On the Existential Impossibility of a Religious Identity: *I'm a Mormon*

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Psychologist William James referred to personal identity as psychology's "most puzzling puzzle."[1] The oracle of Delphi's most famous charge—Know Yourself—affirms that human puzzlement over the nature of identity goes back to the early days of civilization, since the oracle would hardly find this counsel significant enough to utter if everyone already knew themselves as a matter of course. Descartes thought he had solved the problem by locating identity itself in the irreducible fact of consciousness, or the *cogito* of *I think, therefore I am*, but in our own day, philosopher-theologian Paul Ricoeur points out that the *I* implicit in Descartes's first-person verb presumes itself, rather than proves itself, so that Descartes's assurance only demands that we ask, ". . . what is this 'I'"?[2] A person's very first step toward a definitive declaration of identity—in terms such as *I am . . .*—has no ground on which to land. Insofar as what constitutes *any* identity, or human identity, *per se*, still baffles us, we find ourselves unmoored even before we consider a question such as what constitutes a specific *kind* of identity.

So, the declaration *I'm a Mormon* is problematic. If we can't find a self, we can hardly find a *Mormon* self. But this philosophical uncertainty has not stood in the way of the LDS Church's most recent media assault on the United States. Four years after it first colonized billboards and the rooftops of taxi cabs in New York City, the marketing campaign still asserts itself with a mad audacity. Smiling, non-threatening faces appear on no less than three successive pages of the Marquee program distributed to audiences attending current touring productions of Matt Stone's

and Trey Parker's satirical musical *The Book of Mormon*. The faces assert their Mormon identities, even in hostile territory, as perfectly reasonable, natural, ordinary, and amenably heedless of the content of the play their faces inadvertently advertise. The all-American strategy seems to serve its purpose even in the United Kingdom, where visitors to mormon.org.uk as well as requests for contact with the LDS Church jumped two hundred and fifty percent within the first couple of months during which the young and hip proclaimed their Mormon identity from the walls of the underground passageways of the Tube.[3]

But the campaign's blissful ignorance of the problem of identity, and of a particularly Mormon identity, does not dismiss the problem. Other faces—similarly happy, similarly smiling—appear on various institution-defying channels of the internet to affirm *I'm a Mormon* with equal conviction, though without the sanction, approval, or even the affirmation of the LDS Church. The ongoing battle over who can speak this most recent of the LDS Church's marketing tag lines brings into relief the existential problem that is inherent in such an affirmation of identity.[4]

At the parochial level, *I'm a Mormon* challenges us to consider what constitutes a personal identity as "Mormon." At the ecumenical level, the existential comprehensiveness implied by *I'm a Mormon* demands an interrogation of the extent to which identity consists only and exclusively of an ideology, or of an exclusive ideology. That is, *I'm a Mormon* raises some questions: (1) How does a person know if he or she is a Mormon? (2) What is the quality of existence that is uniquely Mormon? (3) Is a Mormon *always* a Mormon, at every moment? (4) Must a Mormon be *only* a Mormon, or can a person be a Mormon and also be something else—also, for instance, a Hindu, or an atheist? Insofar as these questions are, indeed, legitimate questions, the parochial and ecumenical versions of the Mormon identity problem both speak back to the presumption that some institution—the LDS Church, for example—is the final arbiter of Mormon identity. Who can declare *I'm a Mormon* and what that declaration must affirm and deny elude institutional prescription as surely as declaring *I'm an American* or *I'm a Pepper*.[5]

The interrogation of the marketing slogan will grow more abstruse later in this discussion. But first, the most straightforward complication in circumscribing what the word *Mormon* can mean. Mormonism has always had Christian content. The central event of the Book of Mormon narrative finds the resurrected Jesus visiting followers in the Americas. Joseph Smith reported visions of the divine Jesus. The language of Mormon ordinances has consistently included deference to Jesus, alongside the Father and the Holy Ghost. Nevertheless, Mormonism's claim to Christianity has always been in question, and since at least the 1950s, the beginning of the great LDS expansion, the LDS Church has exerted an effort to claim Christian legitimacy for itself in a national and international field. Jan Shipps has summarized some of the deliberate strategies that the LDS Church has employed in the past few decades to bring its Christian elements into greater relief against the background of Mormon elements that distinguish Mormonism from historical Christianity.[6] From curricular modifications that emphasize the apostolic heritage that the LDS Church claims to the orientation of publicly proclaimed doctrine toward "Atonement discourse" to adding an assertive subtitle to its central scripture to redesigning the church's logo, the LDS Church has tried to claim an identity as a Christian church rather than as a Mormon church. LDS members consistently express incredulity at the charge that Mormonism is not Christian and cite the name of the Church, the Church's official recognition of Jesus' divine sonship, the Church's acceptance of the New Testament as holy writ, and other things, as signs of Mormonism's Christian bona fides. Since it bows to Jesus Christ, goes the argument, the Mormon identity must be Christian.

At the same time, and with considerable irony, LDS Church members routinely deny the Mormon bona fides of members of the Community of Christ, the FLDS church, the Hedrickites, etc.[7] However, by the same logic that Mormonism must be Christian because of Mormonism's confession of Jesus' divinity, it seems that Mormon reorganizations, reformations, fundamentalisms, and other movements have a legitimate right to call themselves Mormon on account of their confession of Joseph Smith's

prophethood and their adoption of the Book of Mormon as scripture.[8] The LDS rejoinder that these various religions do not properly understand Smith's prophetic role nor do they properly interpret the Book of Mormon sound suspiciously like the traditional Christian's assertion that Mormons do not understand Jesus nor interpret the Bible properly.[9]

Before looking at the problem of personal Mormon identity, we should first acknowledge that "Mormon," as a socio-cultural category, must include any communities that harbor peculiarly Mormon elements of doctrine or practice which make them distinct from other new religious movements. As opposed to a conviction of Jesus' godhood, of the Bible as the divine word, of the family of faith to be found in Christianity, which were articles of faith that were common to religious movements, well-established and otherwise, in Jacksonian New England, the confession of Joseph Smith's divine commission, or prophethood, and an acknowledgement of the scriptural status of the Book of Mormon were unique to the people whom outsiders would call Mormons almost from the moment of Smith's publication of the Book of Mormon. Those communities that make these unique claims must be, historically, Mormon.

Given this thesis, there are, clearly, many Mormon churches of which the LDS Church is only one (albeit the largest by a significant margin). It follows, then, that any affiliate of any of these many churches—from Stephen M. Veazey to Warren Jeffs—can aver without equivocation *I'm a Mormon*. It also follows that the unaffiliated might legitimately claim Mormonism as their own. Insofar as an individual confesses Joseph Smith's prophetic role and the scriptural character of the Book of Mormon, he or she axiomatically identifies himself or herself as a Mormon.[10] The first hurdle in sussing out the content of *I'm a Mormon* is determining how the declaration accounts for many Mormonisms—the variety of traditions that descends from the publication of the Book of Mormon and the founding of the Church of Christ, which was Smith's first Mormon institution. This is to say: one significant problem with declaring *I'm a Mormon* is that the statement does not specify what kind of Mormon one is. Indeed, given how many

Mormonisms there are, the assertion *I'm a Mormon* does more to obscure than clarify an individual's religious identity.[11]

The diverse institutional geography of Mormonism may be the most obvious obstacle to a definitive understanding of Mormon identity, but probably the least interesting, since it is, ultimately, a political matter that could be more or less resolved by referendum.[12] More intriguing, if more unforgivably recondite, are the existential conundrums that any presumption of Mormon identity inevitably butts up against.

Three centuries ago, John Locke puzzled over personal identity in a way subsequent arguments have had to address. Among the philosopher's classic questions about identity are the following:

> What makes a forty-five-year-old numerically identical with an eight-year-old from thirty-seven years prior, with whom the forty-five-year-old shares a name and a certain, apparent physical continuity?
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> Is the "sameness" of a forty-five-year-old and an eight-year-old quantitative or qualitative?
>
> Is it possible that a forty-five-year-old is *not* the same person as an eight-year-old with whom the forty-five-year-old shares a name and a certain physical continuity?

One classic, Christian solution to all such questions resides in the concept of an eternal soul that is independent of the physical body. According to this religious idea, a person's identity resides in his or her soul, which lives apart from the body and after the body's dissolution, so that identity is transcendent and immaterial and not subject to the contingencies that inspire Locke's classic questions about personal identity.

However, the "eternal soul solution" did not satisfy Locke, and it certainly does not address the matter of Mormon identity, at least insofar as one applies the tripartite Mormon concept of being, which makes the soul neither immaterial nor independent of the body. Proposing a hypothetical example, *Freaky Friday* model in which God swaps the souls of a prince and a cobbler, Locke concluded that the Christian soul, eternal and physically

transcendent, cannot account for identity, since physical circumstances very much shape identity. Splitting the conceptual hairs demanded by such Mormon aphorisms as "the spirit and the body are the soul of man," we would have to concede that the term *spirit* in the Mormon lexicon is closer to the term *soul* as understood by traditional, bipartite Christendom, at least to the extent that Mormons would acknowledge that the spirit can exist apart from the body, but the soul cannot.[13] This bit of parsing might help us edge toward solving the identity puzzle by way of a metaphysical entity after all.[14] We might say that a Mormon identity is essentially embedded in a person's spirit. But we would then have to wrestle with Joseph Smith's dictum that the spirit is fundamentally deficient and must be embodied to be whole.[15] Considering this Mormon conception, a spirit might be "Mormon" in some way, but the complete soul—of which spirit is only a constituent part—might not be.

Rather than solving questions of Mormon identity, a theory that embeds identity in spirit only creates new questions for the interrogation of Mormon identity:

> If God switched my Mormon spirit with the non-Mormon spirit of Kim Jong-un, so that when my duly baptized and endowed body awoke in the morning to threaten the suburban neighbors with nuclear tests, and the unbaptized, unendowed body in Pyongyang awoke with a hankering for pancakes and peanut butter, whose temple work would need to be done after our deaths?

I will suggest here that the argument has not run off the rails, its citation of the very un-railed Democratic People's Republic of Korea notwithstanding. If Mormonism will assert that an individual identity can *be* Mormon, as opposed to something else, and if Mormonism will follow the classic Christian address of the identity problem by accepting the proposition that each individual is possessed of a unique, bodiless spirit, then Mormonism is necessarily positing that an individual spirit could itself be possessed of a uniquely Mormon quality or character, which would, presumably, accompany the Mormon spirit to another physical body were God to oblige the experiment.[16] If temple work must be done for Kim

Jong-un's body after my Mormon spirit has occupied it and after also my Mormon spirit has left it (to death), we have found the Mormon doctrine of the deficiency of the spirit, which concedes that (Mormon) identity does not reside in a non-physical (not, necessarily, immaterial) spirit. If temple work need not be done for Kim Jong-un's body because my Mormon spirit has occupied it, we have uncovered a serious problem with Mormon temple work, which will be examined in greater detail below. In either case, we find that the Mormon approach to identity—at least inasmuch as we accept that that identity can *be* of a particular sort—departs from a traditional, bipartite, Christian concept of being. We also discover that Mormonism does not locate Mormon-ness in either the body or the spirit.

Locke was similarly dissatisfied by the "soul" solution. To replace the soul as the seat of identity, Locke proposed "consciousness" as an element that is not the same as the Christian soul, and that can be regarded as one and unified over time, irrespective of the radical changes through which a single human body passes. Locke saw consciousness as especially evident in the phenomenon of human memory. Hence, what justifies regarding an eight-year-old and a forty-five-year-old as the same person is the individual, unified, continuous consciousness that both possess, in which lies the singular historical narrative of memory that both share. Locke's location of the self in a continuous consciousness sets aside both the body and the spirit as the sites of identity, which had the advantages of accounting for the persistence of identity independently of the significant difference between an eight-year-old body and a forty-five-year-old body, and of setting aside the problems inherent in locating identity exclusively in the (Christian) soul.

One of these problems might be the unfalsifiability of anything that is immaterial. Locke himself was not so concerned with proof (or not) of spirit. He accepted certain Christian concepts of life after death, which required a belief in an immortal spirit, and part of what drove his reconceptualization of identity was an anticipation of the Christian resurrection, in which spirit and body would reunite. Locke was, rather, concerned that the Christian spirit was no more useful as a location of identity than the

physical body. A not-conscious person, for instance—a person, say, in a coma—might have both body and spirit, but not much in the way of individual identity. Worse, upon waking from the coma without memory of anything preceding the coma, such a person would *not* be the same person as before going into the coma, though, presumably, would still be composed of the same body and spirit. Identity, for Locke, thus became less something defined by a distinct entity (such as a body or a spirit) and more itself a definition. Rather than deriving its essential nature from a soul and its God-given characteristics, a person's consciousness determines the nature of the body and spirit which it accompanies.

Lockean identity, then, is not a feature of an individual, but an agency, and in some important ways, Western culture has followed along. Among other things that Locke's concept drives is Western jurisprudence, which, by allowing such things as insanity pleas, recognizes identity as a function of agency (or vice-versa). That the law might not reasonably punish an individual who was not conscious of his or her actions in the moment of committing them acknowledges the Lockean doctrine that the individual who commits a crime and the individual who stands accused in the box may not be the same individual, even if the two are composed of the same body/spirit. Moreover, as Patrick Stokes has articulated, the identity that Locke imagines establishes and secures its existence by being the agency of its activity. Rather than a transcendent entity showing us what (or who) is responsible for an act, responsibility for an action, which only arises from a conscious, free act, shows where and what identity is.[17] The Lockean implications of *I'm a Mormon* are profound. For one thing, Mormonism's deep investment in the sanctity of agency makes the religion appear as a hyper-Lockean worldview. Certain restoration scripture makes agency more important than obedience.[18] Indeed, at least one of Joseph Smith's revelations asserts the very Lockean claim that existence itself depends on agency.[19] Saying *I'm a Mormon* seems to be as much as to say, "Choosing to do the Mormon things I do establishes and determines my Mormon-ness."

But Locke was not without his critics, even in his own day, and he does not provide a theory of identity that incontestably

determines what constitutes a Mormon identity. The classic questions about personal identity ring with a new and portentous tone when tuned with the language of Mormon selfhood:

> If *I'm a Mormon* when I am eight years old, am I necessarily a Mormon when I am forty-five years old?
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> If *I'm a Mormon* at eight years old and at forty-five years old, is the Mormon characteristic over this span of time quantitative or qualitative?
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> If *I'm a Mormon* at eight years old but not at forty-five years old, is the difference physical, psychological, spiritual, or institutional?
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> If *I'm a Mormon* at eight and at forty-five, am I the *same* Mormon, and, if not, is it because the forty-five-year-old's *I'm* is not the same *I'm* as the eight-year-old's? Or, is it possible that Mormonness when I was eight years old is not the same Mormon-ness now that I am forty-five?

In the search for the constitution of a Mormon self, these questions—and many more that we might ask—are not incidental. The answers that are forthcoming reveal how we think of Mormonism as a phenomenon. The answers that are not forthcoming, similarly, reveal just how problematic the declaration *I'm a Mormon* can be.

Locke's critics have pointed out that people often *do not* feel a continuity between their eight-year-old selves and their forty-five-year-old selves. A forty-five-year-old may not feel a responsibility for his actions as an eight-year-old (or, perhaps more illustratively, as an eighteen-year-old). As Locke's near-contemporary Thomas Reid pointed out, the forty-five-year-old might not remember what the eight-year-old did, even without the catastrophic event of comatose amnesia. If we accept Locke without qualification, we would have to regard such forgetful forty-five-year-old people as distinct individuals from the eight-year-old people of their lost pasts. Where Mormonism is concerned, if my eight-year-old self was baptized, but my forty-five-year-old self does not recall the event (which, in this case, is mostly true), the forty-five-year-old Mormon self is not the same thing as the eight-year-old Mormon

self. Under Locke, if my eight-year-old self could genuinely declare *I'm a Mormon* on account of remembering his baptism, my forty-five-year-old self, which does not recall the event, might not, genuinely, be able to make the same affirmation.

In an un-Lockean way, Mormonism could dismiss this conundrum as mere nit-pickery that need not concern people who inhabit the real world forsaken so readily by the pointless flights of philosophical imagination. The eight-year-old body was baptized, therefore the forty-five-year-old body is Mormon. But this Mormonism has merely retreated to the theory that the body that can be submersed holds an individual's personal Mormon identity—a formula of personal identity that did not satisfy Locke, in the first place. Even so, this very retreat necessarily reasserts a Lockean concept of personal identity in spite of itself. The individual who does not remember his or her Mormon baptism might be able—might, even, be *required*—to declare *I'm a Mormon*, anyway, to the extent that his or her body can be remembered by *someone* to have been baptized in the past. Here, we see Mormon materialism manifest, the kind of materialism that regards even the physical body as eternal, and, therefore, necessarily constitutive of personal identity. Indeed, we see here something we might call "obligatory materialism," inasmuch as the body provides for personal Mormon identity where neither spirit nor consciousness can.

Consider that in LDS Mormonism—one Mormonism that still practices baptism for the dead—the theology of proxy baptism includes the anecdotal but frequently affirmed doctrine that in the event that proxy baptisms are performed for them, the spirits of the departed have been taught LDS Mormonism and choose, even as spirits, whether or not to be Mormon. LDS Mormons are careful to stipulate that the proxy baptism itself is of no consequence without the conscious understanding and consent of the dead. This valorization of agency seems very Lockean and may imply that LDS Mormons find identity in consciousness rather than the body after all. But in the Lockean scheme, the person who emerges from a coma with no recollection of his or her Mormon-ness cannot be said at that moment to understand nor to have consented to his or her baptism, and, therefore, ought to

be baptized again (following, of course, adequate instruction and his or her conscious consent). LDS Mormonism, however, would *not* rebaptize the person awaking from a coma with no recollection whatsoever of his or her pre-coma Mormon-ness, which shows that consciousness and its concomitant agency are, actually, not so very important and that Mormonism does, indeed, locate Mormon-ness in the physical body and not in spirit or consciousness or consent. If the pre-coma baptism is left as perfectly efficacious regardless of the coma and the ignorance of Mormon identity the coma brings about—that is, ignorance of the Mormon activity in which some consciousness chose to engage in the past and for which that consciousness feels a responsibility—we might just as well conclude that proxy baptism does *not* require the conscious acquiescence of the dead, since the superfluity of post-amnesia rebaptism demonstrates that consciousness and deliberate action on the part of the baptized are unnecessary. We should also conclude from the superfluity of post-amnesia rebaptism that LDS doctrine and practice do, in fact, locate Mormon-ness in the body, quite irrespective of any consciousness. Not rebaptizing the person whose coma has erased his or her Mormon consciousness signifies that contemporary LDS Mormonism regards the body as the seat of identity, as numerically and qualitatively continuous over time, even in spite of discontinuity of consciousness.[20]

But this obligatory materialism, it turns out, is not located, in popular LDS Mormonism, in a person's own body, after all. The assurance of a body's physical baptism and, thus, of a person's Mormon-ness does, indeed, in a Lockean way, reside in the continuity of a certain memory over time. LDS baptism must persist in *someone's* memory, if not in the memory of the baptized individual. The contemporary LDS Church, at least, in the absence of *any* memory of the amnesiac's baptism, will, as a matter of fact, rebaptize the amnesiac. Even in the event that someone *does* remember the baptism—say, the amnesiac's non-Mormon cousin—the LDS Church will regard the amnesiac as *not* a Mormon and will require the amnesiac's rebaptism, nevertheless, as long as the memory of the event that persists over time is not constituted by a verifiable Church record or by the memory of two people who are themselves duly

recorded members and who can attest in writing to the year in which the ordinance-event occurred and can identify the person who performed the ordinance.[21] For the LDS Church, even the coma victim who emerges from his or her long sleep with a bright and clear personal recollection of his or her baptism would have to be rebaptized if no Church record or witnesses of a very specific sort were forthcoming.[22] Until and unless that rebaptism is duly recorded, the LDS Church, at least, will not concede this individual's *I'm a Mormon* claim as a genuine expression of personal Mormon identity and will affirm that expression of identity only as long as the record of the rebaptism persists.

The preceding analysis brings us to conclude that the LDS conception of Mormon identity *does* follow Locke's insistence that a continuous consciousness revealed by memory constitutes identity, but that it is a *corporate* or *institutional* identity rather than a personal identity. For that matter, the memory that constitutes this corporate identity, the memory that supersedes all others, is, similarly, a *corporate* memory. In the way that a Lockean personal identity depends on particular memories, the LDS Church's corporate identity depends on particular memories, duly recorded as distinct LDS membership records. But the recording of membership statuses recursively determines (or validates) these instances of corporate memory—the identities of these *members*—in the way that Lockean conscious memory composes an individual's personal identity, and *only* an individual's conscious memory composes that individual's personal identity.

The primacy of LDS records anticipates the exclusionary problem pursued below. In the same way that the Lockean eight-year-old person has no personal identity of its own as long as the forty-five-year-old person claims the eight-year-old's activity for itself by way of memory, and, in fact, in the same way that the eight-year-old largely ceases to exist at all should the forty-five-year-old not claim its activity by way of memory, so does the institutional LDS memory recursively affirm or deny an individual's personal LDS Mormon identity, but only to the extent that that personal LDS Mormon identity contributes to constituting the institutional LDS Mormon identity. As the eight-year-old's personal identity

"belongs to," and is determined by, the remembering of the forty-five-year-old's personal identity, so a personal LDS Mormon identity belongs to, and is determined by, the institutional LDS Mormon identity that claims it, with the consequence that the personal LDS Mormon identity has no more of its own substance or individual quality than an eight-year-old has of itself forty-five years later.

Following Locke a little further, the institution's membership record contributes little or nothing to the personal Mormon identity of an individual, since the record and the making of it are corporate acts and very seldom an individual's own conscious action. Thus, the membership record is almost never a conscious memory by which an individual can know itself. Insofar as a personal identity consists of conscious memory of actions and events, and, so, a personal Mormon identity consists of conscious memory of Mormon actions and events, a Church membership record—even while asserting the right to determine an individual's Mormon identity—is not constitutive of a personal Mormon identity, since the personal Mormon never composes his or her own membership record and, thus, does not hold the act of composing it in his or her memory.

According to Locke's theory of identity, then, what constitutes a Mormon institution's corporate identity is a corporate consciousness-memory that is continuous over time, not contingent on changes to the corporate body, and independent of the corporate spirit (or soul). While this understanding of identity raises very interesting questions about an institution's character—questions that would be the topic of another inquiry—it does not explain what the Mormon in *I'm a Mormon* might be. In Locke's scheme, the peculiar Mormon quality of the institution's identity seems to emerge not from the Mormon-ness of individual members but from the authorized (recollected) record of the incorporation of its members. *I'm a Mormon* is, here, a marketing slogan, indeed, expressing merely an individual's existence as a corporate memory that constitutes a corporate identity and revealing nothing about the individual who declares it.

In his *Treatise of Human Nature*, David Hume provided a radically different description of personal identity. Or, rather, Hume

provided the principal counter to Locke, insofar as Hume largely denied the existence of personal identity altogether. Hume's attempts to put his finger on his own personal self only resulted, he said, in putting a finger not on the self itself but only on particular perceptions that the theoretical self was supposed to be having—heat, light, pain, anger, etc. Apart from the perceptions, Hume thought, nothing presented itself, and, therefore, Hume concluded that there was nothing more than the perceptions. Hume decided that personal identity was a phantom created by a swirling agglomeration of perceptions. Because we perceive or experience heat and light and anger, we suppose that some self, independent of the experiences themselves, must exist, as *something* must be having the experiences. But this self is only an illusion created by the perceptions or experiences, as they seem to present themselves as distinct and unified at the same time. The self, to Hume, is not persistent over time, somehow distinctly cohesive and surfing over the flow of all other existence, but composed in time and in the present moment by all the existence that colludes in a moment. Nor did Hume allow Locke his constitutive memory, which seems to survive independently through time. Even memory, said Hume, is a contingent phenomenon, malleable, imperfect, incomplete, and often wrong. Memory, then, cannot be said to be constitutive of a stable, cohesive, personal identity, but can only be another mechanism by which an illusion of unity presents itself to perception. Hume conceded only that in the search for a personal self, no one could be certain of any claim that another person might make since the other person's perceptions (of heat, light, and of his or her self) were completely inaccessible to anyone else. Another person's claim to experience a self that is distinct and independent of perceptions might be true for all anyone else could know. But, of course, there is no way for anyone else to know.

In Hume's scheme, a personal Mormon identity would be no more substantive than a personal identity per se but would, nevertheless, manifest to the same extent as any personal identity—only personally and privately, and necessarily reserved from external determination. Strictly speaking, for Hume, a Mormon

identity would be impossible, since any identity is an illusion; but, since we have the experience of a self, as illusory as it may be, we could concede that we might individually have the experience of a Mormon self. The Mormon-ness of a self would be some perception among the many perceptions in which the illusion of a self coalesces so that the person who fields the perception not only of being at the center of a cloud of experience but at the center of a cloud of experience that includes Mormon wisps could identify those Mormon wisps as continuous with his or her self in the same way and to the same extent that he or she could identify hot-ness, light-ness, or angry-ness as continuous with his or her self or, in other words, as experiences that his or her self is "having." The only question here would be the quality of the experience that a person might identify as "Mormon" in the way one would identify the qualities of experiencing "heat" and "light."

One possible response to Hume involves the experience Mormons often refer to as "feeling the Spirit." Inheriting the affective spirituality of late-eighteenth century Christian movements, such as the Methodists and "New Light Baptists" among whom Brigham Young was raised, Mormons have from the beginning of the movement coupled conversion and the genuine identity associated with it with feeling. So much is the authenticity of feeling still a part of the tradition that children and newcomers to Mormonism are carefully instructed in the discovery and interpretation of feeling, and certain describable feelings have become indicative among Mormons of divine presence and approval. Following Hume, we might say that the person who can say *I'm a Mormon* is the person who has sensed his or her consciousness as the collusion of experiences among which has been or is the "burning in the bosom" or other such affective experience, especially as the person's consciousness is able to associate this particular affective experience with some Mormon content—say, as a "response" (or complement) to a personal interrogation of Mormonism.

But because an affective experience does not rationalize itself, a feeling can only be more than what it simply is—it can only have some *meaning*—once it has been understood as a sign. Unless an affective experience or feeling is the kind of sign that Charles

Sanders Peirce calls an icon or an index—in which case the experience has an essential relationship with what it signifies—the affective experience has been *assigned* a relationship with what it signifies. That is, an affective experience means something such as Mormon-ness only once someone has decided that the affective experience in question means such a thing. Smoke is an index of fire insofar as smoke's existence is essentially contingent on fire. We can identify smoke as an index of fire on account of a common, objective experience of fire. We can identify a drawing of a frog as an icon of a frog, given a common, objective experience of frogs and a capacity to recognize an essential resemblance between a drawing and a frog. Without universal access to a materially constituted, objectively perceivable Mormon-ness (say, an identical manifestation of a Mormon God to everyone on the planet, in the same way, simultaneously, such that everyone experiences the same *feeling* from the encounter and also *knows* somehow that everyone is having the same affective feeling), we cannot conclude that the "burning" of Mormon tradition is an icon or index. The association of "burning"—or whatever other sensation—with an especially Mormon quality appears to be a *symbol*, an arbitrary or conventional, rather than a necessary or essential, relationship. If we decide, we might just as well interpret the peculiarly affective nausea that follows the eating of Jell-O with shredded carrots as a sign of Mormon-ness. Since, for Hume, the self is an illusion, anyway, the arbitrary ways in which we choose to characterize the self may be superfluous, and we may as well select "Mormon" as anything else to describe experience that has not already been unassailably co-opted by other conventions.[23] The convention, then, such as a burning that symbolizes the birth of an especially Mormon identity, might *define* an individual (according to further conventions by which definitions operate) but does not *describe* an individual's personal identity or unique selfhood.

We find, then, Locke and Hume still opposed to each other with respect to defining personal identity. Accordingly, we find the Lockean and Humean possibilities for a personal Mormon identity at odds with each other. On the one hand, Locke channels Mormon identity toward institutional determination, so that

a person's Mormon-ness is a relational status granted by others and *I'm a Mormon* becomes a declaration of affiliation rather than a description of the self (and, generally, given the public context that *I'm a Mormon* has created, an affiliation with only one of the many institutional possibilities). On the other hand, Hume erases identity altogether, allowing for the possibility of a Mormon self of no particular substance or distinction. The individual who would yet say *I'm a Mormon* for himself or herself remains a cypher, and the matter of *being* Mormon is left either to external judgment or to the convention of a community.

One alternative to being merely composed as a Mormon person by the criteria of an institution (in which there can be no individual self-hood and no particular Mormon-ness) and merely deciding that one's experiences signify Mormon-ness (where one's religious identity is merely a convention) may be found in Kierkegaard, who—ironically using an array of pseudonyms—recommended self-ness as an ongoing achievement, ever developing, never accomplished, and, thus, "located" not in a place nor a time nor even in a *being*, as such, but in the effort to realize itself. We discover in the Kierkegaardian tradition that identity as such—Mormon and otherwise—offers itself as a *doing* rather than a *being*, and, consequently, that the construction of a distinctly Mormon personal identity has ethical implications. In fact, we may find that the declaration *I'm a Mormon* is ethically suspect and, on ethical grounds, ought to be eliminated as a description of the (Mormon) self in favor of a less combative option.

For Kierkegaard, the maximally reduced definition of the self that might also be identified as a personal identity comes in a statement in the essay titled "The Sickness unto Death" that is aggravating both for its childish simplicity and flippant ambiguity. A self, writes Kierkegaard under a pseudonym that is counterpart to another of his pseudonyms, is "a relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another."[24] Unless and until a person becomes aware of himself or herself as an existing entity, becoming, then, aware of his or her capacity to act in existence, and, in that awareness necessarily assuming responsibility for his or her acts, he or she is not a self.

The material components of a person are not the issue.[25] Body exists. Soul exists. Never mind. In the same way that Locke was not satisfied that either body or (Christian) soul could be the seat of identity, so Kierkegaard, while conceding the body-soul duality, did not accept body, soul, nor both together as the self's harbor. Like Locke, Kierkegaard prefers to find the self in consciousness, but, unlike Locke, he does not find consciousness revealed in memory. Though he associates consciousness with "spirit," Kierkegaard, cleverly, does not situate consciousness in any particular phenomenon apart from consciousness itself. This consciousness for Kierkegaard is nothing except self-consciousness.[26] The *sine qua non* of the self, for Kierkegaard, is a relationship one has with one's own being by becoming conscious of it. Spirit, as an awareness, works upon the individual as a power, a force, that impels the individual toward seeing itself. But this vision is not merely of the self—body and soul—as it is. One's consciousness of oneself sees what one is and all that one might be. The relationship of the self to the self, then, involves a consciousness of potential. In a rather Anselmian way, God reveals this potential to the individual as the unavoidable consciousness of a self of which a better cannot be imagined.[27] The divine, thus, joins the relationship of self to itself, becomes a feature of the self to which the self relates itself, and this new self necessarily confronts as part of its very existence the desperate reality that it exists only as something that its self has not yet become. The self, at this point, entails both a material necessity and a divine possibility—the former a constraint and the latter a liberation, an awful liberation that affords the self no excuses.

Both necessity and possibility are, thus, constituent elements of the self. The individual who ignores the possible does not know his or her aim and loses his or her self, then, to the imposition of circumstances. But the individual who sheds all concern for necessity can never bring his or her pursuit of possibility toward actuality. The self oscillates, ever, always, "breathing," as Kierkegaard writes, necessity and possibility.[28] For Kierkegaard, the self might be characterized as "Christian" insofar as the temporal and divine dialectic inherent in the genuine self's relation of self to

itself is consummated in Jesus. Becoming a genuine Christian self, consequently, is a matter of living in "Christ's mode of being."[29] The Kierkegaardian self might also be a "Mormon" self to the extent that the dialectic oscillation of necessity and possibility in the self involves some inherently Mormon quality. If we follow Kierkegaard's identification of Jesus as the paradigmatic self for being that in which necessity and possibility fully coincide and would call this paradigmatic coincidence "Christian," we should expect to find a similarly paradigmatic coincidence of necessity and possibility in something that is distinctly "Mormon" if we expect that there is some especially Mormon identity to be found.

In 1843, Joseph Smith, apparently with his tongue buried deeply in his prophetic cheek, provided an etymology for the word *mormon*.[30] Following the careful disclaimer that the language of the Book of Mormon was inaccessible without revelation, Smith proceeded impishly to combine an Egyptian cognate with an absurdly abbreviated English adverb to define *mormon* as meaning "more good."[31] The tantalizing implication of Smith's etymological gag is its presumption of good outside the religious tradition he fashioned around himself. "More good" can only arise where good has already materialized. Which is to say that Smith seems, here, to have acknowledged deliberately the good-ness of Mormonism's broader, American, and traditionally-Christian foundation. His appreciation for the good of the world he inhabited is of a piece with Smith's apocalyptic optimism.[32] It was the Mormon prophet, after all, who envisioned an afterlife that did away almost entirely with the Christian hell and, instead, offered all the dead an eternal condition that could only be more good than their mortal condition. If we give a nod to Smith's prophetic calling, fulfilled even when disposing himself rather brazenly of sarcasm, we find ourselves, perhaps, with revelatory ground on which to build the dialectic we need to come, finally, face-to-face with the Mormon in *I'm a Mormon*.

Where Kierkegaard would find Christian identity in an individual's consciousness of the convergence in herself of mortal exigency and divine promise, we might find a Mormon identity in an individual's consciousness of the convergence in herself of

good and more good. That is, the genuine Mormon self is always in awareness of its oscillation between what is good and what is more good, between seeing its part in the glorious good of the world as it is, the good of its varied life, its people, their relationships and accord, and its anticipation of more good—a more good world, more good people, a more good church, and a more good eternity in which good only grows. The Mormon self inhales the brute facts of existence—his own and the world's, however abominable—as experience that constitutes good, and then exhales an imaginative hope for more good to come, to replace the good of reality with a more good reality in himself and in all existence.[33] Good is ever present to the Mormon. More good is ever, consciously, unrealized. And her Mormon-ness—quite independent of any institutional affiliation—manifests itself in her always-catastrophic liminality between the two. Good, for the Mormon, is ever present, even in church. More good is ever unrealized, especially in church. Mormon-ness manifests in knowing the transition from one to the other is always, ever, forever ongoing.[34]

Mormon identity, so construed, is not an existential state or quality that might be determined by decree or reached by accomplishment. On the contrary, the eternal oscillation between present good and future more good that characterizes the duality of Mormon existence constitutes a non-condition or an un-quality, a state that presents itself, thus, as non-being. Toward reconciling the struggling Mormon conviction that works matter to salvation with the neo-orthodox Protestant fixation on God's grace as the sole, unqualified mechanism of salvation, the genuine Mormon can affirm that works matter but they do not accomplish the goal of exaltation, which never is accomplished by anything. God's grace makes the way open for work and progress in a process that transforms rather than to an end that never arrives. Following Kierkegaard's argument, God's ordinances do not make a Mormon, and so much less the membership records of any one of the many Mormon churches. Although a person might construe an ordinance, a church, or an affiliation to one extent or another as a mark of *being*—a sign of a fixed, persisting identity—any one of these circumstances, or even all of them together, only stand

as blocks to progression. If Mormon-ness is embedded in the self's immanent, material circumstances—say, in the body that has been baptized or in the institutional record of that baptism—then Mormon-ness surrounds and qualifies the self as do other contingencies of necessary actuality as, for instance, a person's height, bank balance, and addiction to Diet Coke. Mormon-ness of this sort is a constraint that keeps a person rooted (or, perhaps, damned) to being. The genuine Mormon perceives his eternal un-state between good and more good, between mortality and exaltation, between church and God.

One cannot *be* a Mormon. If we follow Kierkegaard, one can only ever *become* a Mormon. The declaration *I'm a Mormon* à la Kierkegaard becomes a nonsensical statement. In the same way that declaring *I'm a Gooding* declares nothing at all, so, also, *I'm a Mormon* is only a sequence of sounds a person might make that has no propositional content. Similarly, the idea that a person's Mormon-ness is determined only and exclusively by an institutional affiliation removes every and all claims to Mormonism from the realm of goodness, progression, faith, love for God and humankind, and our gaze into the cosmic mystery, and reduces them—reduces them *all*—to something mundane and trivial. Whatever the self might be—a combination of spirit and body, a continuous consciousness, a convergence of sensation, a complex of learned and enacted social formulae—the Mormon-ness that might be part of it does not reveal itself as a *thing* a person claims and can incorporate or as a record that an institution makes but as a sense of self in suspension, neither whole at the given moment nor prophetically final but channeled by a conviction deliberately echoing Joseph Smith's cheeky exegesis that saw the world, as awful as it acts, as good and that believed more good must surely come.

Which draws us to the remainder of *I'm a Mormon*'s identity problems and also toward its solution. Does the extent to which a person can *be* a Mormon preclude *being* anything else also? Hume, of course, would say that the sense of being anything in particular is an illusion anyway, so a person just as well *is* whatever she perceives collecting in her perceptions, and that might be in multiples: a woman, an American, a caucasian, a Mormon, a Christian, a

dentist, and an atheist. What Kierkegaard offers to the concept of Mormon identity also seems to allow for a multiplicity of affirmations or, as it happens in Kierkegaard, affirmative denials. Inasmuch as a person cannot *be* a Mormon in accomplished fact, it is just as well that one also cannot simultaneously *be* a Christian or an atheist in accomplished fact.[35] But what about the hopeful hopelessness of moving in the space between the world and eternity by confirming the good and aiming at more good? Does this positive construction of an always unrealized, Kierkegaardian Mormonism exclude all other modes of engaging with our existence?

Institutions, pointing every direction, say yes. The Roman Catholic Church rebaptizes Mormon converts to Catholicism. The United Methodist Church does as well. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America kindly offers Mormons "Christian Baptism" rather than re-baptism.[36] And, of course, as LDS Church spokesman Michael Otterson has tersely stated LDS Church policy: "We rebaptize Catholics, we rebaptize Protestants and we rebaptize everyone else."[37] The institutions, here, seem to regard identity as something that is at least partly composed of a rite legitimized by a corporate organization and mostly exclusive of alternatives. The LDS Church formally disciplines as apostates its members who join other churches.[38] Since excommunication from the LDS Church on the grounds of apostasy results in the putative removal of an individual's name from the Church's records as well as the cancellation of "any privileges of Church membership," we can conclude that the LDS Church regards the identity that it assigns through its record-keeping as excluding all other comparable identities.[39] The institutional position is that a person cannot be a Catholic and also a Mormon. Saying *I'm a Mormon* seems to preclude saying *I'm an Anything Else*.

But if one aims at *not* being a Mormon in order genuinely to become Mormon, one might consider how one goes about preventing one's ossification in being. One method can be gathered from the remarkably liberal attitudes that both Joseph Smith and his devoted successor Brigham Young held concerning religions. In a letter he wrote to Isaac Galland while confined in the pre-

posterously-named Liberty Jail late in the winter of 1839, Joseph Smith railed on the "long faced Baptists" who were responsible both for his incarceration and for the undeniably abominable persecution of his followers and then, with a customary measure of inconsistency, the prophet described his emerging religion thus:

> Mormonism is truth, in other words the doctrine of the Latter Day Saints, is truth. . . . the first and fundamental principle of our holy religion is, that we believe that we have a right to embrace all, and every item of truth, without limitation or without being circumscribed or prohibited by the creeds or superstitious notions of men, or by the denominations of one another, when that truth is clearly demonstrated to our minds,and [*sic*] we have the highest degree of evidence of the same.[40]

Given the tongue-lashing that he lays on the Baptists and other sectarians in the same letter, Smith here probably intends to say that Mormons claim the constitutional right to reject traditional religion in favor of anything else they can imagine for themselves. But the prophetic word, as it so often does, gets out ahead of Smith. Whatever he may have meant in the moment, what he wrote is distinctly infused with a meaning that reaches far beyond Smith's immediate circumstances. Mormons, for Smith, were ever to accommodate themselves to truth—all truth, from whatever source, dismissing the artificial boundaries between sects and systems, including those that worked to cordon off Mormons from everyone else. Even Brigham Young, who was as given to parochial superiority as any Mormon leader, imbibed Smith's liberal intuition. In 1859, and speaking contrary to what has become a conventional Mormon reading of the "Dark Ages" between 100 CE and 1830 CE, in which the world's religions are supposed to have been getting along without truth, Young declared to a Utah congregation:

> It is our duty and calling . . . to gather every item of truth and reject every error. Whether a truth be found with professed infidels, or with the Universalists, or the Church of Rome, or the Methodists, the Church of England, the Presbyterians, the

> Baptists, the Quakers, the Shakers, or any other of the various and numerous different sects and parties, all of whom have more or less truth, it is the business of the Elders of this Church . . . to gather up all the truths in the world pertaining to life and salvation, to the Gospel we preach, to mechanism of every kind, to the sciences, and to philosophy, wherever it may be found in every nation, kindred, tongue, and people and bring it to Zion. . . . This statement is not only true of the nations termed civilized—those who profess to worship the true God, but is equally applicable to pagans of all countries, for in their religious rights [*sic*] and ceremonies may be found a great many truths which we will also gather home to Zion.[41]

Since the LDS Church understands the term *Zion* to refer to its own dioceses, or stakes, throughout the world, the injunction that Young laid on Church members in 1859 to gather the world's truths "home to Zion" calls for them to find the truth that every other religion on the planet conserves (not to mention every truth of science, philosophy, etc.), and to gather those truths into the religious life of their Mormon communities. These truths, Young averred, lie even in "pagan" rituals.

Speaking of the silent rites of Zen Buddhism, Ronald Grimes has reasoned, convincingly, that while "theology" involves "reflection on normative texts"—so that theological study is a way of conserving and transmitting meaning—ritual tends not to "mean" anything, but simply is, actively, what it is.[42] Or, we might say, ritual does, simply, what it does. The fundamental value of religious ritual is found in the doing of it and, perhaps, secondarily, in studying and rationalizing it. It is, perhaps, self-evident that one does not come to know the truth of physical exercise from watching the Olympics. One does not come to know the truth of philanthropic engineering without digging some ditches. Running twenty miles a week reveals something that the watching of marathon runners can never know, and that revelation appears not merely as the confirmation of propositions such as "sustained exercise makes a person feel better." The revelation that comes from exercise is also the transformation of the individual, who not only "knows"

something about exercise but, through exercise, becomes something exercised. As Brigham Young intuited, knowing the truth of a rite—the Compostela pilgrimage, the Ramadan fast, covering the head in a Gurudwara—cannot materialize fully without participating in the rite.

By charging their followers to embrace all truth, even in the rituals of the world's other religions, the first and second LDS prophets imply, inescapably, that the Kierkegaardian *doing* that comprises Mormon non-being necessarily involves actively living other religions. Indeed, insofar as Mormon non-being consists of eternal movement between *good* and *more good*, that movement seems to involve, as a fundamental characteristic, passing into all the world's religious traditions—not as a patronizing voyeur or a type of Orientalist but as a person who sees, clearly, that the *good* of Mormon reality is, indeed, good but inadequate and that the *more good* he must realize lies as well in Catholicism, existentialism, particle physics, Hinduism, Sufism, primatology, and philanthropic engineering, as it does in the correlated curriculum issued from Salt Lake City to his stake.

If pursued actively (or "sought" according to the injunction of the thirteenth of Smith's basic articles of Mormon faith), the truth the first prophets of Mormonism perceived in everything else—including, explicitly, in "pagan rites"—dispels the inertia that leads to spiritual ossification in *being*. The active pursuit of such truth requires not only study but participation. The building of water works both confirms principles of mathematics and physics and also transforms the ditch-digging individual, who, in the act of digging, becomes something that has to do with the well-being of the world. So, too, one does not come to know the truth that Joseph Smith and Brigham Young both insist is available in Hinduism without looking at Krishna. Without taking *darshan* of Shrinathji in Nathdwara, the one who would become Mormon can never know what great truth this act makes available. Circumambulating the Sarovar at Amritsar accelerates the Mormon out of *being*'s torpor and toward the infinite possibility of not-being. The doing, in these examples, tears open the individual's tendency toward hebetude and puts the individual into

acceleration—a changing velocity and direction. Accordingly, the pursuit of truth that Mormonism requires expects the believer to participate, to *do* the "pagan rites" in order to find their "great many truths."[43]

The becoming Mormon goes to Mass, reads Sartre, collects neutrinos, bathes Krishna, whirls like a dervish, documents the behavior of Javan lutungs, and constructs irrigation works, recognizing that she will find a great many truths everywhere, not to be discovered only by disinterested study but by participation. Rather than cultivating an identity that *is* Mormon and, thus, essentially bound to a sect rather than let loose to eternity, a person with genuine Mormon aspirations pursues everything. Said Brigham Young in 1853:

> "Shall I sit down and read the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Book of Covenants all the time?" says one. Yes, if you please, and when you have done, you may be nothing but a sectarian after all. It is your duty to study to know everything upon the face of the earth in addition to reading those books.[44]

The person genuinely *becoming* a Mormon is in the same activity *becoming* a Catholic, an existentialist, a physicist, a Hindu, a Sufi, a primatologist, and a philanthropic engineer. For that matter, the person is becoming a fireman, a mayor, a tutor, a Lutheran, an activist, a parent, and a child in order, precisely, to prevent *being* a Mormon, which can only be understood as a stagnant state that is not at all distinct from the uniquely Mormon understanding of the word *damnation*. The Mormon issue is not whether a person can *be* all such things—the accomplishment of which would signal an eternal death—but whether or not one *is becoming* in a divine, eternal life.[45]

Rather than speaking such slogans as *I'm a Mormon* that do as much to prevent the individual Mormon's progress as they do to promote the LDS Church's claim to a place in the mainstream of American culture, we might consider some alternatives. Those of us with Mormon aspirations might affirm, for instance, *Mormonism is me*. The ontological problem remains, insofar as the problem we have heretofore confronted is the conception of the self as an

accomplished, static object. But this problem is here mitigated by pointing to the self as the seat of Mormon-ness, rather than the other way around. In this affirmation, Mormonism is not a condition that is external to the self and that appropriates the self. This affirmation also allows for the many things that ineluctably coalesce in an individual as an owned identity. We might also consider *I'm becoming a Mormon*, which is probably a more truthful statement for most LDS practitioners, even if Kierkegaard has nothing to do with the discussion.

This Mormon's personal preference would be to assert *I do Mormonism*. Spencer Kimball, according to legend, solicited the change to the lyrics in the song "I Am a Child of God" from "Teach me all that I must *know*" to "Teach me all that I must *do*." Although I am more than a little suspicious of the implications of "*teach* me *all* that I must do," I appreciate the former LDS Church president's sense that doing must be at the heart of Mormonism. *Doing* Mormonism, as opposed to *being* Mormon, sets aside the existential problem of *I'm a Mormon*. The person who *does* Mormonism is *moving*, past the good that is and toward the more good that will be. The person doing Mormonism is less concerned with the kinds of self-assertive identities or institutional affiliations that inevitably draw antagonistic lines between peoples—the insiders who can say *I am* and the outsiders who must say *I am not*—and is, rather, attuned to his or her own *I am neither*, a selfless emptiness between the anxious, good cause of the world and the more good of eternity. A person doing Mormonism does so for the absurd realization of both.

Notes

1. William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. 1 (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), 330.

2. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, translated by Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 6. By proposing a "narrative theory" of identity, by which a self comes into being and knows itself as a result of one entity's interaction with other entities, Ricoeur does his best to supply some ground in which to plant a personal identity. Ricoeur's is one proposal among

many. Considered here are only those proposals—Locke's and Hume's, with a nod to Kierkegaard's—that provide the touchstone for the ongoing examination of the problem in Western thought.

3. Joseph Walker, "LDS Church Pleased with Positive Response to 'I'm a Mormon' in Great Britain," *Deseret News*, June 22, 2013.

4. Part of a court order imposed earlier this year forbade Canadian Winston Blackmore from "interfering" with the LDS Church's use of the term *Mormon.* Daphne Bramham, "Mormons win battle to distance themselves from B.C. polygamist," *The Province*, January 13, 2015.

5. The corporation that is the LDS Church certainly has the capacity to determine who enjoys its institutional membership status since it can invalidate membership records according to its internally-determined procedures. The matter under examination is not whether a church institution can deny membership to an individual but whether institutional membership and a Mormon-ness of identity are the same thing.

6. Jan Shipps, "From Peoplehood to Church Membership: Mormonism's Trajectory since World War II," *Church History* 76, no. 2 (2007): 261.

7. There are nearly 300,000 members of the Community of Christ, a church that shares a nineteenth-century origin with the LDS Church, acknowledges the prophetic mission of Joseph Smith, and regards the Book of Mormon as scripture. See http://www.cofchrist.org/OurFaith/scripture.asp. The Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints may have 10,000 members who also collectively affirm that Joseph Smith was a prophet and regard the Book of Mormon as scripture. The number of distinct church institutions that have developed from Joseph Smith's visionary energy in the 1820s may be impossible to determine. Membership in any of the extant versions of these many churches ranges from fifteen million to twelve. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latter_Day_Saint_movement (accessed March 25, 2015).

8. Not everyone is confused about the multiplicity of Mormonism. When one looks up the term "Mormonism" in the index of *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, one is directed to several portions of the book that have to do specifically—and not erroneously, I would argue—with the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. See Robert A. Orsi, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

9. In the "Mormon Moment" that coincided with Mitt Romney's 2012 presidential candidacy, the American media rather uncritically adopted the practice of referring to the LDS Church as "*the* Mormon church."

10. The thesis is not obligatory, of course. One might yet stand on the assertion that the LDS Church is the only Mormon church and only documented affiliates of the LDS Church can declare *I'm a Mormon* without any radical qualification, invalidating any such claim not only by the faithful of other churches that claim Smith and the Book of Mormon but also of LDS excommunicants. But this position merely insists, arbitrarily, that the term *Mormon* must signify the LDS Church and no other believers in Smith and his scripture. The arbitrariness of this assertion does not contribute to understanding what constitutes Mormon identity.

11. *I'm a Mormon* does not tell an audience of outsiders whether one's affiliation is LDS, FLDS, Community of Christ, etc., but leaves the matter of affiliation open so that an audience is free to assume that one is a polygamist. The insistence that Mormons are not polygamists can sound like deliberate dishonesty to outsiders who can see Mormon polygamists spread across the western states.

12. Where the link between Mormon-ness and institutional affiliation is arbitrary—as in "Only LDS members are Mormons" and vice-versa—the matter of who really is Mormon can be resolved simply by agreement in the form of a convention. Never mind that an agreement among the Community of Christ, the FLDS church, the LDS church, et al. that only LDS members shall be considered Mormons would never materialize. If Mormon-ness is only a convention that correlates a particular institution and a concept, an exclusively LDS claim on Mormon-ness could be determined by a vote. That the matter would not be resolved by a vote itself indicates that Mormon-ness is not an arbitrary relationship between an institution and a concept. The various concerned populations here would refuse to come to such an agreement on the grounds that they would regard as ontological rather than conventional.

13. D&C 88:15.

14. There is, of course, tripartism in Christianity, variously conceived by such important figures as Origen, Gregory of Nazianzus, Martin Luther, and Kierkegaard.

15. See D&C 93:33–34.

16. If the transfer of Mormon identity between bodies as a correlate of the transfer of Christian spirits between bodies appears to Mormons too nonsensical to consider, perhaps we have discovered another area in which

Mormonism does not coincide with Christianity. Given the metaphysics that might be involved in the proposition that an identity can be Mormon, perhaps only the person who proposes that there can be no Mormon self that is distinct from not-Mormon selves can regard a question like the transposition of spirits between an American professor and a North Korean dictator as too absurd to consider.

17. Patrick Stokes, "Locke, Kierkegaard and the Phenomenology of Personal Identity," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 16, no. 5 (2008): 649.

18. If, as the verse reads, a person who only does what he or she is told to do is a "slothful servant," then a person who is only obedient is slothful. The person who acts independently, on the other hand, or "of [his or her] own free will" secures a heavenly reward (D&C 58:26–28). Obedience, it would seem here, is not the highest law nor the standard by which God will judge.

19. D&C 93:30.

20. This rebaptism problem is historically contingent. The LDS Church, for one, might very well have rebaptized this hypothetical individual, had the coma and the individual's emergence from it occurred during the nineteenth century, during which members of the church were rebaptized frequently and regularly. Brigham Young encouraged his followers to be rebaptized often, and was himself rebaptized several times: notably, upon entry to the Salt Lake Valley in 1847 and in concert with the establishment of his version of the United Order in Utah in the last decade of his life. Besides helping us wrestle with the nature of individual identity in Mormonism, this hypothetical coma draws our attention to the way that LDS belief and practice are tied to historical moments rather than to a transcendently unabridged whole.

21. *Handbook 1: Stake Presidents and Bishops* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2010), 141.

22. "If the ordinance is not verified by an original certificate, a search of Church records, or the testimony of witnesses, it must be performed again to be considered valid." *Handbook 1*, 142.

23. Although referring to a perception or sensation as "hot" may be arbitrary, it would defy reason, nevertheless, to decide to begin to refer to all "hot" experiences as "Mormon" experiences. Among other problems, by appropriating for itself such a universal experience as hot-ness, a convention-swap of this sort would paradoxically undermine the search for a perception that might be understood as uniquely Mormon.

24. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Essential Kierkegaard*, edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 351.

25. Since we are in the realm of Mormon metaphysics, we will accept "spirit" as material and a counterpart of the "soul" of the traditional Christian lexicon.

26. Kierkegaard here anticipates Nobel Prize-winning scientist Gerald Edelman, who insists that "consciousness is not a thing, it is a process" and who refers to genuine, human consciousness as necessarily "consciousness of consciousness" (*Second Nature: Brain Science and Human Knowledge* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006], 38, 41).

27. St. Anselm gives us the famous proof of God's existence that involves a definition of God as that thing no greater than which can be imagined.

28. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness unto Death*, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 314.

29. J. Preston Cole, *The Problematic Self in Kierkegaard and Freud* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 31.

30. Part of what might account for Smith's sardonic tone is his sense of the absurdity in asking about the meaning of a word that was, in the origin of the religious tradition in question, a proper name rather than a grammatically functional term and which came to be regarded mistakenly by outsiders to the tradition as some kind of adjective that could be employed as a predicate nominative. Smith may have read the question, "What does the word 'Mormon' mean?" much in the way a Jew might read the question, "What does the word 'Moses' mean?" The prophet's convoluted response purposefully treats the inquiry as a misunderstanding too ridiculous to take seriously. We might also consider just how ridiculous *I'm a Moses* would be as some religious tradition's marketing slogan.

31. Joseph Smith, "To the Editor of the Times & Seasons," *Times & Seasons* 4, no. 13 (1843): 194. May 15, 1843.

32. Of course, Smith's liberal optimism is also of a piece with the rest of his considerable paradoxes. The founding vision of Smith's religious tradition condemned traditional Christianity as an abomination, after all, and Smith was not averse to condemning in ferocious terms those who denied him legitimate space in their America. Smith oscillated in high, noble crests and deeply spiteful troughs.

33. We might ask how the ninth of the thirteen LDS "Articles of Faith" could mean anything else.

34. Kierkegaard's forever "becoming-ness" intimates an "eternal progression" that traditional Christianity still rejects and articulates "eternal progression" in a way that Mormonism has yet to fully realize insofar as the

Mormon nod too often ignores that, by definition, "eternal progression" must include "mortal progression."

35. As Judith Butler, et al., have argued, we may not be able to claim "man" or "woman" as accomplished fact of identity.

36. See http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Do_Lutherans_rebaptize_former_Mormons_who_are_joining_the_congregation.pdf (accessed March 25, 2015).

37. Gustav Niebuhr, "Vatican Decides to Rebaptize Mormons Who Are Converting," *New York Times*, July 24, 2001.

38. *Handbook 1*, 57.

39. *Handbook 1*, 59.

40. Joseph Smith Jr., "Copy of a Letter from J. Smith Jr to Mr. Galland," *Times & Seasons* 1, no. 4 (1840): 54.

41. JD 7:283–84.

42. Ronald L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (Waterloo: Ritual Studies International, 2010), 90.

43. I hope that it is clear that I do not advocate here a colonialist-orientalist project of thrusting oneself uninvited into the lives of communities that are not one's own. Nor am I advocating any senseless, tasteless *doing* without any reflection, without any thinking at all. I hope here to justify, as a principle, a joyful participation with the world to a people whose religious tradition works too hard to impose on them a fear of everything else that too often becomes a contempt for everything else. The nuances of the responsibility and good neighborliness that such participation requires must be reserved for another essay.

44. JD 2:93–94. To the objection that Brigham's injunction to know everything on the face of the earth is an expression of a particular, naturally-inquisitive temperament that does not expect literal implementation and, therefore, that it is expressive of a distinctly elitist attitude, we might first concede that Brother Brigham did, indeed, harbor a distinctly elitist attitude but that, secondly, the "eternal" in eternal progression opens up an infinite space in which to develop and pursue interests to their perfection. Pursue what one must or can here in one's very narrow mortality as one's inclinations direct and possibilities allow, but expect that in the great, grand, never-ending scheme of things, one will also come to an interest in Chinese, fiddle-playing, Vedanta, and trigonometry, and will know them all.

45. What else could be the implication of the fundamentally Mormon doctrine of "eternal progression"? In its genesis, Mormonism charges every-

one to do everything and propels that apparently impossible injunction with the doctrine that all of eternity is open to the pursuit. Unless LDS doctrine has resolved that mortality is the only space in which we can do (and learn), then basic LDS doctrine asserts that doing everything is not beyond the reach of people aspiring to divinity. Rather than a soul-crushing standard that no one can hope to meet, the Mormon mandate to arrive at perfection by doing everything conceives the infinite circle of celestial eternity as space in which to do—to collect neutrinos, to read Sartre, to dance the charleston whether or not one has time or inclination in mortality to dance it. Surely God can dance the charleston. The eternal movement toward God that Mormonism imagines offers the grand hope that existence provides everyone the endless room to dance as God dances.

Amy Jorgensen
Far From the Tree (2014)
7:14 min., HD video

"This work explores themes and imagery of the apple as a loaded and sometimes contradictory cultural symbol. 'Far From the Tree' documents the artist unsuccessfully bobbing for red apples, a performance that treads the line between the romantic nostalgia of a childhood game and the voyeuristic discomfort of observing someone struggle underwater." —Rebecca Maksym, UMOCA, curator

"Shot from underwater with audio, the viewer watches Jorgensen struggle, drowning, desperately searching for the desired fruit. Her hair floats eerily outward, filling the frame. She struggles back and forth, fluttering about, failing. The exercise is futile; the apple is never attained. Mirroring documentation of waterboarding, the seemingly playful reference to the childhood party game feels terrifying from this perspective. And as a viewer, one is left as the voyeur, watching without an ability to assist. Therefore, it is a metaphor for other, similar, yet more horrific images, of American torture. Such images can be difficult to see because they debunk the notion of American exceptionalism. They demystify America, a nation fallen from the tree." —Esmé Thomas