

Mormonism and Determinism

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MORMONS HAVE HISTORICALLY REJECTED any form of universal causal determinism because it appears to conflict with its basic commitment to free agency. However, Rex Sears has recently argued that (1) free agency and causal determinism are compatible; and (2) Mormon commitments square better with causal determinism than the opposing view of libertarian free will.¹ He further argues that metaphysical conceptions of moral accountability are misguided and suggests an alternative which views accountability as a feature of demands arising in interpersonal relationships. It is my purpose to show that Sears has sold out to a view that is difficult at best to reconcile with fundamental Mormon commitments. I intend to argue that none of his arguments in favor of determinism are compelling and that his answer to arguments against determinism are weak or simply miss the point.

I will first consider arguments which Sears raises against the libertarian view. Sears argues that foreknowledge is inconsistent with libertarian free will, so Mormons should reject libertarianism and construct a notion of "agency" consistent with foreknowledge. He then argues that the reconstructed notion of agency is also consistent with causal determinism. While I agree with Sears that infallible foreknowledge is inconsistent with libertarian free will, I suggest adopting a view of foreknowledge that fits better with libertarian free will and the scriptures in the Mormon canon.

Sears argues that libertarian free will is inconsistent with Mormonism's rejection of creation out of nothing. I review his argument and suggest that his argument does not succeed. Sears also argues that libertarian free will is inconsistent with Mormonism's commitment to materialism. I suggest that the libertarian view of free will can easily accommodate a materialist metaphysic. To this point my arguments are in defense of libertarian free will as consistent with Mormon commitments.

1. L. Rex Sears, "Determinist Mansions in the Mormon House," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 115–141.

I then go on the offensive to argue that Sears's arguments in favor of determinism are flawed. In particular, I argue that causal determinism, even if modified so that causes may be eternally internal to intelligences, is not consistent with any view of free will worthy of the name "rational agency" in particular and Mormon views of agency in general.

DETERMINING THE TERMS

Perhaps it would be best to clarify a few of the notions at issue. Sears affirms what I will call necessitarian causal determinism, or nc-determinism. That is, Sears asserts that for every event that happens, there are previous events and circumstances, whether internal or external to persons, such that given those events and circumstances it is impossible that the event should not occur. Thus, all events are necessary in the sense that they could not fail to happen given prior conditions. There are two commitments implicit in nc-determinism: (1) every event has a cause; and (2) all causes necessitate their effects. That is, causal relations are universal (the "universality criterion") and given prior events, one and only one world is possible (the "necessity criterion").² Both of these commitments are controversial and neither has been shown to be true by scientific evidence or other means.

On the other hand, those who affirm libertarian free will hold that there is more than one state of the world possible, even given all prior causal conditions. Libertarians affirm that persons can do otherwise than they actually do when they act freely. Sears assumes that libertarians must reject both the universality criterion and the necessity criterion. But this assumption is not quite accurate. A libertarian can affirm the universality of causal relations, but hold that given the prior causal conditions, several effects could follow (a position I will call "universal cause libertarianism" or "uc-libertarianism"). Thus, causal conditions must be adequate for whatever occurs, but do not necessitate their effects.

The conjoint assumptions of universal and necessary casual determinism appear to be false given our present scientific theories. Quantum mechanics has demonstrated that prior conditions do not always necessitate their effect. There is a certain indeterminacy in events among subatomic particles—though whether the same indeterminism holds at the macro-level in events such as neural connections in the brain has not been shown. No less an authority than neuroscientist Roger Penrose has argued that quantum effects create an indeterminacy at the macro-level

2. In my view, the best arguments for nc-determinism are set forth by Bernard Berofsky, *Determinism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 64–70; and John Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs: Princeton Hall, Inc., 1964 ed.), 221–275. Both are compatibilists and adopt David Hume's view of causation as constant conjunction.

in synaptic connections in the cerebral cortex.³ Thus, Sears's assumption that there are no macro-level quantum effects is at least questionable. At the very least, quantum mechanics has demonstrated that it is quite reasonable to believe that prior causal conditions do not necessitate a single, predictable outcome.

There are also libertarians who believe that some human actions are chosen and performed by the agent without there being any sufficient condition or cause of the action prior to the action itself.⁴ In other words, free human choices initiate causes but are not themselves caused (a position I call "pure act libertarianism" or "pa-libertarianism"). That is not to say that human decisions pop into being from nothing but simply that the organization of energy and matter or whatever else might be involved in making free decisions is not fully explained by reference to prior conditions. Sears does not seem to be aware that there is a distinction between uc-libertarianism and pa-libertarianism.

THE ARGUMENT FROM DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE

Sears presents three arguments to support his view that Mormonism squares better with nc-determinism than with libertarianism. The first argument is based on God's foreknowledge.⁵ Sears accepts the argument that, given God's *infallible* foreknowledge, the future is as fixed as the past and, thus, persons are not free to do other than what they do. Thus, if God has foreknowledge, persons cannot be free in a libertarian sense. Sears then suggests that belief in God's foreknowledge is more fundamental to Mormonism than libertarian free will, and, thus, Mormons must reject libertarian free will.

The notion of foreknowledge of itself does not motivate acceptance of nc-determinism, for it is quite possible to affirm God's foreknowledge without affirming that the *basis* of divine foreknowledge is complete awareness of causal effects. While it is true that Thomists and Calvinists affirm precisely that God foreknows in virtue of his complete knowledge of himself as First Cause, Arminians affirm that God foreknows in virtue of having seen the future. However, Arminians expressly hold that free human actions are not caused by either God or by natural causes. Thus, belief in divine foreknowledge does not entail that nc-determinism is true.

Sears argues that the Mormon position is best represented by James Talmage, who held that God knows our future free acts *not* because God causes our acts, but because God has become so acquainted with us over

3. Roger Penrose, *Shadows of the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1994), chap. 7.

4. This position has recently been elucidated and defended by Robert Kane, *The Significance of Free Will* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

5. Sears, 120–21.

eons of time in the pre-existence that he simply knows with certainty what we will do in the future.⁶ Sears observes that God's knowledge of the future is, thus, not logically necessary, but it is empirically certain. Thus, God is not infallible in the classical sense that logically he cannot be wrong about any belief, but is merely empirically certain. Sears then observes that this explanation of *how* God knows our future acts assumes determinism "because it depends on there being laws of spiritual and human nature that describe how individuals with certain characteristics will behave in certain situations."⁷

Now I believe that Sears is correct that divine foreknowledge is inconsistent with libertarian free will, for it entails that the future is as fixed as the past and, thus, there is only one possible future, given God's foreknowledge.⁸ Libertarianism of any stripe requires that there are at least two possible futures open to our free acts. Further, I agree with Sears that Talmage's explanation of how God knows the future entails a certain type of character determinism (though not necessarily *nc*-determinism). If my character is so fixed that given a knowledge of my past there is only one possible future open to me, as Talmage and Sears argue, then some type of determinism is called for. I also agree that God must be regarded as all-knowing or omniscient in some sufficiently robust sense.⁹ However, I believe that Sears is incorrect that libertarian free will is not more fundamental to Mormonism than Talmage's particular view of God's foreknowledge. Moreover, commitment to this type of character

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. The valid and, I believe, sound argument to show that foreknowledge is incompatible with (libertarian) free will is as follows:

(1) It has always been true that I will sin at *tn* (Assumption: Omnitemporality of Truth).

(2) It is impossible that God should hold a false belief or fail to know any truth. (Assumption: Infallible Foreknowledge).

(3) Therefore, God has always believed that I will sin at *tn* (from 1 & 2).

(4) If God has always believed a certain thing, then it is not in anyone's power to do anything which entails that God has not always believed that thing (Assumption: Fixed Past).

(5) Therefore, it is not in my power to do anything that entails that God has not always believed that I will sin at *tn* (from 3 & 4).

(6) That I refrain from sinning at *tn* entails that God has not always believed that I will sin at *tn* (from 2 and the Principle of Transfer of Powerlessness).

(7) Therefore, it is not in my power to refrain from sinning at *tn* (from 5 & 6).

(8) If I act freely when I sin at *tn*, then I also have it in my power at *tn* to refrain from sinning (Assumption: Libertarian Free Will).

(9) Therefore, I do not act freely when I sin at *tn* (from 7 & 8).

9. We can define God as omniscient if God knows all things it is logically possible to know at the time of defining the present.

determinism is inconsistent with bedrock notions of Mormonism, including the possibility of repentance and being born again.

It seems to me that the notions that a person can develop character and that a person can change past character through repentance are at variance with determinism. For how could I predict what a person will do if my observations are based upon a past which has been relinquished through repentance to become a new person, born again in Christ? Talmage's position seems to be as follows: God knows my future because he has seen that whenever I was in situation *s* in the infinite past, I did action *a*, therefore, in the future whenever I am in situation *s* I will *a*. But these assumptions are problematic for several reasons. (I will refer to these assumptions as "character determinism."¹⁰) First, all situations are unique because none of them included my additional experience that brought me to the new situation. For example, even if confronted as an adult with the same situation I had as a child, the situation necessarily includes something new—me as an adult having already confronted the situation and possibly having learned from it. I may choose to do something different precisely because I do not want to repeat the past. Thus, there simply is no situation *s* identical to any that I have been in before. Therefore, no situation can be used as the basis for predicting future behavior even if character were somehow fixed.

Second, if I can act out of character or change my character so that, when I am in *s*, I refrain from doing *a*, then my past is not a prediction of my future. In contrast, Sears' argument in support of determinism assumes that character is fixed and utterly unchangeable and is, thus, a reliable predictor of future acts. However, if I have put off the natural man that I was in the past, then my past acts are not a predictor of my present acts, for I have changed radically. Thus, it seems to me that the doctrine of character determinism is inconsistent with the doctrine of repentance.¹¹

Moreover, the very notion of the "natural man" is interesting in this connection. Could it be that the very characteristic of a natural man is that such persons are always an effect and never really free as a first cause of acts? Could it be that the *natural* man truly is governed by *naturalistic* forces whereas the person who has put off the natural man is free because he acts for himself? It seems to me that this is precisely the distinction that Lehi makes in his discussion of how persons become free

10. The best treatment of "character determinism," in my view, is C. A. Campbell, *In Defense of Free Will* (Glaskow: Jackson & Son, 1938).

11. I also have reservations about Sears's use of scripture. Sears assumes that scriptures can be reduced to philosophical propositions without any hermeneutic theory. I am doubtful that scriptural language can be so easily reduced to propositions. However, if we adopt a Calvinistic-Arminian optic to view the language in earliest Mormon scriptures, as Sears appears to do, then Mormon scripture seems to be at odds with causal determinism.

“to act for themselves and not [merely] to be acted upon” (2 Ne. 2:27). Lehi distinguishes between things which are merely “acted upon” and those which “act” (2 Ne 2:14). This distinction then becomes the basis for a further distinction between those persons who are free and those who are captives to the devil: “And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon. . . . Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh . . . and they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity of the devil. . . (2 Ne. 2: 26–27). Thus, the distinguishing characteristic of persons who are free is that they act for themselves. They have a choice between two genuinely open options, good and life or evil and death. Those who are not free are merely “acted upon.” It seems to me that the Book of Mormon teaches that persons who are merely effects of the natural causal order, or “acted upon,” are not free. In contrast, those persons who break free of the realm of effect and become causes to act for themselves are free.¹²

Is not this an implicit rejection of causal determinism by Mormon scripture? If determinism is true, then I am always merely an effect of prior causes; I am merely acted upon. On the other hand if libertarianism is true, then I am sometimes the initiator of causal sequences. That is, if libertarianism is true, I act for myself and I am not merely acted upon by causes.

Sears ignores these Mormon doctrines and claims that foreknowledge is non-negotiable for Mormons because it is asserted in scripture and presupposed by the Mormon doctrine of foreordination. However, he cites only two scriptures to support his view, neither of which is persuasive.¹³ For example, Sears asserts that according to Joseph Smith God knew and ordained the biblical prophet Jeremiah before he was conceived (Jer. 1:45) and Christ was also foreordained as our Savior. However, neither of these doctrines presupposes foreknowledge. I am unaware of any Mormon source that holds that “foreordination” either necessitates or even makes certain the success of the person fore-

12. The language of the Book of Mormon here is translated in terms drawn from the Arminian-Calvinist debate. I have explained my hermeneutic of this interpretation elsewhere (Blake T. Ostler, “The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20, no.1 (Spring 1987): 87–100). The Book of Mormon consistently adopts an Arminian perspective which rejects causal determinism and salvation by grace alone. Sears would have the Book of Mormon argue in favor of Calvinism which accepted causal determinism. However, unlike Calvinists, Sears argues that God does not causally determine; rather, material laws are supreme on Sears’ view rather than God. See “The Development of the Mormon Concept of Grace,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 24 (Spring 1997): 57–84.

13. Sears, 121.

ordained. Rather, the foreordained person is called with a “conditional calling.” The realization of the calling depends on whether the person is faithful to the calling in this life. In Joseph Smith’s interpretation, Jeremiah could be foreordained before birth not because of God’s foreknowledge, but simply because he already existed in the pre-existence as an actual person.¹⁴ Such an action no more entails foreknowledge than the act of ordaining a person to the priesthood in this life.

This last point is critical. Though Joseph Smith was foreordained a prophet, no prediction regarding any individual act in a certain situation is remotely implied in the doctrine. For example, Joseph Smith was told by God that he was “chosen to do the work of the Lord, but because of transgression, if thou [Joseph] art not aware thou wilt fall” (D&C 3:9). Thus, there is always the possibility of “falling” even if one is foreordained as a prophet.

To imply determinism, foreordination would have to entail a single act necessitated by causal conditions at a given time. Even if it is assumed that a prophet (or anyone else) is foreordained to perform specific tasks in his lifetime, such an assumption in no ways entails that the specific acts to fulfill that task must happen at any particular time tn . Thus, even if Joseph Smith had been foreordained to translate the Book of Mormon, such a task in no way implies that the task must happen at tn . Thus, at tn Joseph could still have alternative courses of action open to him though the task is certain to be accomplished prior to his death at some later time, say $tn+5$. Moreover, the Mormon scriptures rather clearly state that Joseph Smith could have failed in his foreordained calling and another would have been called “in his stead” (D&C 35:18). The Mormon doctrine of foreordination not only does not guarantee a specific act at a given time, it does not even guarantee that the person foreordained will fulfill the calling! Thus, Sears’s argument seriously misrepresents the Mormon doctrine of foreordination.

Indeed, the central, pivotal and bedrock doctrine that defines Mormonism over against predestinarian schemes is precisely that there are no guarantees to success in this life. The primordial story retold in the Book of Moses and D&C 29:35–43 is the basis for the Mormon view of foreordination. According to these sources, the key to God’s plan was free agency. Satan would have saved all persons at the expense of their agency, but God’s plan entailed the risk that not all would be saved (Moses 4:1). The primary reason that Satan’s plan of guaranteed salvation was rejected was that it destroyed agency (Moses 4:3). The primary characteristic of agency was that it presented a genuine option among open alternatives, to choose among good and evil, bitter and sweet (D&C

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

29:29; 2 Ne 2:23). The distinctive facet of the Mormon view, as I see it, is precisely the risk entailed in mortality and God's unconditional commitment to respect the freedom of human agency even at the expense that some persons could be eternally lost if they so chose.

Of course, if Sears is right about determinism, God knew who would succeed and fail, and we are merely going through the predetermined motions to carry out what God foresaw. There is no risk in Sears' view. God could have guaranteed salvation to those he foresaw would be caused to be saved and also guaranteed damnation to those he foresaw would not. Indeed, given causal conditions existing even prior to our mortal existence, our salvation or damnation was already in the causal cards before this life. God should have told those he knew would not be saved (i.e., those of whom the scripture in D&C 76:32 says it would be better for them never to have been born) not to bother with mortality. Why would God put us to the test "to see if" we will keep his commandments, as the Book of Abraham states (Abr. 4:25), if the outcome had already been causally determined?

Sears also argues that the notion of "suitability for membership in the various kingdoms of the hereafter" based upon a judgment of past acts somehow "carries the same deterministic implications as the doctrine of foreordination."¹⁵ However, I fail to see how the notion of judgment based on past acts implies either foreknowledge or determinism. To carry out the judgment, God need only know what we have done in the past, not what we will do in the future. Sears apparently means to argue that, because the judgment is a prediction of what we are fit for in the future based on the past, it must be deterministic. However, is the judgment really a prediction of what we will do in the future on Mormon doctrine? I don't see how. The Mormon view is that whatever degree of light quickens us in this life is the degree of light to which we will rise in the resurrection (D&C 76 and 88). However, whether there is further progression to yet greater degrees of light or whether persons can move between kingdoms seems to me to be unsettled in Mormon thought. Moreover, the fact that I may be saved in a particular kingdom in no way entails that I will do any specific acts in the future as determinism requires. Sears's evidence simply doesn't support his conclusions.

DOES SCRIPTURE REQUIRE FOREKNOWLEDGE?

Sears argues that the scriptures are incompatible with the view that God does not infallibly foreknow all free acts of humans. This assumption is quite common among Latter-day Saints. How then do those who believe God's foreknowledge is limited explain biblical prophecy and

15. Sears, 121–122.

faith in God's certain triumph over evil? God can ensure triumph over evil though the future is not absolutely foreknown because he is like a master chess player. Even though he does not know exactly which moves free persons will make, he knows all possible moves that can be made and that he can meet any such moves and eventually win the game. God may lose some pieces during the games, just as some persons may freely choose to reject God and thwart his plans as far as they are concerned individually, but God can guarantee ultimate victory. Those who reject infallible foreknowledge affirm these propositions about God's knowledge of all possibilities:

1. God is omniscient in the sense that he knows all that can be known, but it is logically impossible to know future acts that are free.
2. God knows all possibilities, including the present probability of any future event.
3. God knows now what his purposes are and that he will achieve them.
4. God does not know now, in every case, precisely which contingent possibility will be chosen or become actual.
5. God knows now how he will respond to whichever contingent possibility occurs to ensure the realization of his purposes.

Thus, God can ensure ultimate victory and the realization of all of his purposes not because of his omniscience, but because of his almighty power. These features of God's knowledge ensure that God knows all possibilities and future events which are now certain given causal implications (propositions 1 and 2). This view also allows for free choices among genuinely open alternatives (propositions 2 and 4). These provisions suggest that God knows all possible avenues of choices (propositions 2 and 5) and, coupled with God's maximal power, entail that God's plans and declarations of future events will be realized (propositions 3 and 5). Thus, a complete picture of God's providence is possible even though God does not have infallible and complete foreknowledge.

Nevertheless, can limited foreknowledge be squared with scriptural predictions of the future? I will argue that: (a) scripture is consistent with limited foreknowledge, and (b) a number of scriptures require limited foreknowledge.¹⁶ There are several different types of prophecy, each of which is consistent with God's limited foreknowledge:

16. I want to be clear that I am *not* claiming that the scriptures plainly state that foreknowledge is inconsistent with free will. It seems to me that the scriptures are pre-critical and do not address such philosophical issues. It can be argued that some scriptures, e.g., Alma 13, assume that free will and election based on foreknowledge are compatible. However, the election addressed in Alma 13 is merely "preparatory" to the possibility of obtaining the priesthood in this life and in no way implies any specific act at a specific time as required by causal determinism. I do claim, however, that the living interaction between God

1. *Predictions about what God will bring about through his own power regardless of human decisions.* God can clearly predict his own actions and promises regardless of human decisions. If human cooperation is not involved, then God can unilaterally guarantee the occurrence of a particular event and predict it ahead of time. For example, God can guarantee that his plan will be fulfilled because he will intervene to bring it about. Thus, God can show prophets a panoramic vision of his plan from beginning to end. God can declare that he knows the beginning from the end in terms of his plan and what he will bring about himself: "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do my pleasure . . . yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it" (Isaiah 46:10–11). A perfect example of a scriptural passage showing that God knows the future in virtue of what he will bring about through his power is found in 1 Nephi 9:6: "But the Lord knoweth all things from the beginning; wherefore, he prepareth a way to accomplish all his works among the children of men; for behold, he hath all power unto the fulfilling of his words."

However, the fact that God's plan will be carried out does not mean that he has to know each individual's free actions beforehand. God has prepared a plan to save all persons *if they will keep his commandments*. However, not all persons will be saved, despite his plan, because they are free to reject him. God's plan will be realized, but it is possible that not every person will be finally exalted. God's plan, thus, involves a risk that not all persons will be saved. There is a clear contingency in God's knowledge with respect to the future free acts of individuals. From the Mormon perspective, one of the primary purposes of life was that God wanted "to see if" persons would keep his commandments when granted significantly free will (Abraham 3:25). This desire to learn whether persons would do what God commanded assumes that God does not have complete foreknowledge.

2. *Conditional prophecies.* Numerous prophecies express what God will do *if* certain conditions obtain. For example, several prophecies are predictions as to what will happen if human beings behave in one way rather than another. Jeremiah 18:7–8 (Revised Standard Version, RSV) is an example of a conditional prophecy: "If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will repent of the evil that I intended to do to it." Conditional prophecies are numerous in the Book of Mormon (e.g., 2 Nephi 1:7). Conditional prophecies do not require absolute foreknowledge because God

and prophets demonstrates that God's foreknowledge is provisional, subject to changes in plan and, therefore, his foreknowledge is not absolute.

waits upon conditions to occur before a course of action is finally decided. Indeed, conditional prophecies are incomprehensible if God has complete foreknowledge. There would be no "ifs," only absolutes.

3. *Prophecies of inevitable consequences of factors already present.* If God's knowledge of present conditions is complete, it follows that he knows all things that are inevitable as a causal result of present conditions. He also knows the probability of any future event based on current conditions. For example, a skilled physician can predict the death of certain individuals because the causes of that death are already present. Similarly, God can predict future events that are causally implicated by present circumstances or otherwise inevitable. For example, at the time Christ prophesied that Judas would betray him, Judas had already betrayed him by accepting thirty pieces of silver and by promising the Jewish authorities to identify Jesus at the designated place.

4. *Absolute election of nations and conditional election of individuals.* A number of passages in the New Testament speak of God's foreknowledge in the context of election or foreordination. The New Testament uses a family of words associated with God's knowledge of the future such as "foreknow" (*proginosko*), "foresee" (*prooraō*), "foreordain" (*proorizo*), "foreknowledge" (*prognosis*), and "foretell" (*promarturomai* and *prokatan-gello*; see 1 Peter 1:2, 20; Ephesians 1:4–5; Romans 8:28–30; Acts 2:23, 4:28). For example, Ephesians 1:11 discusses God's foreordination of persons, "in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined (*prooristhentes*) according to the purpose (*prothesin*) of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will (*kata ten boulon tou thelmatos autou*)." This passage does not speak about what persons do to earn election; rather it focuses exclusively on God's decision to choose a certain group of persons. Now if individual persons were "predestined" or "elected" to salvation on the basis of God's own counsel alone, then free will would play no role in individual salvation. God would arbitrarily damn some and leave others to damnation for no act of their own. Thus, it is problematic to assert that such passages relate only to God's action to elect individuals to salvation as Calvin and Luther claimed.

However, passages speaking about God's election do not address individual election; rather, they speak of the corporate election of Israel, or the church, or of God's people as a whole. In a sensitive and careful analysis of the doctrine of election, William G. MacDonald demonstrates that the biblical doctrine of election invariably refers to corporate rather than individual election. The same conclusion was reached by William W. Klein.¹⁷ Election is not a reward for an individual exercise of free will,

17. William G. MacDonald, "The Biblical Doctrine of Election" in *The Case for Arminianism*, Clark H. Pinnock, ed. (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1989), 207–29; William Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1990).

but a divine decision unilaterally made to elect a group of people as his "chosen" or "promised" people. Although the election is certain, the promises made to any individual member of the elect group are conditional upon faithfulness to God. Such corporate election is not inconsistent with individual free will.

It is, of course, true that God sometimes foreordains individual persons to specific callings. Yet the foreordination of individuals is conditional. For example, God's foreordination of Samson as a chosen vessel did not imply that it was inevitable that Samson would fulfill that calling. In fact, Samson failed. Moreover, individual calls represent a summons to service and not a guarantee of individual salvation based upon acts of free will. Thus, no prediction is made about individual acts when an individual is elected or foreordained to a particular calling.

SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT FOR THE OPEN VIEW OF GOD

The biblical record gives strong indications that God's knowledge of future free acts is not complete. For example, when God speaks in scripture he uses terms implying uncertainty such as *if* (Heb. *'im*) or *perhaps* or *maybe* (Heb. *'ûlay*). Other scriptures demonstrate that though God had expressed an intention to carry out a certain judgment, he changes his mind when the people repent. Certainly, it is impossible to change one's mind if one already knows what will occur.

Some rather strong indications exist in scripture that God does not know all future contingencies. First, even though some scriptures present Jesus as omniscient, it is clear that others do not. Indeed, Jesus seems to have expected the kingdom of God to come in power and glory before the end of his contemporary generation, even before all of the seventy returned from their missions throughout Judea. But it makes no sense to argue that Jesus must have known that the kingdom was not coming that soon because he was omniscient, for the scripture expressly states that the Son of Man did not know when the kingdom would come. Jesus does not know all things.

In the Hebrew scripture, the word *'ûlay*, meaning "perhaps" or "maybe," is used in divine speech. For instance, God is portrayed as saying:

Son of man, prepare for yourself an exile's baggage,
and go into exile by day in their sight. . . . Perhaps
[*'ûlay*] they will understand, though they are a
rebellious house. (NSV Ezekiel 12:2-3)

Thus says the Lord: Stand in the court of the Lord's
house, and speak. . . . It may be [*'ûlay*] they will
listen, and every one turn from his evil way, that I

may repent of the evil. (RSV Jeremiah 26:2–3; for other uses of *'ûlay*, see Jeremiah 36:3 and 7, 51:8, Isaiah 47:12, Luke 20:13).

How shall we understand such passages? Terence E. Fretheim, professor of Old Testament at Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, suggests that it:

... seems clear from such passages that God is quite uncertain as to how the people will respond to the prophetic word. God is certainly aware of the various possibilities regarding Israel's response. One might even say that God, given a thoroughgoing knowledge of Israel, knows what its response is likely to be. . . . Yet, in God's own words, God does not finally know.¹⁸

That Fretheim is correct and that God actually was uncertain as to what Israel would do is supported by RSV Jeremiah 3:7 and 19:

And I thought,
 "After she has done all this she will return to me";
 but she did not return. . . .
 I thought,
 how I would set you among my sons,
 and give you a pleasant land,
 a heritage most beautiful of all nations.
 And I thought you would call me My Father
 and would not turn from following me.
 Surely, as a faithless wife leaves her husband,
 so have you been faithless to me, O house of Israel.

Fretheim observes of this passage: "Here God is depicted as actually thinking that the people would respond positively to the initial election or that they would return after a time of straying. But events proved that God's outlook on the future was too optimistic. The people did not respond as God thought they would. God's knowledge of future human actions is, thus, clearly represented as limited."¹⁹ Perhaps those holding that God has absolute foreknowledge will interpret this passage in a manner consistent with the belief that God actually knew what Israel would do and assert that we have an example of the dreaded anthropomorphism of the Old Testament in this passage. Fretheim observes that such readings "buy us an absolute form of omniscience at the price of

18. Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 45–46.

19. *Ibid.*

placing the integrity of the text and coherence of all of God's words in jeopardy: does God mean it or not? These tests show that Israel's future is genuinely open and not predetermined. The future of Israel does not only not exist, it has not even been finally decided upon. Hence, it is not something that even exists to be known, even if the knower is God."²⁰ It seems to me that the only way to preserve the integrity of this text is to admit that God experienced, nay suffered, disappointment when he discovered that Israel would reject him, especially after expecting that Israel would love him as a son loves a father.

Exodus 32:7–14 (cf. Deuteronomy 9:13–29), where God is portrayed as changing his mind after a consultation with Moses, is of similar import. Yahweh told Moses that he intended to destroy Israel for having made the golden calf, and Moses objected and actually argued that such a course would be unworthy of God. The key to understanding the encounter is God's response to Moses: "Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against [Israel]" (v. 10). God had actually formed an intention to execute wrath; it was something that "he thought to do" (v. 14). This passage shows that, while God had decided to destroy Israel, "the decision had not yet reached an irretrievable point; Moses could conceivably contribute something to the divine deliberation that might occasion a future for Israel other than wrath."²¹ Remarkably, Moses persuaded God to recant what he had decided to do: "And the Lord repented of the evil He thought to do unto His people" (v. 14). The most faithful way to understand this passage, it seems to me, is to view Yahweh as having formed an intention to do one thing—and, thus, at one time having believed that he would do it—and at a later time changing his mind and coming to believe something different. Yet if God did not know at the time of his conversation with Moses whether Israel would be destroyed, then certainly there were a good many things about the future that he did not know. Some Mormons may point out that when Joseph Smith revised the Bible, he changed all of the passages suggesting that God repented—implying that such changes were made because the Prophet Joseph Smith believed that repentance could not be appropriate to a being that cannot possibly be mistaken about any belief or sin in any way. Nevertheless, the Joseph Smith translation of this passage makes God's change of mind even more explicit, and, thus, recognizes that God changed his mind: "The Lord said unto Moses, If they will repent of the evil which they have done, I will spare them. . . Therefore, see thou do this thing that I have commanded thee, or I will execute all that which I had thought to do unto my people" (JST Exodus 32:13–14).

20. *Ibid.*, 47.

21. *Ibid.*, 50.

Still other passages suggest that some predictions of future events are conditional and that God does not know precisely what will happen, though he intends to persuade people to freely repent. A good example of such a conditional prophecy is found in RSV Jeremiah 22:4–5: “If (*im*) you will indeed obey this word, then there shall enter the gates of this house kings who sit on the throne of David. . . . But if (*im*) you will not heed these words . . . this house shall become a desolation.” Numerous similar conditional prophecies occur throughout the Old Testament, the Book of Mormon, and modern Mormon scripture. Is the *if* in such passages to be taken with full seriousness? For example, the book of Abraham suggests that one of God’s purposes in establishing his plan and this earth was to learn something about humans: “We will make an earth whereon these may dwell; and we will prove them herewith, to see *if* they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abraham 3:24–25). It seems to me that this passage doesn’t make any sense at all if the future is already determinate and God already knew from all eternity exactly what we will do without actually “seeing *if*” persons will do what he has commanded. Indeed, the very earnestness of mortality in Mormon thought derives its force from the view that the future is genuinely open and as yet undecided and therefore truly up to us to declare to God who we will be—a fact he is waiting with loving interest to discover along with us. God is waiting on us to see if we will be faithful.

One final type of text may be taken as evidence that God’s knowledge is dependent upon what actually happens. In the book of Jonah, the prophet Jonah declared that “yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (Jonah 3:4). In response to this proclamation, the city of Nineveh proclaimed a fast and repented of its evil ways. “The word of the Lord” came to the king of Nineveh: “Who can tell *if* (*im*) God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?” (Jonah 3:9). In response to the repentance of the people of Nineveh, God changed his mind and decided not to do what he had declared he would do: “And God saw their works, and they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that he had said he would do unto them; and he did it not” (Jonah 3:10).²² Jonah’s response was undoubtedly similar to what a believer in absolute foreknowledge might experience when expectations about God have been shattered by concrete dealings with God involved in an open future that can have results unanticipated even by God: Jonah was “very angry” with God. Jonah complains: “O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? . . . I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness,

22. The JST Jonah 3:10 reads: “God saw their works, that they turned *and repented*; and God *turned away* the evil that he had said he would *bring upon them*.”

and repentest thee of the evil" (Jonah 4:1). This picture of God presented by patience, kindness, and mercy is possible only within a genuine relationship in which all responses and outcomes are not already determined before the responses and decisions are made. Moreover, if such decisions are not already made, then how can it be that God infallibly knows beforehand what the decision is? Perhaps the book of Jonah can teach us something about God—maybe even something unexpected and outside our preconceived notions about how God must be. As Abraham Heschel comments, "This is the mysterious paradox of Hebrew faith: The All wise and Almighty may change a word that He proclaims. Man has power to modify His design. . . . God's answer to Jonah, stressing the supremacy of compassion, upsets the possibility of looking for a rational coherence of God's ways with the world."²³

Nor should it be assumed that indications of God's limited knowledge of the future are found only in the Old Testament. There are several instances in modern revelation indicating that God's knowledge is limited. For example, the *Church News*²⁴ observed that Jonah's revoked prophecy has important implications:

This incident is instructive because it shows that a specific prophecy or decree from God through one of His servants is not necessarily irrevocable. Indeed, He revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith, "wherefore I, the Lord, command and revoke, as it seemeth me good." (D&C 56:4)²⁵

The article notes that the revelation contained in section 56 of the Doctrine and Covenants was given after Ezra Thayne had been appointed to travel to Missouri (D&C 52:22); however, he was unable to go due to involvement in a controversy in Thompson, Ohio. (See D&C 54 and 56.) The article also notes another example where the Lord revoked a prior word. In 1832 the saints were commanded to build a temple in Jackson County, Missouri (D&C 84:4). However, the Lord later revoked that command due to persecution by mobs (D&C 124:49, 51). The *Church News* observes:

That the Lord occasionally does alter decrees in no way means He is changeable or capricious, or that the servant through whom His words come is a false prophet. It only means that in His infinite wisdom, He adapts His directives according to the righteousness, wickedness or changing circumstances of mortals and according to their use (or misuse) of their own agency.²⁶

23. Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 2:66–67.

24. "Lessons of Nineveh: God Commands and He Revokes As Seemeth Him Good," *Church News*, 1 August 1998, 14.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*

Of course, these instances of the Lord revoking his prior word also imply that his knowledge of the future is adapted to changing circumstances. That is, God's knowledge of the future is not absolute or fixed; rather, God's knowledge is constantly growing as the future unfolds. As Clark Pinnock observed:

According to the Bible, God anticipates the future in a way analogous to our own experience. God tests Abraham to see what the patriarch will do, and then says through his messenger, "Now I know that you fear God" (Gen. 22:12). God threatens Nineveh with destruction, and then calls it off when they repent (Jonah 3:10). I do not receive the impression from the Bible that the future is all sewn up and foreknown. The future is envisaged as a realm in which significant decisions can still be made which can change the course of history.²⁷

THE ARGUMENT FROM MATERIALISM

Sears's second argument is that the Mormon view that all reality is a form of matter (including spirit) entails nc-determinism. However, his entire argument rests on the *assumption* that must be proved, i.e. that materialism entails nc-determinism. His argument, thus, severely begs the question. Sears asserts: "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 any other observable events; whatever freedom human beings have does not exempt them from being as regular in their development as the rest of nature."²⁸ That's the entire argument—a mere argument of assertion without proof. The very question to be proved is assumed, i.e., that the material world is governed by nc-determinism.

Sears's argument is problematic, moreover, because the only evidence which he discusses is a powerful counter-example to the assumption of universal and necessary causal relations. Sears notes that quantum mechanics seems to be a counter instance to his theory of determinism. However, he dismisses quantum mechanics as a counter-instance to determinism because it may not apply on the macro level, that is, the world of everyday experience. But the point is simply that no one has come remotely close to showing that the natural world, even the macro world, is universally governed by necessary causal connections. Indeed, in the realm of the human "sciences" such as psychology, no one

27. Clark Pinnock, "God Limits His Knowledge," in *Predestination and Free Will*, David Basinger and Randall Basinger, eds. (Donners Grove, Ill: Inter Varsity Press, 1986), 157.

28. Sears, 123–124.

has even suggested that we could possibly develop a working theory to predict individual actions—and certainly not with the type of precision implicit in *nc*-determinism.²⁹

Nevertheless, Sears seems to be assuming an argument something like the following:

- (1) Mental events such as human choices supervene on physical events, in particular, neural events.
- (2) Any neural event which occurs without a necessitating cause by prior physical events must occur randomly or without reason.
- (3) If our decisions occur randomly they are not free acts but uncontrolled occurrences.

However, no libertarian holds that free acts are merely random events, and thus, premise (2) is to be rejected. Random indeterminism is not the only alternative to determinism as Sears assumes.³⁰ It is quite possible to consistently adopt a materialistic metaphysics which is consistent with libertarian free will. A libertarian could adopt a process view of freedom where a free act is a creative synthesis of the prior states of the world. Thus, there are causal relations or nexus from which a free act flows; however, there are several different outcomes for which the causal conditions are adequate but not sufficient.³¹ Such an explanation of free will has always appealed to me as an attractive model from which to explore Mormon thought—and I am hardly alone in this view. Moreover, process thought is thoroughly materialistic and, thus, congenial to

29. See Mark Balaguer, "Libertarianism as a Scientifically Reputable View," *Philosophical Studies* 93 (1999), 189–211.

30. It has long been argued by compatibilists that "if it is a matter of chance that a man should act in one way rather than another, he may be free but he cannot be responsible" (A. J. Ayer, "Free Will and Moral Responsibility," *Mind* 52 (1948): 46). The same argument is made by Robert Hobart, "Freewill as Involving Determinism," *Mind* 43 (1934): 1–27. However, the argument was long ago answered by Phillipa Foot, "Free Will as Involving Determinism," *The Philosophical Review* 66, no. 4 (October 1957): 439–450. Galen Strawson has recently resurrected this argument in "The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility," *Philosophical Studies*, 75 (1994): 5–24. However, his argument has been persuasively answered by Robert Kane in *The Significance of Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 140–146.

31. See, for example, Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 88, 212–215; Charles Hartshorne, *The Logic of Perfection* (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court Books, 1962), 20; John B. Cobb, Jr., and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 24–28; Robert B. Mellert, *What is Process Theology?* (New York: St. Paul Press, 1975), 29, 72–73. When I say that "condition P is adequate for the occurrence of an event Q," I mean that a "minimum potential threshold for the actuality of Q has occurred, but that the P is also an adequate minimal potential threshold for the occurrence of R, S, T. . . ." When I say that "P is sufficient for the occurrence of Q," I mean that "the non-occurrence of Q is impossible given the occurrence of P."

Mormon assumptions in metaphysics. Unless it can be shown that process thought is incoherent, which is quite doubtful, then Sears is mistaken to assume that materialism entails determinism.

Further, science has progressed well beyond the vulgar billiard ball model of causation to explain the natural world in its totality. In particular, the emergence of chaos theory suggests that the natural world is subject to universal law-like behavior which is in principle not fully predictable. The human sciences have given up on the view that compares causation to coercion, including the view that causes necessitate their effects. Instead, causation is viewed merely as an explanatory relation of events. Most of our experience is not of causes which necessitate their effects, but of law-like relations of self-organizing chaotic systems. Moreover, chaos theory has demonstrated that biological systems are dominated by chaos. Chaos theory entails that many systems that were otherwise unexplainable are subject to law-like explanation. However, due to the sensitivity of initial conditions, the prediction of the behavior of chaotic systems is in principle impossible, given our epistemological limitations. Whether these limitations should also be affirmed to be ontological realities cannot be demonstrated by science.³² Nevertheless, the very existence of chaotic systems demonstrates that science does not and cannot establish a fully predictable system of deterministic explanation. As Paul Davies writes:

The conclusion must be that even if the universe behaves like a machine in the strict mathematical sense, it can still happen that genuinely new and in-principle unpredictable phenomena occur. If the universe were a linear Newtonian mechanical system, the future of the world would, in a very real sense, be contained in the present, and nothing genuinely new could happen. But in reality our universe is not a linear Newtonian mechanical system; it is a chaotic system. If the laws of mechanics are the only organizing principles shaping matter and energy, then its future is unknown and in principle unknowable. No finite intelligence, however powerful, could anticipate what new forms or systems may come to exist in the future. The

32. John Polkinghorne argues that chaos theory spells the end for the theory of causal determinism because prediction is epistemically limited for science and, thus, a meaningless hypothesis. He suggests that we should take the epistemological limitations as ontological fact. See his "The Metaphysics of Divine Action" in Robert John Russell, Nancy Murphy, and Arthur Peacock, eds., *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* (Berkeley CA: The Center for Theology and Natural Sciences, 1995), 47–56. Langdon Gilkay argues that chaos theory is inconsistent with causal determinism in "The God of Nature," *Ibid.*, 211–270. Wesley J. Wildman and Robert John Roselle argue that chaos theory supports determinism because it shows that cases we previously thought do not exhibit law-like behavior are subject to law-like explanation. However, their observations at most support uc-libertarianism and *not* nc-determinism. See "Chaos: A Mathematical Introduction," *Ibid.*, 49–90.

universe is in some sense open; it cannot be known what new levels of variety and complexity may be in store.³³

Sears has erected a false dichotomy, claiming that the only alternative to causal determinism is random indeterminism. There is a third notion of human agency that is neither the necessary effect of the causal past nor merely a random occurrence. It is the notion of agency as "creative synthesis." Human consciousness is a synthesis of unorganized stimuli into an integrated experience, and freedom arises from this creative act. Human freedom consists of a synthetic unity of experience not present in the stimuli or causes from which consciousness arises. Human creativity is the additional element which must be added to the totality of past causes necessary to explain human choices.

I suggest that human agency be viewed as a creative synthesis of the causal influences that form the limiting of scope of human agency together with a creative, organizing input from the agent. Unlike billiard balls, free agents are proactive in their interaction with reality.

A conscious mind reacts differently to stimuli than an unconscious mind. The difference is that humans act upon the data of experience to fashion it into integrated experience. Such a view of agency is required by the Mormon view that persons are not determined by a fallen character, they are not stuck with their past, but are free to change their character. For unless choices both arise from and also shape character, no such character development or soul-making is possible. Persons are free to choose either good or evil, and are not pre-determined by causal antecedents.

Moreover, this notion of agency as a creative synthesis of prior (causal) data is supported by brain research. For example, studies conducted at Berkeley suggest that unconscious or inactive brain states are characterized by "chaos" or non-linear patterns. However, when a conscious person engages in sensory perception, an underlying order in brain activity arises from the chaotic function and forms patterns of brain activity. At the moment of perception, vast collections of neurons shift abruptly and simultaneously from chaotic and random activity to complex activity patterns.³⁴ In essence, the brain is like other chaotic systems that exhibit random behavior which evolves into a hidden underlying order of brain activity. The insight that the brain is a chaotic system which is self-organizing suggests that free choices arise from the self-ordering, self-cause initiating systems of underlying chaos. Thus, the mechanistic world view underlying Newtonian physics and a clock-

33. *The Cosmic Blueprint* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1988), 55–56.

34. Walter J. Freeman, "The Physiology of Perception," *Scientific American* 264, no. 2 (Feb. 1991): 78–85.

work, deterministic universe gives way to self-organizing complexity and novel order. As Freeman concluded in his study: "In short, an act of perception is not the copying of an incoming stimulus. It is a step in a trajectory by which brains grow, reorganize themselves and reach into the environment to change it to their advantage."³⁵

Now I am not claiming that any of this *scientifically proves* that determinism is false and libertarianism is true. We just don't know enough about how our material bodies, in particular our brains and neural systems, interact with prior causes. We are simply phenomenally ignorant about such matters. We know even less about how a "finer-material" spirit body works and interacts with causal forces. However, we can emphatically state that science has not proven determinism to be true. Thus, it cannot simply be assumed that it is true to prove that Mormonism squares better with determinism because of its materialist metaphysic.

THE ARGUMENT FROM CONSERVATION OF MASS-ENERGY

Sears next argues that libertarians view free choices as uncaused and, therefore, as popping into being from nothing. Thus, he concludes that libertarianism violates the conservation laws of mass-energy and amounts to creation out of nothing. He then argues that because Mormonism rejects *creation ex nihilo*, it should also reject libertarian free will.³⁶

However, after giving his argument he concedes that a libertarian could hold that pre-existing energy is consumed in making choices or that existing matter is simply organized in novel fashions. Thus, he admits that this argument is not a knockout punch to libertarians. Nevertheless, he regards such views as "*ad hoc*" and concludes that the relation between the Mormon view rejecting *creation ex nihilo* and determinism is "undeniable."³⁷

Frankly, these claims are puzzling. Just why it is *ad hoc* for a libertarian to hold that making free decisions uses pre-existing energy he never says. Once again, the argument is nothing more than sheer assertion. I have always felt that it is quite natural to believe that free will arises from organizing chaotic energy into novel order and complexity. Indeed, this view is precisely the position of free agency as a "creative synthesis" that I have already briefly outlined. Thus, Sears's argument is a non-starter.

35. *Ibid.*, 85.

36. Sears, 124–125.

37. *Ibid.*, 125.

SEARS' ATTEMPT TO REFUTE ARGUMENTS AGAINST DETERMINISM

Sears turns next to answer arguments which he asserts have been used to discredit determinism. The first argument is that determinism somehow implies predestination.³⁸ While it is true that predestination implies divine determinism, I agree with Sears that it is not true that determinism implies predestination. For predestination requires that *God* be the determiner of individual salvation, whereas causal determinism can arise entirely from naturalistic causation.

However, Sears states that I present an argument that creates a "similar confusion" by arguing that petitionary prayer is pointless if God foreknows the future.³⁹ Sears argues that God is not stuck with the future he "sees" because part of what he sees are his own choices and the human choices that cause the future. Sears asserts: "The future God foresees may well be shaped by God's foreseen response to our foreseen prayer: the prayer then is not an irrelevant side show but rather an essential causal nexus significantly shaping the future."⁴⁰ However, I believe that Sears has not fully realized the dialectical situation here.

It can be admitted that what God foreknows includes his own responses to human prayers without affecting the conclusion that God is powerless to answer a prayer if he has foreknowledge. It remains the case that it is incoherent to suppose that God uses his knowledge of future events either as a basis for his own decisions (say to answer prayers) or as a guide to proper exercise of the divine power. For if God sees all effects of all causes that lead to his responses to prayer, then the causes are logically prior to any divine response, for these effects of the causes are supposedly already known prior to God's response. The effects of the causes must already be known *prior to* God's response for they are somehow already "there in the causes" to guide the divine decision. But if the effects of the causes are known before God can even deliberate or decide, then there is never a time before which God already knows what he will do. Thus, God is stuck with what he sees the effects of the causes will be before he can deliberate about it. Moreover, how could God change what he has seen the effects of all prior causes (supposedly including his own choices and human prayers) will be? Remember, for Sears, God is a part of the fully pre-determined world because God too is a material being. Thus, everything God thinks or does is always the pre-determined effect of prior causes.

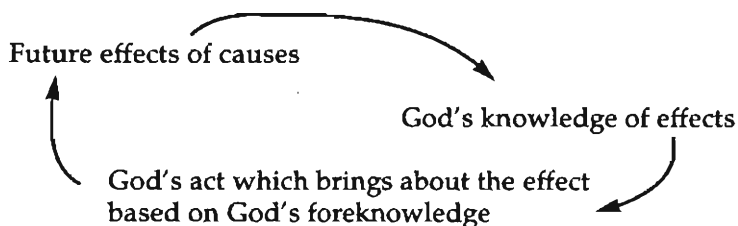
We can say that *x* logically precedes *y* if the truth of *y* depends on, or is contingent upon, the truth of *x*. Given God's foreknowledge based on

38. *Ibid.*, 126–28.

39. *Ibid.*, 128.

40. *Ibid.*

knowing the prior causal order, God knows what he knows because all effects are included in the causes known to God; the effect does not occur because God knows it. Thus, God's foreknowledge is logically dependent on the actuality of the future effect already present in the causes. God's providential acts such as answers to prayer and miracles, in turn, depend on and supposedly are causally explained by God's acts done in dependence on all-encompassing knowledge of the future. God supposedly knows what to do because he knows the effects present in the already existing causes and has arranged and ordered his acts in light of what he knows will occur. But these divine acts are also part of the causal chain which will bring about the future events foreknown to God. We, thus, have a logical and perhaps causal circularity: the effects of divine providence causally depend on God's acts, and God's acts depend on God's foreknowledge, and God's knowledge in turn depends on the effects of divine providence. That is, the determined future logically precedes God's knowledge, which logically precedes his acts, which logically precede the determined future. We, thus, have a vicious circularity which renders the entire scheme incoherent:



The future effect explains God's foreknowledge of the effect, and God's foreknowledge explains God's act to bring about the effect, and God's action explains why the effect is brought about. This same type of vicious circularity is involved in the example of the son who goes back in time and kills his father and, thus, brings it about that his son never existed! Sears's explanation of how determinism is compatible with petitionary prayer is itself incoherent.

Sears's view also has the consequence of binding God to a determinate future before he can providentially get involved. It follows that God cannot plan or deliberate about the future—or even his own future acts. Why would anyone plan for something when he already knows with absolute certainty how it will be because he has seen it in present causes? Planning presupposes that future events are not yet determined and must be ordered to bring about desired results. It presupposes a time when the future is not absolutely certain to occur in the way that will be planned. Further, planning presupposes that the future can be otherwise unless the planning is done. But God's decisions themselves are a part of the predetermined order which he foresees! For God is as much a part of

the causal order as everything else in Sears's view. Thus, there was never a time before which God's own decisions were not already a part of the causal order. For any act God performs there is *no* time prior to that act at which God does not already know every future event in detail, including which acts he is already causally determined to bring about.

Thus, God cannot act to answer a prayer unless it is already in the cards of the causal order to answer the prayer. It follows that God does not answer the prayer *because of* the prayer, but only because it was already a necessary effect of pre-existing causes.

DETERMINISM AND FREE AGENCY

Sears also argues that determinism does not undermine free agency, which includes both free will and moral responsibility. Sears accepts the position which previously has been articulated by both Truman Madsen and Kent Robson that Mormonism's commitment to eternal intelligences undermines a key argument against determinism.⁴¹ The "consequence argument" against determinism basically concludes that if determinism is true, then we can trace the *external* causes of behavior to a time before the person existed. For example, suppose that a person, we'll call him Rock, desires to steal a Mars bar from a 7-Eleven. Rock has these desires, he mistakenly thinks, because he likes Mars bars and doesn't like to part with his money. However, if determinism is true, then Rock's desire to steal is the causal result of his brain chemistry and environment, and these in turn are the result of antecedent causal events which can be traced back, ultimately, to causal events and circumstances over which Rock had no control, for they existed long before he was born. Is Rock morally responsible for stealing the Mars bar? How could he be? The act of stealing is fully explained by events over which he had no control. It follows that he had no control over whether he desired to steal the Mars bar. Rock is no more responsible for stealing than he would be for having a congenital birth defect.⁴²

Sears concedes that this "consequence argument" is a strong reason for rejecting determinism as it is usually conceived. However, the Mormon belief in the eternal intelligences alters the consequence argument. Sears argues that if a person has always existed, then the causes cannot

41. Truman Madsen, *Eternal Man* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976), 63–70; Kent Robson, "The Foundations of Freedom in Mormon Thought," *Sunstone* 7, no. 5 (Sept.–Oct. 1982): 51–54. Robson appears to adopt uc-libertarianism, for although he maintains a form of causal determinism, he asserts that "there are adequate causal circumstances for me to act in several different ways."

42. The consequences argument is critiqued and revised by Thomas S. McKay, "A Reconsideration of an Argument Against Compatibilism," *Philosophical Topics* 24, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 113–122.

ultimately be traced to *external* events over which the person had no control; rather, some of the relevant causes are always *internal* to the person: "Since intelligences are uncreated, each individual has always been able to influence the course of events; nobody is entirely the product of past circumstances over which she had no control; 'man has never been totally a product.'"⁴³

I agree with Sears that the consequence argument is undermined by the belief that some causes are always internal to the agent. Indeed, Sears can even speak of "self-determination." Although every decision is determined by prior causal events, I have always been around to influence those events. Sears goes on, at least partly, to ground both free will and moral responsibility in the ability to deliberate and reason. Moreover, he points out that we can deliberate and reason even if determinism is true (as long as we are in fact ignorant of the actual causes leading to our behavior).⁴⁴ "[P]eople 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."⁴⁵

However, Sears appears to overlook the fact that deliberation and reasoning are merely a façade if determinism is true. Consider the nature of deliberation and rational thought. If I act *based upon rational thought and deliberation*, then I act *because I recognize that the action is a rational conclusion* of my thinking and deliberation. I act for the reasons that I have considered. However, if determinism is true then I never act based solely on the reasons I have considered.

Let us suppose with Sears that human thinking is determined in the sense that every thought or belief accepted by a person is a necessary result of the prior causal events whether internal or external to the person. Is it not evident that on such a view that rational thought is impossible? It cannot be true that anyone's thinking is guided by rational processes; rather, it is guided entirely by laws of cause and effect which proceed with no regard to whether the thought processes they generate correspond to the principles of sound reasoning. If I have a thought, it is not because it was a rational conclusion, but because it was determined by prior causes. Thus, the thought I now have is the result of prior causes, and I can never trace any act or thought to one that is not merely the result of prior causes, whether internal or external to me. If I have a thought and determinism is true, it is not because it is the result of rational process but because it is the upshot of the prior states of the universe.

43. Sears, 134, quoting Truman Madsen, *Eternal Man* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1966), 65.

44. Sears has an inconsistent view, for he asserts that God knows all of the causes past and future and yet God deliberates and is free.

45. Sears, 138.

If determinism is true, no one ever thinks rationally, but merely has thoughts caused by prior circumstances. Our belief that we are capable of rational thought, that we can act because of our rational insight, is merely an illusion if determinism is true. Of course, this includes the determinist's own thinking. If he is right, Sears was determined to be a determinist long before he had any thoughts about it! How could Sears' commitment to determinism be the result of rational thinking when he was causally determined to believe in determinism long before he thought about it?

This conclusion is not changed simply because some of the causes may have been eternally internal to me. Assume that all human thinking, deliberations, acts, and choices are fully determined by my prior internal decisions. Suppose that I decide to go to the opera in 1960 among other things. In 1999 I must decide whether to steal a Mars bar from a 7-Eleven. If my decision whether or not to steal is explained by my prior decisions, including my prior decision to go to the opera in 1960, then it seems that I do not act responsibly when I rob the 7-Eleven. For I did not appreciate the causal consequences of deciding to go to the opera in 1960—I didn't know I was also causally determining myself to steal in 1999. I contemplated the wrong consequences when I decided to go to the opera. I thought I was deciding to enjoy Mozart when in reality I was also deciding to enjoy a purloined Mars bar. Unbeknownst to me, when I decided to go to the opera, I was also unwittingly causally determining my later "choice" to rob the 7-eleven.

It, thus, follows that none of my decisions are the result of the reasons I think. I am unaware of the actual causes of my thoughts and actions if determinism is true. How could I be morally responsible for my thoughts and the acts that issue from them when I failed to appreciate the real causes of acts? How could I be rational in my deliberations when the decisions that I consider in the moment were all causally determined by causal events long before I thought about the decision? It seems to me that these are strong reasons for rejecting even Sears' particular version of eternal, partially internal, causal determinism.

It may be responded that my argument confuses *reasons* for belief with *causes* of belief. It may be claimed that a conclusion may be supported by reasons even though those reasons are causally determined. If an act is supported by reasons, then it is a rational belief. However, this response fails to grasp the fact that no one ever accepts a belief *because* she sees that it is supported by good reasons if determinism is true; rather, the reasons entertained are merely a façade for the underlying causes that go back far before any of the reasons were considered.

It should be noted also that Sears sometimes speaks as if an act is not wholly an effect; instead, he speaks as if something new and not already determined is added by the agent. For instance, he claims that Truman

Madsen is a “proponent of a deterministic interpretation of Mormon doctrine” because he asserts that the “Gordian knot” of determinism is solved by a belief in the eternal intelligence.⁴⁶ However, Sears misreads Madsen. When Madsen states that the traditional dichotomy between determinism and indeterminism is “cut not by indeterminism, but by *self-determination*,” Sears takes Madsen to be affirming determinism after all. Indeed, Madsen does affirm universal cause-effect relationships, but he also states that “man is, and always has been, one of the *unmoved movers*, one of the *originating causes* in the network.”⁴⁷ Sears also quotes Madsen with approval when he asserts that “man has never been totally a product.”⁴⁸ However, such affirmations show that Madsen is actually a libertarian, though he fails to distinguish between uc-libertarianism when he affirms universal causation, and pa-libertarianism when he affirms that the will is uncaused. For Madsen clearly believes that the human will is uncaused, for it is an *unmoved mover*, that is, the will is not sufficiently explained by reference to any prior causes. For Madsen, the will is an “originating cause,” meaning that no prior causes were necessary to create it. However, if nc-determinism is true, then man is totally a product of the past whether the causes are external or internal. There is nothing genuinely new added by persons, but mere products of the past, for every event was already written in the past causal states of the universe long before it happened. Sears wants to affirm that persons “have always had something more to contribute to the network of causes and effects than that which they received from *outside influences*,”⁴⁹ but such a position hardly affirms that anything new is added when the past internal states of the person are added to the equation. Indeed, Sears also affirms that any truly *new* force in the universe would violate the second law of thermodynamics, the law of conservation of energy. Thus, if causal determinism is true, we do not really originate anything that is truly new; rather, we merely effectuate what the prior causes dictate.

The Immediate Experience of Free Will.

Sears admits that causal determinism seems to be at odds with our immediate experience and intuitive grasp of making free choices and that “we are able to do other than we do.” In my immediate experience, I am able to choose to do a thing or refrain from doing it. In the moment of choosing, I am deciding in that moment what I will do; what I will do is

46. *Ibid.*, 133.

47. Madsen, 65.

48. *Ibid.*

49. Sears, 131.

not decided until I decide it.⁵⁰ According to Sears, however, this intuitive view and our immediate experience are mistaken; we are never able to choose other than we do.⁵¹ Sears attempts to soften the counter-intuitive impact of causal determinism by observing that whether or not “determinism is true, we still, in Kant’s phrase, must act under the idea of freedom.”⁵² He maintains that “determinism does not change what deliberation looks and feels like from the point of view of the person trying to decide what to do. . . .”⁵³ However, it must be pointed out that this “idea of freedom” could as easily be translated as the “illusion of freedom” given causal determinism. While, according to Sears, I must act as if I were free to do other than I could when I deliberate, if Sears is correct, then the idea that I can, in fact, do other than I do is illusory.

It seems to me that Sears *assumes* determinism to be true and then argues that since determinism is true, our internal deliberations must look the same whether determinism is true or not since we obviously deliberate and feel that we can do otherwise than we do. However, Sears makes an unwarranted epistemological leap in his argument, for he cannot know what it feels like to deliberate, given the truth of determinism, unless determinism is true. But he doesn’t know that; he merely assumes it. The truth of the matter is that if determinism is true, then our immediate experience is illusory and misleading. It is not true that what I will do is decided by me in the moment of deliberation and decision, as my experience reveals; rather, it was determined long before I deliberated and decided. It is not true that I could choose to go to the opera or stay home in the moment I deliberate, for it was determined that I would go to the opera long before I deliberated about it.

50. Whether free will and/or moral responsibility require “power to do otherwise” has been much debated in recent philosophical literature. Based on “Frankfurt-style counterexamples,” many have argued that the ability to do otherwise is not necessary for moral responsibility. See John Martin Fischer, *The Metaphysics of Free Will: An Essay on Control* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994). However, I believe that the better position is that responsibility, moral or otherwise, requires freedom to refrain from doing an act. I doubt that Frankfurt-style counter-examples are even possible in a world that is not completely deterministic. See David Widerker, “Libertarianism and Frankfurt’s Attack on the Principle of Alternative Possibilities,” *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (April 1995): 274–261; and “Libertarian Freedom and Avoidability of Decisions,” *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (January 1995): 113–118; David Widerker and Charlotte Katzoff, “Avoidability and Libertarianism: A Response to Fischer,” *Faith and Philosophy* 13 (July 1996): 415–421. The best treatment of the subject, in my view, is Robert Kane, “Response to Bernard Berofsky, John Martin Fischer and Galen Strawson,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 61 (January 2000): 157–167 and *The Significance of Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); and William Hasker, *Emergent Dualism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), chap. 4.

51. Soft determinists maintain that I am able to do other than I in fact do *if I had chosen to do so*, but I am *not* able to choose other than I do given past circumstances.

52. Sears, 129.

53. *Ibid.*, 130.

It is precisely this violence to our immediate experience that strongly argues against acceptance of causal determinism. It seems to me that the gospel is predicated on the view that I am free to make choices in this life that were not determined long before I was born—even if I was around when the determining causes were set into motion. This life is a “state of probation” to allow us to declare what we stand for and who we really are based upon the choices we make in this life when confronted by genuine temptation and challenges in concrete situations. It wasn’t already in the cards before we got here. This is an aspect of the Mormon view of things that is at its very core. It is a vital part of the Mormon gospel that I for one am loath to abandon in favor of causal determinism.

CONCLUSION

It seems to me that Sears has failed to identify any good reasons for adopting determinism. Mormon theology (if there is such a thing) militates *against*, not in favor of, accepting causal determinism. Further, his responses to arguments against causal determinism seem to me to be unpersuasive. Therefore, I freely choose to reject his view regarding causal determinism. Of course, if Sears is right, I was determined by causes long before I even thought about it to reject his views on causal determinism. Thus, if there are errors in this response to his views, the fault is not in my reasoning, but in the collocation of atoms in my past. You see, given what occurred in the past, I literally could not do otherwise; every word of this article was causally determined long before I was born—if Sears is right.