, therefore, is achieved horizontally along the line of time which extends into the immortality of the future. With this belief, Mormons look hopefully and optimistically to the future life with full faith that a God

in whose nature there is a “lamb slain from the foundation of the world” will leave nothing undone for the ultimate redemption of His children.

More specifically, Mormon optimism relative to the future life is seen in the rejection of any notion of predestination, and in the doctrine of a universal resurrection and salvation. The Mormon view is that with few exceptions men born into this life will not only be saved but will share a future of varying degrees of glory, the three main divisions of which are known as the Celestial, Terrestrial, and Telestial. James E. Talmage, discussing these future states, writes:

The three kingdoms of widely differing glories are severally organized on a plan of gradation. The Telestial kingdom comprises subdivisions; this also is the case, we are told, with the Celestial; and by analogy, we conclude that a similar condition prevails in the Terrestrial. Thus the innumerable degrees of merit amongst mankind are provided for in an infinity of graded glories. . . .

It is reasonable to believe . . . that, in accordance with God’s plan of eternal progression, advancement within the three specified kingdoms will be provided for; though as to possible progress from one kingdom to another the scriptures make no positive affirmation. Eternal advancement along different lines is conceivable. We may conclude that degrees and grades will ever characterize the kingdoms of our God. *Eternity is progressive; perfection is relative; the essential feature of God’s living purpose is its associated power of eternal increase.* (*Articles of Faith*, p. 409; italics added.)

This statement expresses and ascribes to man in the future life what we have stressed as being his chief characteristic in the pre-existent and mortal states. We described this as a dynamic expansiveness and drive toward integrated wholeness. Mormonism looks to a future life where all men, with the few exceptions noted above, will have the chance to move forward in their drive for fulfillment. This includes vast numbers of men who traditionally have been assigned to perdition. Describing the great multitude of those who inherit the Telestial kingdom—and we must remember this is a kingdom of glory—Mormon scripture states:

These are they who are liars, and sorcerers, and adulterers and whore-mongers, and whosoever loves and makes a lie. (Doctrine and Covenants 76:103.)

Even these have the chance for repentance and to share God’s forgiveness:

Great as is the effect of this life on the hereafter, and certain as is the responsibility of opportunities lost for repentance, God holds the power to pardon beyond the grave. (*Articles of Faith*, p. 60.)

Mormonism does not hold that sinners of the categories mentioned above will not suffer the effects of which their sins are the causes. Both rewards and punishments are natural consequences, and the repentant, forgiven sinner in the hereafter may find himself greatly retarded. Yet, the point is that however handicapped by the effects of his previous sins, for Mormonism there is always the opportunity to move forward. With endless time before him, there may be no limits to the ends he can achieve. This seems to be true whether or not there is progression from one

kingdom to another. However, it would seem that if the repentant sinner in this life can become a candidate for the Celestial kingdom, there would be made available for the repentant sinner in the hereafter some means for such advancement even though initially after death he finds himself in a lower kingdom.⁴

Such speculation is unnecessary for our present purpose, which is to show that the Mormon view of the future life of man supports the position that man is good by nature. We have argued throughout this essay that the moral nature of man must be defined in such a way as to include his potentialities, and we have seen that in the gradual fulfillment of his person man becomes increasingly like God and thus slowly realizes his highest possibility. We repeat that man must be defined in terms of this highest potentiality if one is to describe the Mormon doctrine of man.

Mormon scripture as it portrays the future of man testifies to the near achievement of this high status, at least by those who inherit the Celestial kingdom. "These are they into whose hands the Father has given all things—they are they who are priests and kings, who have received of his fulness, and of his glory; . . . Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God" (Doctrine and Covenants 76:55-58).

The term "gods" is taken here to be a generic term. Nevertheless, the passage argues for our contention that man, in Mormonism, is by nature good and is scriptural support for the Mormon faith that he does eventually achieve Godhood.

⁴A letter written to the Presidency of the Church asking the following question:

Please inform me as to the teaching of the Church regarding the possibility of a person progressing from one kingdom to another after the resurrection.

received this answer:

The Brethren direct me to say that the Church has never announced a definite doctrine upon this point. Some of the brethren have held the view that it was possible in the course of progression to advance from one glory to another, invoking the principal of eternal progression; others of the brethren have taken the opposite view. But as stated, the Church has never announced a definite doctrine on this point. (Signed by Joseph Anderson, Secretary to the First Presidency, March 5, 1952.)

THE MORAL DIMENSIONS OF MAN: A SCRIPTURAL VIEW

Rodney Turner

Like beauty, the moral nature of man is in the eye of the beholder; there is no one description of that nature that will prove acceptable to everyone. The view presented in this article is primarily oriented to and based upon divine revelation rather than human reason. This is not to infer an awful dichotomy between the two, it is only to admit that whatever we know of man in the past or man in the future is necessarily predicated upon the scriptures. Where they are silent, we are ignorant; where they speak, we are informed. The writer has tried to keep the tail from wagging the dog. How successful he has been will doubtless prove a matter of opinion.

It should be noted at the outset that Mormons, of whatever doctrinal bias or