

# Determinist Mansions in the Mormon House?

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THE HUMAN MIND SEEMS IRRESISTIBLY COMPELLED by (at least) two incompatible intuitions: first, that as morally responsible beings we are able to do other than what we do; second, that what happens now could not have been different unless at some point in the past things had been different. Certainly Mormonism, with its deep commitments both to human freedom and responsibility, on the one hand, and the universal reign of natural law, on the other, seems committed to both. Yet discourse over the conflict in its Mormon setting is virtually nonexistent.

By way of introduction (for those not already conversant with the terms of the debate), determinists maintain that all events, including human decisions and actions, are determined, fixed by factors outside the events themselves. While there are other kinds, the most common sort of determinist believes that every event is caused by other (usually<sup>1</sup> prior) events. Absent explicit indications to the contrary, "determinism" used without modifiers refers to their view, causal determinism. Almost invariably when first exposed to deterministic views, people conclude that determinism and human freedom are incompatible, that if determinism holds true then people are not free; libertarian<sup>2</sup> thought accepts this conclusion and affirms that we are free (and that determinism is therefore false).<sup>3</sup> Despite this strong prevalent prejudice to the contrary, many thinkers have argued that careful reflection reveals the compatibility of determinism and freedom. Soft determinists go beyond this mere compatibilist assertion of the

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1. Usually, not always, because some causes operate contemporaneously with their effects; for example, my moving finger causes the computer keyboard key to move at the same time, not later.

2. Philosophy appropriated the term for this use before there was a Libertarian political party.

3. So-called hard determinists agree with libertarians on this point, but insist, instead, on the truth of determinism.

compossibility of determinism and human freedom, insisting that both are actualized in the real world.

Some thirty-odd years ago Sterling McMurrin accused his contemporaries in Mormondom of confusing the freedom at stake in the free will/determinism debates with "the various forms of social or political freedom"<sup>4</sup>; McMurrin also charged that the few thinkers of the Mormon tradition who succeeded in distinguishing the relevant notion of free will from the others uncritically subscribed to common libertarian conceptions of freedom, with "no serious attempt to refine their doctrine or to confront the numerous subtle problems associated with the meaning of freedom within the context of the current analysis of causation and determinism."<sup>5</sup> Judging from what has appeared in the intervening decades in print, at least, not much has changed: modern LDS church leadership shows none of the interest in or sensitivity to philosophical issues exhibited by some earlier leaders; among lay thinkers who distinguish free will from political or social freedom, the libertarian hegemony, while occasionally repudiated,<sup>6</sup> has yet to be effectively challenged; neglect of the subtleties of the general free will/determinism debate and their potential bearing on Mormon thought continues; and the doctrine of free agency remains undeveloped.

In this essay I hope to invigorate what to all appearances has been a moribund area of thought and discussion, in part by challenging pervasively but complacently held beliefs. In the first place, it seems to me that several central strands of Mormon thought militate in favor of determinism; I begin by exploring these, to motivate the discussion that follows. Next, I examine what seem to me to be the strongest barriers to Mormon acceptance of determinism, arguing that once both these objections and determinism are properly understood the objections fail. In the course of doing so, I will offer a more comprehensive formulation of the doctrine of free agency than is commonly set forth.<sup>7</sup>

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4. Sterling McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1977), 82. The freedom at issue in the free will/determinism debates is essentially characterized by its connection with moral responsibility. The other freedoms mentioned by McMurrin might be necessary to protect various forms of self-expression but not to render individuals morally responsible; for example, though subjects of the Nazi regime lacked virtually every form of social and political freedom imaginable, we nevertheless consider them free in the sense required to hold them responsible for their actions under that regime.

5. McMurrin, *Theological Foundations*, 81-82.

6. See, for example, Truman Madsen, *Eternal Man* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1970), 66n; Kent Robson, "Foundations of Freedom in Mormon Thought," *Sunstone* 7 (Sept.-Oct. 1981): 51-54.

7. This formulation is developed and authenticated in more painstaking detail in chap. 2 of my dissertation, "An Essay in Philosophical Mormon Theology," Harvard University, 1996.

## IN FAVOR OF DETERMINISM

But for the instinctive appeal of libertarianism, it would be puzzling that recognized Mormon thinkers have not advocated determinism. The deterministic inclinations of Mormon thought are apparent, for example, in the dominant Mormon view that miracles are not divine interventions that violate the natural order, but rather result from the operation of laws with which we are currently unfamiliar<sup>8</sup>: there is underlying this view a commitment to the idea that the reign of natural law is universal, yet the notion of a thoroughly law-governed universe implies determinism (as Truman Madsen certainly recognized<sup>9</sup>).

The preference for a naturalistic view of miracles may seem doctrinally peripheral, and so perhaps its rejection justifiable given this conflict and the intuitive appeal of libertarianism. Of course, the general commitment to a law-governed universe appears in other places, as well, notably in explaining the need for atonement and in justifying the exclusion of some people from exaltation; still, the advocate of libertarianism could insist that there are specific laws mandating these results while denying that the reign of law is absolutely universal. Nevertheless, I believe there are even more fundamental (and so less excisable) elements of Mormon thought that press toward determinism: first, Mormonism's acceptance of divine foreknowledge of human behavior; second, its materialist ontology; and third, its denial of creation *ex nihil* and concomitant commitment to conservation principles.

*The Argument from Divine Foreknowledge*

Scripture explicitly describes Peter's denial of acquaintance with Christ (Mark 14:66-68) as an object of divine foreknowledge (v. 30). Whether or not God's foreknowledge can be analyzed as justified true belief (per the standard philosophical model), it seems reasonable to suppose that God's foreknowledge of Peter's denial entails at least that God believed, at the time foreknowledge of Peter's denial was announced ( $t_1$ ), that Peter would first deny Christ shortly before the cock first crowed ( $t_2$ ). Given that God believed, at  $t_1$ , that Peter would deny Christ at  $t_2$ , Peter's denial of Christ at  $t_2$  appears unavoidable:

- (i) Peter cannot falsify God's belief, because God cannot be wrong;
- (ii) Peter cannot change the fact that God held that particular belief at  $t_1$ , because Peter cannot change the past; and

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8. B. H. Roberts, *The Truth, The Way, The Life: An Elementary Treatise on Theology* (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1994), 60-61.

9. Madsen, *Eternal Man*, 66n.

(iii) Peter cannot change the fact that the being who held the belief at  $t_1$  was infallible.<sup>10</sup>

Failing to deny Christ would necessarily involve doing one of the impossible things enumerated in (i)-(iii); so given God's foreknowledge, it is impossible for Peter not to deny Christ.

Note that the argument is not that God's belief *makes* Peter deny Christ; the argument says nothing about what leads to Peter's denial, what makes it happen. What the argument does purport to show is that since God, who cannot be wrong, at  $t_1$  believed that Peter would deny Christ at  $t_2$ , and since Peter can neither falsify God's belief nor change the past, Peter cannot do other than as God has foreseen. Now there is nothing in this argument peculiar to Peter or his denial of Christ, and since God is commonly held to have foreknowledge of every action anybody performs, the conclusion is that if God exists then everything anybody does is fixed prior to their performance of that action.

In *The Consolation of Philosophy* Boethius champions the most promising line of defense against this argument by insisting that God is not within time; that God's cognitions, like God himself, are outside of time and so do not precede my actions; and that, since God's cognitions of my actions do not precede them, my actions are not fixed *prior* to my performance of them. Mormonism, however, places God firmly within time and so cannot avail itself of the Boethian resolution of the apparent contradiction between divine foreknowledge and human freedom.

The argument from divine foreknowledge requires only that God believe, at  $t_1$ , that Peter would deny Christ at  $t_2$ . The argument can be further clarified by juxtaposing it with another argument, that the truth, at  $t_1$ , of the proposition that Peter would deny Christ at  $t_2$  (which also seems to be implied by God's foreknowledge of Peter's denial), seems to entail the conclusion that, at  $t_2$ , Peter could not do otherwise. For *this* argument, however, the existence of God and divine foreknowledge is irrelevant. At  $t_1$  the proposition that Peter would deny Christ at  $t_2$  was true, whether or not it was foreknown by God or by anyone else.

However, this argument from the antecedent truth of propositions about the future to the fixity of the future appears to rest on a failure to appreciate the difference between hard and soft facts, anticipated by Ockham's distinction between "propositions about the present as regards both their wording and their subject matter" and "propositions ... about the present as regards their wording only and ... equivalently about the future, since their truth depends on the truth of propositions about the

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10. Compare Nelson Pike, "Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action," in John Fischer, ed., *God, Foreknowledge, and Freedom* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 57-73.

future."<sup>11</sup> An approximation (not completely rigorous) of the needed distinction between hard and soft facts can be constructed from Ockham's classification of propositions: roughly, facts about a given time  $t$ , that can be described using only propositions that do not depend for their truth on propositions about the future relative to  $t$ , are hard facts about  $t$ ; facts about  $t$ , that can only be described by using propositions that depend (at least in part) for their truth on propositions about the future (relative to  $t$ ), are soft facts about  $t$ .<sup>12</sup>

Returning to the argument from the past truth of propositions about the future to the fixity of the future, that it was true, at  $t_1$ , that Peter would deny Christ at  $t_2$ , appears to be a soft fact about  $t_1$ : the truth of the proposition describing this state of affairs, the proposition that the proposition that Peter would deny Christ at  $t_2$  was true at  $t_1$ , depends on the truth of the proposition that Peter *did* deny Christ at  $t_2$ , a proposition about a future time (relative to  $t_1$ ). Since the truth of the proposition, at  $t_1$ , about Peter's future denial of Christ is a soft fact about  $t_1$ , it seems that this fact (that the proposition was true) was, in some way, not quite fixed at  $t_1$ , and so Peter's action at  $t_2$  was not fixed at  $t_1$ , either.

In contrast, that God believed, at  $t_1$ , that Peter would deny Christ at  $t_2$ , appears to be a hard fact about  $t_1$ : the truth of the proposition that God *believed*, at  $t_1$ , that Peter would deny Christ at  $t_2$ , does not appear to depend on the truth of any proposition about the future relative to  $t_1$ ; in particular, the truth of this proposition describing God's belief does not depend on the fact that Peter *did* deny Christ at  $t_2$ . While the soft fact that the proposition describing Peter's denial at  $t_2$  was true at  $t_1$  does not render Peter's denial unavoidable, the hard fact that God believed, at  $t_1$ , that Peter would deny Christ at  $t_2$ , coupled with God's infallibility, appears to entail that Peter could not fail to deny Christ at  $t_2$ .

Were it successful, the argument from the antecedent truth of propositions to the fixity of the future would entail that it is impossible for Peter (or anybody else, for that matter) to do other than he does at any particular time: for any action (except an action occurring literally at the beginning of time) there was an earlier time at which it was true that that action would be performed when it was performed; given this, when the time for the performance of the action comes, it is irrevocably fixed by the antecedent truth of the proposition describing its occurrence. In an orthodox context, where a mistake on God's part is ruled out as a conceptual impossibility (in Nelson Pike's terms, God is *essentially* omniscient<sup>13</sup>),

11. William Ockham, *Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents*, tr. Marilyn McCord Adams and Norman Kretzmann (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), 46.

12. Compare Marilyn McCord Adams, "Is the Existence of God a 'Hard' Fact?" in Fischer, *God, Foreknowledge, and Freedom*, 75-76.

13. Pike, *Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action*, 58.

similar conclusions can be drawn from divine foreknowledge: given that God believes prior to every action that it will occur, and that God *cannot* be wrong, when the time for performing an action comes it is impossible for the actor to do otherwise. God's infallibility is a hard fact about  $t_1$ , the time at which he foreknows what Peter will do at  $t_2$ , and so Peter cannot at  $t_2$  change the inerrancy of God's foreknowledge.

The prevalent Mormon understanding of divine foreknowledge as a product of personal premortal acquaintance suggests a way of softening the conclusion of the argument from divine foreknowledge by questioning the status of God's infallibility. Within Mormon thought, divine foreknowledge assumes a naturalistic and empirical cast, being a knowledge acquired through millennia of prior acquaintance with us, as exemplified in James E. Talmage's characterization: "God's knowledge of spiritual and of human nature enables Him to conclude with certainty as to the actions of any of His children under given conditions"<sup>14</sup>; having had the opportunity to become acquainted with each of us during the course of our first estate, God is able to apply his knowledge "of spiritual and human nature" to predict our choices. Presumably both God's acquaintance with us, in particular, and his knowledge of spiritual and human nature, in general, are acquired through the same sorts of learning processes that we use. Accordingly, God's foreknowledge has merely empirical certainty, rather than the strict logical infallibility of more orthodox creeds: given God's prior research, we and God have every reason to be confident in the correctness of his predictions, not because he *could* not *conceivably* be wrong but simply because he has done his homework well enough that we (and he) are quite sure he *will* not be.

Returning to the initial three-step argument from God's foreknowledge with which this section began, the Mormon explanation of divine foreknowledge downgrades propositions (i) and (iii), that Peter cannot falsify God's belief and that he cannot render God fallible, from the level of logical truths to merely empirical certitudes. Accordingly, it is at least conceivable that Peter could render God fallible and falsify God's earlier prediction of betrayal.

However, this softening of the conclusion of the argument from divine foreknowledge comes at a price: the Mormon explanation apparently presupposes determinism, because it depends on there being laws of spiritual and human nature that describe how individuals with certain characteristics will behave in given situations.

Some prominent thinkers in the Mormon tradition astute enough to recognize the apparent threat posed to human freedom by divine foreknowledge have advocated denial of the latter—for example, Talmage's

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14. James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1984), 173.

contemporaries, church historian J. M. Sjodahl<sup>15</sup> and B. H. Roberts.<sup>16</sup> Paralleling his pious redefinitional efforts to salvage “omnipotent” as an accurate characterization of the Mormon God, Roberts suggests that we understand God to be omniscient in the sense that he knows all that is known, which includes all that is or has been, but that the future, which as yet is not (and so is not yet determinate), is not known by God or anybody else until it unfolds and so becomes fixed; at which point God will know it. More recently Roberts’s views have received a sympathetic airing by Blake Ostler.<sup>17</sup>

But denial of God’s foreknowledge appears to be the exception, and with good reason: scriptural references to specific items of divine foreknowledge aside, such knowledge is also presupposed by (other) central Mormon doctrines. According to Joseph Smith, just as God knew, sanctified, and ordained the biblical prophet Jeremiah before he was conceived (Jer. 1:4-5), so too the council in heaven witnessed the appointment, or foreordination, particularly of Jesus as our savior and more generally of every individual who was to play a role in the achievement of God’s aims here on this earth.<sup>18</sup> Presumably, God appoints those he does because “the Lord in his wisdom,” acquired through ages of observation, knows that the person so ordained has “the talents and capacities” to perform the requisite task(s).<sup>19</sup> Regarding Jesus Christ, Lorenzo Snow explicitly taught that God the Father knew that he could trust Jesus to fulfill his mission because the Father had observed his course for thousands of years prior to his birth.<sup>20</sup> The doctrine of foreordination, so explained, requires substantial divine foreknowledge—achieved through a combination of personal acquaintance with particular individuals and a knowledge of general laws according to which people behave and develop.

The questions raised by the doctrine of foreordination may be posed again by Mormon soteriology. On one reading, this life is a time of testing to determine our suitability for membership in the various kingdoms of the hereafter. Essentially this is a later iteration of foreordination: those whose conduct during the course of their entire existence prior to judgment shows them to be capable of shouldering the burdens of exaltation (that is, allows us to predict their success as gods) are to be appointed

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15. Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 442.

16. Roberts, *The Truth, The Way, The Life*, 477-78.

17. Blake Ostler, “The Mormon Concept of God,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17 (Summer 1984): 77-79.

18. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976), 365.

19. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 290.

20. Lorenzo Snow, *The Teachings of Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984), 93.

thereto. As such, this idea carries the same deterministic implications as the doctrine of foreordination.

### *The Argument from Materialism*

According to Mormon scripture, “[t]here is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes; We cannot see it; but when our bodies are purified we shall see that it is all matter” (D&C 131:7-8). The apparent intent of this passage is to deny the existence of *any* immaterial substances; accordingly, intelligence (or intelligences; see below) too must be material, perhaps being composed of the same sort of matter as spirits. Presumably, material intelligence(s) and spirits operate according to principles as deterministic as those governing our physical bodies, and so a deterministic view of human behavior appears inevitable.

Richard Price, an early modern rationalist and libertarian, accused determinists of confusing the operation of physical cause with the influence of a moral reason, thereby committing themselves to the absurdity that “*an abstract notion can strike a ball*”<sup>21</sup>; in arguing from Mormonism’s materialism to determinism, it might seem that I have made just this mistake. Yet it is certainly possible to be a determinist without confusing ideas and physical processes, insisting only that whatever reasoning a person engages in, were that same person placed in identical circumstances (having the same beliefs, values, attitudes, etc., and responding to an indistinguishable physical situation), the reasoning would yield the same outcome. Going farther (and more directly to the complaint currently under consideration), even accepting that mental processes presuppose material processes on which to supervene, determinism can still be accepted without also accepting the absurdity of direct interaction between abstract notions and billiard balls: the argument from materialism only requires that the history of deliberation and that of causally interacting matter can only vary concomitantly; the argument from materialism does not require that causal, material processes *produce* deliberation.

In a related vein, the inference from materialistic metaphysics to determinism need not depend on any claims regarding the reducibility of mental phenomena and their relations to causally related states of material entities. The argument from materialism (understood as a thesis about the nature of all that exists, and not about the reducibility of mental phenomena to physical) to determinism rests on the proposition that if all

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21. Richard Price and Joseph Priestley, *A Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism, and Philosophical Necessity, in a Correspondence Between Dr. Price and Dr. Priestley* (London: J. Johnson and T. Cadell, 1778), 140.

of the material circumstances surrounding the occurrence of some mental happening (thinking a thought, feeling a feeling, making a choice) were to be duplicated, then things would transpire in the same way. This can be defended without appeal to any reducibility thesis: it seems reasonable to suppose that if there are no immaterial entities, then cognitive operations, if they are not equivalent to material processes, at least could not occur except in conjunction with accompanying material processes; whether or not the former are reducible to the latter, there can be no variation in the one without some variation in the other.

While I do not know of its having been offered in support of determinism, the argument from materialist ontology to determinism has been tacitly endorsed by one writer who insists that the scriptural passage denying the existence of immaterial substances must be reinterpreted to avoid the deterministic conclusion.<sup>22</sup> Nolan's own process-philosophy reinterpretation of Mormonism's materialism as recognition of the ontological primacy of change over substance in matters spiritual (as well as physical) does not undermine the argument for determinism: whether change or matter is the fundamental ontological reality, there is no reason for a Mormon to think that the processes by which change occurs in spiritual affairs are any less deterministic than those occurring in the physical world appear to be.

Also, construing Mormonism's materialism in such a way as to exempt the matter of which spirits and intelligences are composed from the laws governing the operation of grosser, physical matter would again conflict with Mormonism's naturalistic view of miracles (discussed above as the principal manifestation of Mormonism's commitment to the universal reign of law). Almost without exception, Mormon thinkers have characterized miracles (divine interventions into earthly affairs) as executed in accordance with, rather than in violation of, natural laws—perhaps natural laws we do not yet know, but natural laws, nonetheless. To affirm that spiritual matter is affected by principles other than those which determine the course of physical matter would render the interaction of spirit and body a miracle in the sense in which Mormon thinkers commonly deny that miracles happen.

Theoretical advances that have led physicists to reformulate deterministic causal laws as statements of high statistical probability do not affect what I see as essential: according to Mormonism, human thoughts and actions are as fully prefigured prior to their occurrence as are any other observable events; whatever freedom human beings have does not exempt them from being as regular in their development as the rest of na-

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22. Max Nolan, "Materialism and the Mormon Faith," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 22 (Winter 1989): 62-75.

ture. Two caveats are in order, however. First, if spirit matter, like the physical matter with which we are more familiar, behaves deterministically on observable (comparatively macro) levels, then the randomness recognized by quantum mechanics does not affect the deterministic inference from Mormonism's materialist ontology. However, scriptural characterization of spirit as *finer* matter (D&C 131:7) might be taken to support the conclusion that its behavior, even on larger scales, resembles that of the random particles of quantum mechanics. To have one's actions determined by random events of the sort described by quantum mechanics, however, seems to be no more free (and quite possibly less free) than having those actions determined by causal processes.

Which leads to the second caveat. Quantum mechanics describes the behavior of certain particles as random. If, however, what quantum mechanics characterizes as randomness is some sort of non-random self-determination by those particles, or if particles of spirit matter exhibit such a capacity for non-random self-determination (Orson Pratt suggested that *all* matter is composed of particles having such a capacity<sup>23</sup>), that *would* undermine this argument from Mormonism's materialism; the argument based on God's foreknowledge, however, would remain.

### *The Argument from Conservation*

One of the most distinctive manifestations of Mormon hostility to the notion of miracles as violations of the natural order is Mormonism's strident rejection of creation *ex nihil* (a rejection absent from Joseph Smith's earlier creation narrative in the book of Moses but incorporated into the Mormon canon by the later account in the book of Abraham [3:24]). Undergirding this rejection is an unbending commitment to the principle that the stuff from which things are made (call it matter [D&C 131:7-8] or element [D&C 93:33] or materials [Abr. 3:24]) is conserved through all changes. In the King Follett Discourse Joseph Smith greatly amplified the modest scriptural declaration that "the elements are eternal" (D&C 93:33), proclaiming

that God Himself had materials to organize the world out of chaos—chaotic matter—which is element and in which dwells all the glory. Element had an existence from the time He had. The pure principles of element are principles that can never be destroyed. They may be organized and reorganized, but not destroyed. Nothing can be destroyed. They never can have a beginning or an ending; they exist eternally.<sup>24</sup>

23. *The Essential Orson Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 187.

24. Stan Larson, "The King Follett Discourse: A Newly Amalgamated Text," *BYU Studies* 18 (Winter 1978): 203.

Mormon apologists consistently refer to this Newtonian sounding conservation principle when seeking to demonstrate the superior rationality of the Mormon view of creation as against the foolish superstitions of their sectarian rivals.<sup>25</sup>

While it seems that in its earliest formulations this principle of conservation was focused primarily if not exclusively on matter, it has been readily expanded to incorporate the (even more explicitly and specifically Newtonian) principle of conservation of force; according to Roberts, for example, "[t]o this statement in respect of the uncreatability and indestructibility of matter there must be added its necessary corollary, the conservation of, or the persistence in undiminished entirety the sum of force or energy throughout the universe."<sup>26</sup> Roberts, for one, made short work of reconciling Einstein's theory of the interchangeability of mass and energy with the doctrinal principle of conservation: after all, Einstein never said matter was annihilable; at most (assuming, for the moment, that matter and mass are equivalent), he said that matter could be converted into energy, but this conversion is again a form of conservation. "'The elements are eternal'—when you get to them."<sup>27</sup>

Yet this deeply rooted commitment to conservation apparently conflicts with libertarian freedom, which seems to involve the introduction of *new* force into the universe. Hence, as Kant saw, the libertarian free will is a first, uncaused cause of the sort apparently precluded by Mormon denial of the possibility of creation *ex nihilo* (see the Third Antinomy in Kant's first *Critique*). Roberts characterized free will as a *vera causa*<sup>28</sup> and its exercise as a fact independent of all that surrounds or precedes it,<sup>29</sup> apparently unaware of any potential for conflict between his dearly held conservation principles and his understanding of the nature of human agency.

It might be possible to avoid this conflict by hypothesizing that exercises of free will introduce pairs of compensating forces; likewise, it could be supposed that the exercise of free will uses ambient mass-energy to produce those paired forces, thereby avoiding the even more problematic specter of absolute creation of mass energy. Perhaps the apparent conflict between libertarian conceptions of free will and principles of conservation can be resolved by such ad hoc measures, and so this apparent difficulty might not be fatal to Mormon libertarianism, but the tension between libertarian thought and a strong commitment to conservation principles cannot be denied.

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25. See, e.g., *The Essential Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 193; *The Essential Orson Pratt*, 29-30; McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 169.

26. Roberts, *The Truth, The Way, The Life*, 38.

27. *Ibid.*, 41.

28. *Ibid.*, 72.

29. *Ibid.*, 32.

## AGAINST DETERMINISM

The arguments in favor of determinism that can be developed out of Mormon doctrine have not been extensively discussed by recognized Mormon thinkers, either sympathetically or critically; instead, the almost universal rejection of determinism (among the minority who consider the issue) has been based on the apparent incompatibility of it with other, more clearly supported, doctrines, principally the rejection of predestination and the assertion that we are free agents.

*Predestinationism and Determinism*

Mormons commonly distinguish predestination from foreordination, accepting the latter but denying the former. Predestinationism is "the false doctrine that from all eternity God has ordered whatever comes to pass," according to which some "are irrevocably chosen for salvation, others for damnation."<sup>30</sup> To be foreordained to some calling, in contrast, is to have been selected by God before coming to this earth to perform certain tasks and/or play certain roles, presumably because "the Lord in his wisdom" knows that the person so ordained has "the talents and capacities" to perform the requisite task(s).<sup>31</sup> Determinism seems to entail predestinationism, and so is rejected.

Coupled with a doctrine of divine creation *ex nihil*, determinism would entail predestinationism: if God established all initial conditions, and the universe unfolded in a deterministic way, God would dictate (directly or indirectly) everything that comes to pass. The Mormon doctrine of creation as organization from preexistent materials, by itself, might still allow the argument from determinism to predestinationism via God's organizational role. But the connection between determinism and predestinationism can be severed by a suitable interpretation of the doctrine of uncreated intelligence.

In his King Follett Discourse, Joseph Smith taught that "the mind of man - the immortal part - is as immortal as, and is coequal with, God Himself."<sup>32</sup> Commonly, this teaching is correlated with the scriptural declaration that "[m]an was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be" (D&C 93:29), and subsequent generations of doctrinal expositors have employed the term "intelligence" to refer to that part of a person that is un-

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30. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 588.

31. *Ibid.*, 290.

32. Larson, "The King Follett Discourse," 203.

created and the term "spirit" to refer to the created part.<sup>33</sup>

Such use of "intelligence" has some scriptural foundation (D&C 93:29; Abr. 3:21-22), but scriptural usage of the terms "intelligence" and "spirit" does not consistently reflect the distinction that has become common since Smith's time; for example, one passage describes spirits as beginningless and endless (Abr. 3:18), while another seems to characterize what contemporary usage would label spirits as intelligences (Abr. 3:21-22). The King Follett Discourse exhibits similar ambiguity, equating "the mind of man," that part that "is as immortal as, and coequal with, God Himself," with the immortal spirit<sup>34</sup>, but also characterizing Adam's spirit as having been "created before" its insertion into Adam's physical body.<sup>35</sup> Scriptural sources also seem to disagree about whether this uncreated something is single, perhaps common to all humankind (as suggested by D&C 93:29), or whether there are many uncreated things (suggested by Abr. 3:18). From this confusion has emerged a general consensus that something of humanity predates any creative intervention by God, but the nature of this uncreated something has been a subject of disagreement.

Bruce R. McConkie offered an interpretation that exemplifies the single uncreated thing view. According to McConkie, intelligence is a (presumably undifferentiated) mass of stuff out of which individual spirits are organized.<sup>36</sup> On McConkie's view the argument from determinism to predestinationism could be made.

B. H. Roberts defended what appears to be the most widely accepted version of the many uncreated intelligences interpretation. According to Roberts, intelligences are unoriginated, discrete entities that are housed in spirits much as spirits are housed in physical bodies.<sup>37</sup> At a minimum, intelligences must possess self-consciousness, "the power to distinguish himself from other things"—the "me" from the "not me"; the power deliberately to compare, "by which he sets over one thing against another"; and the "power of choosing one thing instead of another."<sup>38</sup> Of several contending interpretations of this doctrine, only Roberts's view has been presented and defended with some measure of church sanction. Roberts included his interpretation in a church-published manual of in-

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33. See, e.g., B. H. Roberts's note, carried over from the report of the sermon in the seven-volume *History of the Church* to the *Teachings* report; Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 350.

34. Larson, "The King Follett Discourse," 203.

35. *Ibid.*

36. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 84, 387.

37. B. H. Roberts, *A Scrap Book* (Provo, UT: Lynn Pulsipher, 1991), 2:26-28.

38. *Ibid.*, 26.

struction he authored<sup>39</sup>; much later Roberts's view was defended by Truman Madsen<sup>40</sup> in another church-sponsored publication,<sup>41</sup> and Roberts himself again defended his view in an article reviewed and approved by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve for publication in a church journal.<sup>42</sup>

Assuming, as it seems reasonable to do, that individual intelligences are not identical when God first intervenes in their existence, the coupling of determinism with Roberts's interpretation of the doctrine of uncreated intelligence implies that while the fate of an individual may be fixed long before it is earned or awarded, and so people may be, in some sense, predestined to salvation or damnation, God does not do the predestinating. (Apart from helping to render acceptance of determinism consistent with longstanding Mormon doctrinal commitments, this understanding of what the Mormon denial of predestination amounts to will figure prominently in the reconciliation of determinism and personal responsibility offered below.) In providing spirits and bodies to unoriginated intelligences, God makes possible salvation or damnation, as those are understood by Mormonism, but God does *not* dictate that this person will be saved and that person not. Accordingly, given this interpretation of the doctrine of uncreated intelligence, the inference from determinism to predestinationism collapses; nevertheless, even Roberts, champion though he was of the relevant interpretation of the doctrine of intelligences, seems to have been unaware of this, decrying deterministic dogmas in science (and theology) as "amounting almost to the doctrine of absolute predestination."<sup>43</sup>

Ostler's work exhibits a related confusion. Ostler complains that if the future were fixed prayer would be an absurdity because God, like us, would be unable to change it.<sup>44</sup> Determinism is often confused with what might be characterized as fatalism, the view that nothing we do can change the future; but according to determinism, the future is fixed not in spite of what we or God might do but, rather, *because* of what we and God have done and will do. Turning specifically to the case of prayer, the future God foresees may well be shaped by God's foreseen response to our foreseen prayer; the prayer then is not an irrelevant sideshow but rather an essential causal nexus significantly shaping the future.

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39. B. H. Roberts, *Seventy's Yearbook* 4 (Orem, UT: Grandin Book Co., 1994): Lessons I-III.

40. Madsen, *Eternal Man*, 24-25.

41. *Ibid.*, vi-vii.

42. Roberts, *A Scrap Book*, 2:21.

43. *Ibid.*, 175.

44. Ostler, "The Mormon Concept of God," 79.

*Free Agency*

Nothing in the Mormon conception of man is more in evidence or relates more importantly to the total theological structure than the affirmation of the freedom of the will. Nothing is permitted to compromise that freedom as the essential meaning of personality, whether human or divine, and at every turn of Mormon theological discussion the fact of moral freedom and its implied moral responsibility must be met and accounted for.<sup>45</sup>

Accordingly, unless determinism can coexist with free agency (the Mormon version of free will), determinism must go. For present purposes it will be useful to separate two issues: first, the compatibility of determinism with the specifics of the doctrine of free agency; second, in light of the clear connection Mormon thought makes between that doctrine and moral responsibility, the compatibility of determinism with such responsibility. I will treat the second in the next section.

*The Ability to Choose.* The power to deliberate, evaluate, and choose, identified by Roberts as essential to uncreated intelligences,<sup>46</sup> is the most likely aspect of free agency to be a sticking point for the propounder of determinism. At first blush, it may appear that if the outcomes of our deliberations, our decisions and actions, are fixed before we even begin to consider our alternatives then we are not really deliberating (or choosing). However, on closer examination this initial presumption itself becomes difficult to sustain.

Whether or not determinism is true, we still, in Kant's phrase, must act under the idea of freedom.<sup>47</sup> Consider Christine Korsgaard's illustration:

The afternoon stretches before me, and I must decide whether to work or to play. Suppose first that *you can predict* which one I am going to do. That has no effect on me at all: I must still decide what to do. I am tempted to play but worried about work, and I must decide the case on its merits. Suppose next *I believe that you can predict* which one I'm going to do. ... What then? I am tempted by play but worried about work, and I must decide the case on its merits.

... Having discovered that my conduct is predictable, will I now sit quietly in my chair, waiting to see what I will do? Then I will not do anything but sit quietly in my chair. ...

... Of course it *can* happen, in a specific kind of case, that knowing the sort of thing I am usually determined to do diminishes my freedom. If I see that I often give in to temptation, I might become discouraged, and fight

45. McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of Mormonism*, 77.

46. Roberts, *A Scrap Book*, 2:26.

47. Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, tr. by James W. Ellington, 3rd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981), 50/448.

against it even less hard. But there is no reason to think that this kind of discouragement would be the *general* result. ... Or if there is, it must come from some pessimistic philosophy of human nature, not from [determinism].<sup>48</sup>

Note, too, that determinism does not imply the persistence of past patterns into the future, because in the deterministic unfolding of the universe things do change. In fact, the prospect of old patterns continuing into the future can itself precipitate change; “[i]f predictions can warn us when our self-control is about to fail, then they are far more likely to increase that self-control than to diminish it” by putting us on our guard.<sup>49</sup>

The truth of determinism does not change what deliberation looks and feels like from the point of view of the person trying to decide what to do; it does not provide any direction to the deliberation (by itself it provides no reason for doing one thing rather than another); and it does not obviate the need to deliberate before acting (the agent’s performance of her acts still depends on her having deliberated and decided as she did).

Phenomenologically, determinism and the ability to choose do not conflict; nor need they conflict metaphysically. Commenting on free agency, Roberts declares “that men possess the POWER of their own free will to accomplish things because THEY WILL to do them,”<sup>50</sup> and that “Man is not a mere transmitter, or quotient of forces external to himself.”<sup>51</sup> The first of these seems equivalent to Hume’s description of liberty as “a power of acting or not acting, according to the determinations of the will,”<sup>52</sup> and as such certainly implies no conflict with determinism. Indeed, some of Roberts’s descriptions of human freedom of choice so closely parallel those of compatibilists that had Roberts not elsewhere insisted that each decision a person makes is “a simple fact independent of all the facts which precede or surround it,”<sup>53</sup> we might be left wondering if he might simply have been confused about the compatibility of freedom, as he understood it, with determinism.

Roberts’s insistence that we are not mere transmitters of external forces seems easy to reconcile to a deterministic interpretation of Mormon doctrine<sup>54</sup>: after all, if individual intelligent beings have no begin-

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48. Christine M. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 95-96.

49. *Ibid.*, 96.

50. Roberts, *A Scrap Book*, 2:175.

51. *Ibid.*, 177.

52. David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

53. Roberts, *The Way, The Truth, The Life*, 32.

54. More elaborate consideration of a related line of objection may be found in chapter 2 of my dissertation, “An Essay in Philosophical Mormon Theology.”

ning, then it would seem that they are, simply in virtue of that fact, something more than transmitters of external forces, whether or not they operate deterministically. Although individuals may be affected by and transmit some external forces, since "man never has been totally a product,"<sup>55</sup> even if we operate deterministically we have always had something more to contribute to the network of causes and effects than that which we have received from outside influences.

From the standpoint of Mormon metaphysics, the history of a person's practical development can be told in two distinct ways, neither of which must be regarded as superfluous. By way of illustration, assume, for the moment, that Peter's denial of Christ was motivated by fear of suffering a fate similar to Christ's. In this case, the deliberations which led Peter to conclude that his survival would be threatened if his connection to Christ became known, as well as his decision to safeguard himself rather than acknowledge his discipleship, doubtless were preceded and accompanied by deterministic processes occurring within Peter's material intelligence; further, the deliberation and decision could not have occurred without those deterministic processes; but likewise there could have been no such processes without the deliberation and the decision. Peter has been deliberating and choosing, and his material intelligence has been developing along its deterministic path, forever; neither the deterministic processes occurring within the material intelligence nor the self-conscious development of the agent could be without the other. The fact that there are two histories (the causal history and the associated deliberative history) to be told does not make the description of Peter's denial as a result of deliberation and decision any the less accurate or relevant, and there is no apparent reason to assign explanatory priority to one rather than the other. In short, determinism itself denies neither the existence nor the relevance of the cognitive content of deliberation.

*Other Elements of Free Agency.* As suggested above, freedom of choice should be seen as part but not all of free agency. Accountability must be part of any complete characterization of agency (for which, see below), but there are a couple of other elements of agency having no apparent conflict with determinism. I will set these out, here, without attempting to argue explicitly for their compatibility with determinism.

While other narratives and doctrines can be profitably mined for what they might have to tell us about the doctrine of free agency,<sup>56</sup> an account of agency that suffices for present purposes can be extracted from consideration of events related by scripture as having transpired in the

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55. Madsen, *Eternal Man*, 65.

56. I cast a broader analytical net in chapter 2 of "An Essay in Philosophical Mormon Theology." In addition to the Garden of Eden story, that of the War in Heaven also figured prominently in my wider investigation.

Garden of Eden, where, according to modern revelation, God gave unto us our agency (Moses 7:32). The scripture describing agency as a gift given in the garden suggests linkage between agency and knowledge: "I [God] gave unto them their knowledge, in the day I created them; and in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency" (Moses 7:32). While the agency-conferring knowledge could be whatever awareness of good and evil they gained in consequence of eating forbidden fruit (see, e.g., Gen. 3:7), I think the more promising candidate knowledge is God's initial instruction of Adam and Eve regarding the commandment not to partake. When God forbade partaking of the fruit, he informed Adam of the consequence of doing so. The Joseph Smith translation, in particular, suggests that in doing so God was making Adam a responsible agent: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, *nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee; but, remember that I forbid it, for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die*" (Moses 3:17; Joseph Smith's retranslation added the italicized portion to Gen. 2:17). Giving Adam knowledge of the consequences of his actions was part of making him an agent.

I think the choice to which Adam was put by this knowledge should be recognized as a further component of free agency—in fact, the final component necessary for present purposes. According to Nephi, "men are free ... to choose liberty and eternal life ... or to choose captivity and death" (2 Ne. 2:27). Mormon commentators commonly recognize two forms of death to which Adam and Eve became subject through transgression: first, physical death; second, spiritual death, understood as separation from God, which Adam and Eve suffered immediately (when they were driven from the garden, where they stood in the presence of God and conversed with him face to face [*Lectures on Faith* 2:18]). By their response to God's requirement, Adam and Eve were able to determine the nature (intimate or remote) of their relationship with God; indeed, but for the continued availability of prayer, to which God would at times respond, their choice would have carried with it the possibility of destroying that relationship altogether.

### *Agency and Accountability*

Agency connotes, *inter alia*, accountability to God for the exercise of that freedom (see, for example, D&C 93:31, 101:78). Accordingly, even if other aspects of agency can be reconciled with determinism, within a Mormon framework this reconciliation cannot be purchased at the cost of defining agency, or the freedom of choice that is part thereof, as something incompatible with moral responsibility. While this is not true of every component of free agency, serious questions about the possibility of

responsibility *are* raised by the deterministic account of freedom given above. Articulation of both the questions and my responses can be facilitated by considering Truman Madsen's proposed Mormon reconciliation of determinism and accountability.

Madsen, a proponent of deterministic interpretation of Mormon doctrine, maintains that the combination of determinism with the doctrine of uncreated individual intelligences allows Mormonism to reconcile determinism with moral responsibility. As Madsen observes, philosophical discussions about determinism generally assume a thesis denied by this deterministic doctrine of free agency, viz., that people have a beginning over which they have no control.<sup>57</sup> Drawing on this observation, Madsen contends that what he characterizes as the Gordian knot embodied in the venerable dialectic between traditional determinist and indeterminist views "is cut not by indeterminism, but by *self-determination*. Cause-effect relationships, apparently, are universal. But man is, and always has been, one of the unmoved movers, one of the originating causes in the network."<sup>58</sup>

In his analysis of the impact of the doctrine of unoriginated individuals on the debate about determinism, Madsen appears to have in mind incompatibilist lines of argument like Peter van Inwagen's consequence argument, helpfully summarized by John Fischer as follows:

Causal determinism is the claim that a complete statement of the laws of nature and a complete description of the facts about the world at some time  $t_0$  together entail every fact about the world after  $t_0$ . If determinism is true, then all of our choices and actions are a *consequence* of the laws of nature and events in the distant past. But no one ever has, or ever had, any choice about what the facts of the world were at some time  $t_0$  in the very remote past. Therefore, if determinism is true, then it follows that no one has, or ever had, any choice about any fact about the world after time  $t_0$ —that is, no one has, or ever had, any ability to do, or to choose, otherwise.<sup>59</sup>

If determinism is true, so the argument goes, everything that happens now, including the decisions we make, are unavoidable consequences of things beyond one's control—viz., the laws of nature and the past, the way the universe was before one's birth—so everything that happens now is beyond one's control.

As it stands, the argument fails against the deterministic doctrine of free agency described above because that doctrine contradicts the

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57. Madsen, *Eternal Man*, 65.

58. *Ibid.*, 66n; compare Robson, "Foundations of Freedom in Mormon Thought."

59. John Fischer and Mark Ravizza, eds., *Perspectives on Moral Responsibility* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 8-9.

premise that there was a time in the past, recent or remote, when any individual had no choice, and so no responsibility, about what the facts of the world were. Since intelligences are uncreated, each individual has always been able to influence the course of events; nobody is entirely a product of past circumstances over which she had no control; "man never has been totally a product."<sup>60</sup>

However, the Madsenian response just given to the consequence argument seems to be an inadequate accommodation of the conviction that drives that argument. To understand why, consider Gary Watson's analysis of a fundamental libertarian predicament. As Watson describes it, libertarianism incorporates the principle "that to be responsible for anything, one must be responsible for (some of) what produces it" (the contrapositive of the principle formalized in the rule of inference on which van Inwagen's argument relies<sup>61</sup>); libertarianism combines this principle with the view that good people and bad people are made by their responses to formative circumstances, rather than by those formative circumstances themselves—i.e., that formative (environmental) influences cannot make a person a bad person (or a good person) without that person's consent.<sup>62</sup> The Madsenian response to the consequence argument seems to grant both of these elements, so Watson's subsequent commentary can be applied to Madsen's response. Watson goes on to inquire about the source of the relevant consent:

If we think of agents as consenting to this or that *because* they are (or have?) selves of a certain character, then it looks as though they are responsible for so consenting only if they are responsible for the self in which that consent is rooted. To establish this in each case, we have to trace the character of the self to earlier acts of consent. This enterprise seems hopeless, since the trace continues interminably or leads to a self to which the individual did not consent. The libertarian seems committed, then, to bearing the unbearable burden of showing how we can be responsible for ourselves.<sup>63</sup>

Even though the tracing to which Watson refers would never terminate (on Madsen's view) with "a self to which the individual did not consent" but would instead be interminable, this lack of termination does not seem to meet the "unbearable burden" of explaining our responsibility for ourselves. As Madsen himself observes elsewhere, individual dif-

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60. Madsen, *Eternal Man*, 65.

61. Peter van Inwagen, "The Incompatibility of Responsibility and Determinism," reprinted in John Fischer, ed., *Moral Responsibility* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 244.

62. Gary Watson, "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil: Variations on a Strawsonian Theme," reprinted in Fischer, *Perspectives on Moral Responsibility*, 143.

63. *Ibid.*

ferences are not created either by God or by individuals themselves, but are always present.<sup>64</sup> There must always have been some difference between a good person and a bad, which has led and continues to lead to different kinds of choices; according to the principle underlying the consequence argument, individuals are responsible for these choices only if they are responsible for that differentiation; and responsibility for these originless features seems as little attributable to the individual possessing them as any characteristic with which an individual might have been endowed when she was brought into being by either God or nature. If (as it seems only reasonable to claim) a person is not responsible for the originless features which make her respond to her formative circumstances in such a way as to become good or bad, then the consequence argument applies with full force: assuming she is not responsible for her formative circumstances, she cannot be responsible for those choices, nor for her resultant character, at any point along the way. Recognizing that Mormonism denies that our existence originates from circumstances over which we have no control does not, as Madsen maintains, render libertarian arguments such as the consequence argument irrelevant to deterministically interpreted Mormon doctrine.

The compatibilist articulation of freedom to choose made in the previous section (beginningless exercise of deliberative choice coordinate with beginningless causal processes occurring within a material intelligence) faces this very challenge: granted it may show that the process and outcome of deliberation are not by-products of causal processes occurring outside of the agent, but absent responsibility for some set of initial conditions it does not show that the agent is therefore responsible for those outcomes.

A particular view of the nature of moral responsibility underlies consequence arguments like the one I just made against Madsen (and the compatibilist articulation of freedom to choose put forward above). According to this view of the nature of moral responsibility, a person is responsible for an action just in case the action's ultimate source is the person herself. Yet if such is our understanding of responsibility, it would appear that nobody can ever be responsible for anything: to the extent that determinism is true, whether our existence has a beginning or not our actions are products of causal series extending either to a distant past over which the person performing the action had no control, or to an uncreated essence for which, again, the person cannot be held responsible; to the extent that determinism is false, actions cannot be traced to any source (actions might be traced to volitions, but if a volition has no further source it would be a mistake to ascribe the volition, and so the ac-

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64. Madsen, *Eternal Man*, 57.

tion, to the person). The only way we *could* be responsible, if we accept the model of responsibility under consideration, would be to create our (at least somewhat) deterministic selves.

This model treats the issue of a person's responsibility for a given action as a feature of the person to whom it is ascribed. A person is or is not responsible for a given action, whether or not we are aware of this fact, and when we ascribe responsibility to a person we do so because we believe that, as a matter of fact, independent of our ascription, she is responsible. Religious discourse commonly characterizes human responsibility in terms of accountability to God; Mormonism, in particular, characterizes the stages of our existence as estates granted by God and our earthly responsibilities as stewardships, suggesting an alternative understanding of responsibility that differs in two fundamental (and related) ways.

First, this new paradigm inverts the relation between attributions of responsibility and purported facts about responsibility: when I hold another responsible, I am not making a judgment whose truth value depends on whether or not she is, in fact, responsible; rather, I am *making* her responsible, creating the fact of her responsibility. This does not mean that my perceptions of her factual situation play no role in my determination of whether or not to hold her responsible, but only that her responsibility, prior to my determination to hold her responsible, is not a part of that situation. Second, under this new paradigm, responsibility is relational: a person is not simply responsible, but responsible *to* the individual(s) who hold her responsible. I may be holding myself responsible, in which case I am responsible to myself, but I am still responsible *to* somebody, rather than simply responsible.

I believe that the exposition of the Mormon doctrine of free agency offered above comports well with an account of responsibility that follows the lines just indicated. Central to agency, as set forth above, is a set of expectations that God informs us that he has of us and from our (dis)satisfaction of which momentous consequences follow: the nature of our future relationship with God (indeed, whether or not we will have an interpersonal relationship with him) is determined by whether or not we meet those expectations. I propose that to be responsible to God, to be held responsible by him, is just for him to have such (consequence-laden) expectations of us.

Further, while to this point discussion has focused upon our relationship and concomitant responsibility to God in particular, what has just been proposed with regard to God readily allows generalization. Free agency has been explained as follows: *to be a free agent is to be possessed of a deterministically operative power of self-determination; to have received intuitively endorsed but contested instruction to do some things and avoid others;*

*and to have the ability, by choosing to obey or disobey the admonitions one has received, the nature of one's future relationship with God. This is what it means to be a free agent with respect to God. Generalizing this explanation to what it is to be a free agent with regard to any individual, we have the following: to be a free agent with respect to a particular individual is to be possessed of a deterministically operative power of self-determination; to have been instructed by that individual to do or not do certain things; and to have the ability to determine, by choosing to obey or disobey the admonitions received by that individual, the nature of one's future relationship with her. Having the relevant expectations held of us by her, in turn, makes us responsible to her, and to be a free agent with regard to a particular individual is just to be responsible to her.*

The expectations held of those we hold responsible differ from what may be termed purely predictive expectation, most obviously in the kinds of emotive responses we have to frustrations of the expectations we have of people we hold responsible. I may be frustrated if my car does not start the day after I pick it up from the shop, but my reactions to the mechanic who said she had fixed it will be of a different sort. Moral responsibility, in particular, is to be distinguished from more generic forms of responsibility by the content of the relevant expectations. To be morally responsible is to be expected to behave morally (perhaps by ourselves; we do, after all, expect things of ourselves and rest our self-perception on conformity to those expectations). Further specification of the nature and source of the expectations peculiar to moral responsibility could be influenced by the choice of a particular moral theory (Kant's, say; or a virtue ethics or utilitarian system); in this essay I would rather avoid such entanglements.

Determinism does not make it impossible to hold the relevant expectations of one another; nor does it, in general, make the holding of those expectations irrational by rendering their fulfillment impossible. The truth of determinism does mean that whether or not those expectations would be held or fulfilled was (more or less, given caveats about quantum mechanics) determined prior to the event, and so it may mean that in certain cases expectations could not have been fulfilled, but this does not provide a general argument for the inevitability of the frustration of our expectations. *Determinism tells me that whatever I do, I was determined to do; it does not tell me what it is that I shall do. Likewise, determinism tells me that whatever fate my expectations meet, that was determined; but it does not tell me what that fate will be and so it does not tell me whether to hold a given expectation.* In short, on this understanding of the nature of responsibility, determinism does not seem to pose any threat to responsibility.

However, this interpretation of responsibility readily admits the formulation of a lingering element of libertarian unease about determinism:

it might be thought that the difference in the kinds of expectations we have of people and of things can be justified only if people have a special, indeterministic sort of freedom that sets them apart from things. Yet if the unique value accompanying the expectations manifested in attributions of responsibility needs any justification, I do not see how denying determinism could provide it. To me, it seems that the relevant difference between people and things is that people can deliberate about what to do, can think about and weigh outcomes, make decisions, and act accordingly; whether or not history determines the outcome of that deliberation does not matter.

More generally, we place great value on interpersonal relationships characterized by mutual attributions of responsibility. We value social interaction incorporating such mutual attributions; we seek to interact with people who have expectations of us that mirror ours of them. The value of such society is augmented, not diminished, as we become more certain of the fulfillment of the relevant expectations. The relations we value most are those with the people we regard as the most dependable.

Consider Christine Korsgaard's explanation of what it means to hold another responsible. Korsgaard distinguishes two common uses of the term "responsible": according to the first, to describe a person as responsible for an action or attitude indicates that that person is a candidate for praise or blame; according to the second, however, to call a person responsible connotes that person's reliability, trustworthiness, etc. The notion of responsibility with which Korsgaard operates contains elements of both: "we think of the person as someone who should be regarded as reliable and trustworthy and so forth, and *therefore* as a candidate for praise and blame."<sup>65</sup> We hold others responsible because we anticipate their fulfillment of our expectations, and the truth of determinism (as discussed previously) does not militate against this anticipation.

Still, this relational analysis of responsibility and the accommodation of determinism it makes possible may seem simply beside the point when we turn from responsibility, generally, to specifically moral responsibility. It may seem that the question raised by the specter of determinism is the question of whether or not a person who lacks indeterministic freedom is bound by the moral law, and to that question the possibility of our holding expectations of her may seem irrelevant. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the issue raised by determinism is strictly one of relational responsibility. Even if we are determined, we can still exhibit moral behavior: we can act to promote happiness, as the utilitarians require; we can act according to lawful maxims, as Kantians say we should; we can act as a virtuous person would act. Further, we can act out of appropriate

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65. Korsgaard, "Creating the Kingdom of Ends," 326n.

motives or from virtuous dispositions. The possibility of moral conduct is not threatened by determinism. The question determinism raises is precisely: is it proper for us (or God) to *expect* determined individuals to behave morally, can we hold them responsible for whether or not they do so; and the preceding suggests that determinism provides no reason for *not* doing so, for not holding people responsible for the morality of their conduct, for not expecting them to behave morally.

While absolute independence of the sort sought after by libertarian thought is not necessary for responsibility, some degree of mutual independence among participants in relationships characterized by mutual attributions of responsibility may be indispensable; hence the significance to my analysis of responsibility, remarked upon earlier, of the Mormon rejection of predestination, where that is understood as denial that God dictates the salvation or damnation of the individual. Accordingly, although I observed above that the doctrine of the uncreatedness of individuals does not resolve the apparent conflict between determinism and moral responsibility, I believe it does play a role in explaining the possibility of relations between God and human beings that involve mutual attributions of responsibility. If deterministically operative human beings were products of divine creation, we might be hard pressed to develop any sort of plausible justification for divine attributions of responsibility to us, for the value we attach to moral responsibility may well depend on a certain degree of mutual independence; that is, while the fact that another's actions are determined might not threaten the value I attach to their conformity to or violation of certain expectations, that value may be threatened if I am, in whatever degree, ultimately responsible for that determination.

In order for us to be free agents, in the Mormon sense, we must be able to determine the nature of our future relationship with God. But if we were created by God and determinism were true, then God would ultimately determine the nature of our future relationship with him. The analysis of free agency developed above proceeds against a doctrinal background that includes the assumption that we are uncreated individuals, and it seems to me that this background commitment is essential to the utility of the analysis.

Setting aside the issue of determinism, if the preceding remarks are correct then it may be that traditional doctrines of humanity's creaturely status and ontological dependence on God render truly mutually responsible relationships between ourselves and God impossible. The God of traditional theism keeps us in existence at his pleasure, and he could choose to end our existence if we are found to be sufficiently intransigent; but even the decision to annihilate us is purely God's: *we* cannot choose to terminate our relationship with him by ending our existence. The God

of traditional theism ultimately exercises a great deal of control over the nature of our relationship with him, whether or not determinism is true. Accordingly, it seems that free agency (in the Mormon sense I am advocating) might not be possible within the framework of traditional theism, and so it may be that there can be no truly reciprocal relationships, relationships characterized by mutual attributions of responsibility, with the God of theism; we would be too dependent on such a God for him to hold us responsible.

The warping effects of dependence can be seen, somewhat, even in human relationships, such as the parent-child relationship: only adult children who are independent of their parents can enter into interpersonal relationships with their parents characterized by full-blooded mutual attributions of responsibility (rather than approximations of such attributions). Our relationship with the God of traditional theism takes dependence to the extreme, and so it may warp the context for attributions of responsibility to such an extent that such attributions can no longer meaningfully be made.

### *Surprise! A Final Objection*

I have been surprised to find in Mormon circles that a, if not the most, common objection to determinism is that it robs life of its flavor. Unpredictability, so the criticism goes, is the only thing that can make an unending life worth living; take it away and we might as well cease existing (were that possible for uncreatable and indestructible intelligences) *right now*, or at least once we have seen and predicted it all. While surprise might make for good parties and may be an essential plot element for movies worth at most one viewing, I find it odd that surprise should be regarded as the wellspring of good living. The most worthwhile relationships, and even entertainment, are those that are in large measure predictable: I look forward to seeing my wife laugh at just the part of the story I thought she would find most humorous, taking pleasure in the fact that I know (and am known of) her so well; so, too, I enjoy the growing crescendo of the opening movement of Beethoven's *Ninth* all the more, knowing what is coming.

I suspect that the infatuation with surprise stems from a tradition within Mormonism of praising the ideal of God as constantly progressing in knowledge.<sup>66</sup> Yet even granting for the sake of argument the desirability of surprise, determinism entails only that the future is knowable, and not that it is known. To orchestrate the symphony of earth life, God may

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66. See, for example, LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976), 271.

well have to chart the course of our earth lives with great precision, but once we are safely established on the path to deity there is no reason for him not to curtail his predictive proclivities and enjoy the unexpected delights of interacting with his children and grandchildren. Further, there are ways of growing in knowledge other than knowing that this, that, or the other will in fact happen.

#### CONCLUSION

The God of Mormonism lives in a universe and among intelligences not of his own making. I see no reason for concluding anything other than that our God is a moral being seeking to do the best that can be done in a universe that is morally ambiguous or neutral. In particular, God seeks among the uncreated intelligences populating the universe for those with whom he can enter relationships of the kind he values most dearly, those at the heart of which are expectations of righteous living. And recall that even under the deterministic reading of Mormonism espoused above, God acquires the ability to predict our behavior only by getting to know us; when meeting an intelligence for the first time, as it were, God does not know if things will work out with that intelligence.

There is a certain kind of pride that comes of being a self-made person, which the arguments made in this essay undercut: in the final analysis, it appears, none of us is self-made. I believe this to be so whether or not determinism is true, but those who reject determinism generally do so in part out of belief that we can somehow be the ultimate source for our character and/or conduct. Accordingly, it seems to me that by rejecting that possibility finally and explicitly, determinism *does* militate against smug self-satisfaction on the part of those able to satisfy the kinds of expectations characteristic of celestial society. But this hardly seems a good reason for a religion insistent on its Christian credentials to dismiss the view. Instead, viewing the position defended above against the backdrop of the assimilation of divine to human that is central to Mormon thought, I believe it proper to suppose that the Mormon deity joins with us in viewing with sorrow those unable to meet such high demands, with the poignant yet relieved thought that there but for the grace not of God but of inscrutable, immutable fate go I.

Our most fully interpersonal relationships are characterized essentially, even if not uniquely, by mutual attributions of moral responsibility. In previous sections of this essay, I have argued that participation in these relationships is not rendered either impossible or irrational or pointless by the sobering thought just enunciated. But that thought should keep those fortunate enough to have such ties from hubris.