Christ's Moral System v. Institutional Religious Behaviour:
Do As He Said, Not As We Do?

Bob McCue
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> The historian must not try to know what is truth, if he values his honesty; for if he cares for his truths, he is certain to falsify his facts. Henry Adams

Introduction

As I have deconstructed my experience within Mormonism, I have for the first time addressed many of the basic questions with which well educated, thoughtful people have wrestled since the beginning of recorded history and presumably well before then. As long as I was a believing Mormon, I did not have to worry about these things, because god's oracles of the Mormon variety provided clear and certain answers. Once I found those oracles to be less than trustworthy, I was forced to address the important questions of life on my own. This was initially a terrifying experience, because it soon became clear to me that there were no answers on which I could rely. However, as time passed I first became comfortable with this new uncertainty, and then to revel in it. I came to understand that it is this very uncertainty that was responsible for the new spring I felt in my step.

I came to agree with the philosopher David Applebaum, but have experienced what he described with regard to philosophy in many aspects of my life. He said:

> Stumped by a question, a philosopher labours under a sense of wonder and awe. Socrates, the archetype philosopher of our Western tradition, often speaks of philosophy as a birth process. But the image he uses contains many surprises. We are not only the one who brings new life into the world. We are also an attendant - a midwife - to the event. And we are that new life itself. A new life is a set of thoughts, attitudes, and responses to the world inside and around us. (World Philosophy, Vega 2002, Foreward by Prof. David Applebaum, p. 8)

One of the many questions I have addressed during the course of the last few months is what makes something right or wrong, and how our choices in this regard influence the joy we experience. As I worked through that question, I had to face some uncomfortable things about my Mormon heritage and Christianity in general. One of these relates to the source of what I perceive to be a fundamental conflict between the primary moral foundation of Christianity, and hence Mormonism, and the kind of morality that is both practiced and encouraged by institutional religion.

For reasons that will become apparent below, I think it is fair to characterize these conflicting moral paradigms as individually oriented on the one hand, and institutionally oriented on the other. The individual orientation represents what Christ taught, and is in many ways diametrically opposed to the moral paradigm that drives much institutional religious behaviour,

and is hence copied by many individual members of religious institutions. This conflict produces massive cognitive dissonance, and some bizarre and probably immoral behaviour on the part of sincere people who are doing their best to follow these conflicting principles.

How Do We Know What is Real?

In deciding what is good or bad, right or wrong, we first have to decide how much we can feel confident that we know. Here we sit on the edge of an abyss created by philosophers over the centuries, and have to be careful that we do not fall in and spend the rest of our lives arguing about things that cannot be proven. With that caveat, I venture into this slippery territory.

The nature of reality has occupied philosophers from the dawn of recorded history. For present purposes, I need to sketch only parts of a few chapters.

One of the discouraging aspects of philosophical thought is that it is largely focussed on defining the limits of what we can know, and the conclusion is generally speaking that we cannot know anything with certainty. Unfortunately, many prominent schools of philosophical thought have stopped there. This type of philosophy spawned nihilism, relativism, post-modernism (a type of relativism) and a variety of other largely unhelpful, from my point of view, intellectual traditions. After reading quite a bit of this stuff I am, however, left in a humble state with regard to what I can know, and am less prepared than ever to accept as guides those who come to me offering certain knowledge of The Way.

There have been several fairly recent schools of philosophy that have started with the seemingly sensible proposition that we think we are alive, and think we have to make decisions to make our way through life, and it appears that human beings have been doing something similar to what we think we are doing for a long time. Hence, while admitting that it is impossible to know anything with certainty, we should find ways to make the best decisions we can, and press ahead. The alternative is some form of paralysis for which human beings seem not well suited, or acceptance of the status quo. Philosophers such as William James, Charles Peirce, John Dewey and Karl Popper come from these schools.

I will focus for the moment on the thought of Karl Popper, and some who have come after him and further developed his ideas. I note that no one has a perfect philosophical system. Many insightful critiques have been made of Popper, and there is no doubt that better ways of approaching this delicate subject have been and will be developed. However, for the moment it seems to me that the approach I am about to outline works well enough that I both use and recommend it.

Let me first set out the case that many of the more relativistic schools of philosophy seem to posit. The end point of their analysis appears to be that we are in a state in which we can only be sure of our own consciousness, and perhaps not even that. Difficulties in language, perception etc. shield all other reality from our view, and when we think we are describing it, we are really only describing an illusion that presents itself to us. Hence, we have little ability to be critical of anything, except when someone indicates that they understand, with certainty, some aspect of reality. In a state of such uncertainty, one point of view is as good as another. And some philosophers (including Wittgenstein and Heidegger – relatively recent and highly influential thinkers) seem at times to shroud their perspective in a kind of impossible to understand mysticism that resonates in quasi-religious terms. I will refer to people who subscribe to ideas of this sort as "relativists".

Relativists are often former dogmatists who realise that proof positive of anything cannot be achieved. From this correct idea the most extreme of this group leap to the unwarranted and highly impractical conclusion that all theories and conceptions of reality are of equal value, and hence that there is no such thing as a rational position. Those who are less extreme still have little to offer in terms of how we are to deal with the uncertainty that they have eloquently pointed out.

On the other hand, Karl Popper and certain of the more scientifically oriented philosophers take quite a different approach, that to my dull mind seems much more appealing. After all, we are alive. We make decisions each day on the basis of our perceptions. We can collect evidence that suggests that many people perceive similar things in similar ways, and that this decision-making follows patterns from which rules can be inferred. Other rules seem evident (but not certain) in the physical world (or its illusion) around us. And science has a long track record, in our illusory world, of predicting with success what will happen, as well as on occasion being spectacularly wrong. Using physical theory, for example, the scientists have shot rockets that appear to have landed on the moon where scientific theory predicted they would land, and we have some things that look like moon rocks that were brought back. Ideas like choosing the theories by which I live on the basis of their predictive and explanatory power make sense to me, and Popper et al. base their philosophy on that, while acknowledging that we can't be 100% sure about anything.

Popper's approach is called by some "critical preference", since it amounts to subjecting all theories to the scientific method and running them through other filters, and choosing those that seem most reliable, whose explanatory and predictive power is greatest, etc. and repeating the process each time new evidence of a significant sort has come to light or new perceptive capacity has been acquired. All this of course is subject to what can reasonably and practically be done.

Critical preference posits that we can be certain of nothing, and in this it agrees with the relativists. However, having induced a healthy humility, it goes on to provide guidance as to how we should deal with our uncertain world, and so indicates that some theories or positions will likely turn out to be better than others in the light of how well they stand up to certain tests.

The third approach, dogmatism (sometimes called "fideism" in the scholarly literature), is what religions and many other social institutions use. Dogmatists are people who believe that knowledge is based on an act of faith, usually in an authority figure of some sort. This enables them to cut off what philosophers call the "infinite regress". That is, in order for a belief to be certainly correct, each of its premises must also be correct. Using logical analysis, it is always possible to continue to ask for justification of premises until circularity is established. That is, it is logically impossible to prove anything as a certainty, except perhaps that we are conscious, and even that is debated. Dogmatists, while they do not recognize that this is why they do what they do, avoid this problem by appealing to authority of some kind. In religion, the ultimate authority is god or those who are believed to have authority to act on his behalf. Once they have spoken, an indisputable premise is created from which all-else flows. Most forms of rationalism up to date have, at rock bottom, shared this attitude with the irrationalists (including religiously oriented people) because they share the same "true belief" structure of thought. That is, rationalists sometimes find what appears to be irrefutable authority in a scientific principle, although those most knowledgeable with respect to science would not do this. Others base their certainty in the statements of the great sages, such as Socrates or Plato. The point of much recent philosophy has been to demonstrate the fallacy of proceeding in this fashion.

So, we have one group that says we can't know anything (the relativists), another group that says they are certain of their knowledge (the dogmatists, both rational and irrational), and a third group that stands in the middle (the critical preferentialists).

In my view the critical preference approach works best. But what if the relativists are correct and one view is as good as another, with everything shrouded in mystery? I would then ask why we submit to the authority of any religious leader and why are such leaders justified in using every trick in the book to get us to do that? And we must ask whether Christian and other missionary efforts are justified. If one view is as good as another, on what basis are we out trying to persuade others that our view is not just the best one, but the only correct one?

It seems to me that the relativists have performed a valuable service by pointing out to us the uncertainty with which we must live, and the fact that we must choose our values and walk by faith, and so construct the world in which we wish to live. However, having told us what we can't do, it seems to me that they are woefully short in suggesting how we deal with the uncertainty in which we find ourselves. Popper et al, however, go down that path.

If we adopt Popper's view respecting the degree to which we can know things and how we should conduct ourselves in this regard, we will have a way of getting to know reality (such as we can know it, that is) that allows us to use the scientific method as proposed by Popper and others to our best advantage, as well as using our spiritual and other intuition respecting the vast expanse of life with which science does not deal. After all, science can only tell us is the "hows" of life. The "whys" are left in the realm of religion, myth, philosophy etc. However, occasionally information respecting a "how" will cause us to re-evaluate some of our "whys".

This is precisely what Joseph Campbell has said we need – a mythology or worldview that makes sense in light of the world as we now know it. If we follow Popper's lead, we will have a worldview that will encourage adjustment of both "hows" and "whys" to fit our changing knowledge base as time passes. The course of history clearly indicates that this is what happens in any event, despite the fact that generation after generation of religious human beings think that their "truth" is immutable and unchanging.

Values

As will become apparent as this discussion progresses, what we value determines much of our perception of good and bad, and also what brings us joy. I have become much more sensitive to the foundational role that values play in life. Those values are largely what I have inherited from my Mormon upbringing – compassion, family and other relationships, intimacy, honesty, self-development, the creation of utility, etc.

I am just starting to drill down into those values to understand what is important about them, and how I can make better choices respecting my values and hence the role they play in my life. One of the important lessons I have learned as a result of my spiritual metamorphosis is that I must choose my values, define priorities among them, allocate resources to them, and on that basis I will largely be responsible for constructing the world around me. The results of my effort will be a combination of what I do and what circumstance serves up. However, my input is much more important to this process than I had previously realized. And there is no magic.

For example, my belief in Mormon theology caused me to value following authority across a wide variety of issues, and a great deal of effort was directed toward my own obedience to authority (religious and otherwise) and causing those within my influence to also obey. I now

value learning, measuring the effect of my actions on utility, rights and justice principles (see below), and choosing my actions on that basis much more than I did. I am suspicious of any authority that is not well supported in those terms. This shift in values has caused me to use my time in vastly different ways than I did.

My life now feels completely different than it did a year or so ago when I was a faithful Mormon, and yet my values have not changed much. What has changed is the relative priority between my values. I again come back to the idea that religious authority played far too great a role in my life. It overrode values related to intimacy, relationships, learning and other things. Now that the authority roadblock has been removed, it will take some thought and work to establish more healthy priorities among my values, and to consider whether new values should be added to the list or old ones dropped.

I note that the foundation of the Christian value system is compassion. Above all, that was Christ's message – that the value system of the Jewish society in which he lived had put many things above compassion for other human beings – and that this approach was wrong.

Most of all, I value joy. A discussion of what I mean by that is beyond the scope of this essay, so I will leave it at that while noting that the compassionate mode of living Christ taught so eloquently is central to my conception of joy. This overarching or meta-value directs me to the task of choosing my other values and doing the things connected to them that will create the joy I wish to experience. This choosing of values is the ultimate, and most important, exercise of free will.

Good and Evil

I was reminded as I went through the exercise of attempting to define good and evil of what I have learned of late from philosophy and science – we cannot prove anything, not even the basic theorems of mathematics. And so why should I have thought that there was a way to prove what is good or bad? The best we can do is to look at these complex questions from several angles, recognize the uncertainty we face, and make what appears to be the best decision we can, much as critical preference theory would suggest we should. And then be prepared to acknowledge we were wrong and change course as many times as necessary.

There are many ways to approach the question of how to determine what is good, right, etc. and what is not. One of the most useful, from my point of view, uses three categories - utility, rights and justice. Each of these three approaches sheds different light on whether something is good or bad, and how it compares in that regard to other available options. It would seem wise, hence, to use all three approaches. I will summarize the basics of how they each work.

Utility Theory

Utility theory is usually attributed to Jeremy Bentham (1748 – 1832), and may be defined as follows:

> An action is right from an ethical point of view if and only if the sum total of utilities produced by that act is greater than the sum total of utilities produced by any other act the agent could have performed in its place (Velasquez, Business Ethics – Cases and Concepts, Third Edition, p. 61)

That is, we should do that which will produce the greatest benefit and least cost for the most people, on the basis that the costs and benefits to me are no more or less important that the costs and benefits to any other person. The focus here is on the results of actions as opposed to the intention we have when acting.

Utility theory causes us to focus on the largest possible group, and to think in terms of what we value (benefits) and what we wish to minimize or avoid (costs). It is particularly useful when we have limited resources and unlimited demands as it helps us to determine how to allocate scarce resources. This is consistent with how we tend to think in terms of what the "government should do". That is, we want government to spend our money so as to create the most benefit for the least cost.

It is also consistent with how we intuitively think of many types of moral conduct. We generally advocate not lying, cheating, committing adultery or killing on the basis of implied cost-benefit effects for society, as well as by reference to the Golden Rule. This means, by implication, however, that lying, cheating etc. may be permitted as exceptions to the general rule. For example, many Germans helped Jews escape the Nazi's, and lied, broke the law and cheated to do so, and most people would feel justified in doing the same.

However, utility theory has several significant shortcomings. First, it deals only with aggregate social welfare, while ignoring the interest of the individual and issues related to fair distribution of benefits and burdens. Hence, it can result in a tyranny of the majority in which the few, or the one, is sacrificed for the benefit of the group. The classic case of this utilitarian abuse is illustrated by Christ's crucifixion or Dostoyevsky's question in his masterwork "The Brothers Karamazov" respecting the purchase of the happiness of the human race forever by the tortured death of a single child. Slavery can be justified by utility theory, as can genocide, infanticide, expropriation of property of the rich, and many other practises most of us would consider to be immoral. It is easy to see how utility theory could be tempered in a healthy way be resort to something like rights or justice theory.

Frequently the exercise of a right by an individual will be found to reduce the utility of society as a whole. At this point, rights theory collides with utilitarian theory. In Canada this tension is expressly recognized in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which while enshrining many rights, allows for those rights to be infringed upon by laws that are "demonstrably justifiable in a free and democratic society". That is, we have recognized that generally utilitarian nature of much legislation, and the tendency of that legislation to infringe in an unacceptable way on basic human rights. Hence, the Charter was established to protect those rights in a fashion similar to certain aspects of the US constitution.

Second, costs and benefits are somewhere between difficult and impossible to measure in many cases. How do we measure the joy I get from a forest against the monetary value its trees might produce? How do we measure the value of years of human life that might be saved by allowing the latest and most expensive of drugs to be used by our Canadian healthcare system instead of the cheaper, older drugs, or by requiring the installation of certain pollution control equipment, or eliminating the use of the internal combustion engine? In response, utilitarians will say that we should do the best we can to quantify utility, and where we cannot do this, we should resort to "common sense" notions of value and judge as best we can. This highlights the importance of underlying values to utilitarian reasoning. Utilitarians also note that while we may not wish to admit this, the market puts a value on life all the time. We do value safety equipment in the market, and using the probabilities known to relate to that equipment's efficacy, we determine how the market values a life. Also, in Canada the publicly funded health

care system's policy of not permitting drugs to be used until they come down into a certain price range also implies a value for a life. My father narrowly escaped death as a result of the combination of hairy-celled leukemia and this drug policy. During his first two rounds of treatment, the drug that eventually saved his life was not permitted for use because it was too expensive. Had the drug not made the cost criteria by the time his third round of treatment came up, he may not be with us now.

Once we recognize how the market in various ways puts a value on life, we can determine whether this is a value with which we agree, and whether we are prepared to use that value for other decision making purposes. My guess is that most of us would be uncomfortable enough with the notion of sacrificing life in order to save money that we will shuffle this idea off to a dark corner and only think about it if we are forced to.

I also note that utility theory's two principles – the greatest good for the greatest number – eventually come into conflict and the theory does not help us decide how to sort that conflict out.

Finally, utility theory does not help us decide what is "good" and what is "bad", and therefore what is "utility". Is it good stamp out pornography and take steps to limit or eliminate homosexual activity? How you answer that question depends upon what you value, not on some accessible definition of good and bad. Is gambling and the revenues it produces good? Does our answer change if some of those revenues are directed toward charities to some extent? Again, we are dealing with questions of value.

Rights Theory

This theory is usually traced to Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804), who called his version of rights theory the "categorical imperative" and stated it in two ways that he said each had the same effect. The first was:

> An action is morally right for a person in a certain situation if and only if the person's reason for carrying out the action is a reason that he or she would be willing to have every person act on, in any similar situation. (Velasquez, p. 80)

And the second was:

> An action is morally right for a person in a certain situation if and only if in performing the action, the person does not use others merely as a means for advancing his or her own interests, but also both respects and develops their capacity to choose freely for themselves. (Velasquez, p. 82)

That is, would you wish everyone in the world in similar circumstances to act as you propose to act, including those who would so act against you? And act so as never to treat other people as a means, but always as an end, thus respecting their equality to you.

Rights theory is concerned with the intent of the action, not its consequences. The equality of all humans is implicit in this system, and it is closely related to the Golden Rule.

Where do rights come from? Many religious systems purport to answer this question on the basis of god's revealed will. Most of these systems conflict with each other, and hence while it is possible that one of them is right, that is unlikely. And if a "true" religion exists, it is impossible to tell it from the many impostors by which it is surrounded. One prominent media

organization that reviewed Karen Armstrong's book "The History of God" called it the story of the biggest wild goose chase in human history.

Utility theory does not provide a sound basis for the establishment of rights. Just because something may provide the best results for society on the basis of one definition or another does not vest in me an obligation to behave in a certain way.

Kant's categorical imperative provided one of best foundational theories for rights on the basis that each person should be treated as a free person who is equal to everyone else, and a duty rests on the other end of each right. If I have the right to free speech, you have a duty to respect that right, and vice versa. I again note the similarity between this idea and the Golden Rule, which Christ used to teach compassionate living and which has been an integral part of virtually every major religious or cultural trend in human history. It is possible to read Kant as simply expanding upon and making more robust the idea that underlies the Golden Rule.

Kant postulated that each person has the moral right to be treated as an equal to all other persons, and hence a moral obligation to act this way as well. That is, given the relationship outlined above respecting rights and duties, if I claim the right of free speech for myself, on what basis can I deny it to others? Hence, they have that right too. Hence, I have the duties consequent on the existence of their right. While this approach is far from airtight, it is the best I have found to justify the existence of rights.

Once again, we find ourselves butting up against the question of values. The idea that human beings are equal is of relatively recent invention and has still not been accepted by many in the world. Once we accept that as a basic value, then what Kant says makes sense. However, it would not make sense to many Hindus, since from their point of view members of different castes are not equal and should not be treated the same.

There are many rights people allege to have, and they are regularly in conflict. For example, we recognize the right of privacy, but also the right of security of the person. As a result of the rising risk of certain criminal activities highlighted by September 11, laws have been enacted that infringe upon our right to privacy in order to better ensure our right to security. And I have the right to free speech, while you have the right not to have your reputation besmirched. Hence, the law of defamation restricts my right of free speech so as to protect your right to a hard earned reputation. This kind of balancing between competing or conflicting rights is constant in democratic society.

Rights theory has a number of things to commend it, including that it is apparently simple and easy to follow, produces good results in a many cases, and it is consistent with our moral "intuition" and universally recognized rules, such as the Golden Rule.

It has a number of weaknesses as well. For example, it proceeds from the individual's point of view, and often neglects aggregate well-being and concerns related to distributive justice.

Our actions are based on perceptions of good and bad. But rights theory does not help to identify the values required to form those perceptions. Hence, what to one might seem to satisfy the categorical imperative may not to another. For example, in Hindu culture the caste system dictates that humans are not of equal value. The categorical imperative will there produce dramatically different results than it does here. A Green Peace activist may cheerfully blow up an industrial site that is, in his view, a horrific polluter because if he owned it and was

so blinded by filthy lucre that he could not see what it was doing, he would wish that someone would do the same thing. Rights theory would justify both the Hindus and the activist.

Rights theory does not help to establish priorities. You and I might both favour obedience to the law, but you may wish absolute obedience without dissent, which requires significant police powers and the regular state instigated invasion of privacy, while I might favour stronger human rights and less government intervention, which means that more criminals will likely be able to operate among us. This could lead to a discussion of how rights theory applies to various human rights, which will focus us on what we value. One can see how an attempt at cost-benefit analysis might help us to decide how to proceed. And at what point should the property rights of those who own polluting factories yield to the rights of those whose health may be injuriously affected, or those who find a pollution free environment more aesthetically pleasing?

Rights theory leads to the wrong result in cases where bad values are held. For example, what if an employer believes that black people are inherently inferior to whites and should hence be paid less and given only menial jobs, and he believes this so completely that he would willingly submit to that state of affairs were he black? The categorical imperative justifies this behaviour, although I might be sceptical about the factory owner's ability to predict what the world would look like were he black.

Libertarian philosophy criticizes rights theory on the basis that the only restrictions that should be imposed on rights are those that, if not imposed, would result in greater restrictions on rights. Hence, there is no basis for positive rights or the social programs that go with them.

And finally, some say that rights theory is too vague in a variety of other ways.

Justice Theory

Justice comes in a variety of flavours. There is justice based on principles of equality, justice base on the idea that benefits should be allocated based on need and burdens based on ability, and justice that tends toward various kinds of socialism. There is justice based on contribution, which tends toward capitalism, justice based on liberties, and justice based on fairness, which attempts to balance each of the above. The importance of the values that underlie any theory of justice should be immediately apparent. Different aspects of our society use different parts of justice theory, mixed with utility and rights theories.

On common definition of justice that we will consider for discussion purposes is as follows:

> Individuals who are similar in all respects relevant to the kind of treatment in question should be given similar benefits and burden, even if they are dissimilar in other irrelevant respects; and individuals who are dissimilar in a relevant respect ought to be treated dissimilarly, in proportion to their dissimilarity. (Velasquez, p. 91)

Notice that justice is comparative, or relative, not absolute. "How much are 'they' getting?" tends to be the dominant question. Justice is generally considered to override utilitarian concerns, but certain levels of injustice seem acceptable if the overall utility is large enough. Slavery, for example, is no longer tolerable. But subsistence level wages, which in many cases amount to little more than slavery, are tolerated on the basis of utilitarian principles and conceptions of justice based on merit or contribution. And while justice theory is based to a significant extent on individual moral rights, it also regularly overrides those rights. For

example, we recognize the right to private property, but on the basis of justice authorize taxation and redistribution of that property.

The primary strength of justice theory is that if the members of a group believe that justice has been done within the group, they are likely to be more willing to cooperate with the group and the group will likely be more successful.

Justice theory has its weaknesses as well. Justice's point of view is concerned primarily with distributive issues, and hence often neglects individual rights and concerns related to maximizing total utility.

As noted above, justice is not one. She is many. Whether she works or not depends upon the acceptance of norms respecting what is just by most members of the group in question. The larger the group, the less likely it is that this will occur.

Meting out justice is complex and is seen to be so from the outset. This is perhaps a strength, however, because the difficulty of the process is apparent at the beginning, unlike utility and rights theory which appear deceptively simple until one thinks carefully about the process, which few do. My eyes have been opened to a variety of problems with the worldview I have previously used as I wrote this essay, for example. No doubt many others exist that I have not yet uncovered.

Many aspects of justice downplay individual effort, while we recognize that without an incentive for those with talent to take the lead, much less would be accomplished in our society than currently is. And yet, we also recognize that particularly in an age when one angry and empowered person can cause September 11, it is wise to do what we can to ease the burdens of all those who may become so disaffected as to commit terrorist acts.

Justice theory does not specify what is relevant and irrelevant. That must be determined based on values. How do we value human equality as compared to contribution, or need, or ability, or rights? And how do we measure these things?

John Rawl's Version of Justice Theory

British philosopher John Rawls has created a distinctive formulation of justice theory that is worth summarizing. It goes as follows:

1. Each person has an equal right to the most extensive basic liberties compatible with similar liberties for all (known as the "principle of equal liberty"); and

2. Social and economic inequalities are arranged so that they are both (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged persons (known as the "difference principle", and (b) attached to offices and position open to all under conditions of fair and equal opportunity (known as the "principle of fair and equal opportunity") (Velasquez, p. 98).

Part 1 is designed to provide a base of justice, and part 2 is designed to encourage behaviours that will keep the economy and society moving forward.

Rawls' idea was to design a system that would be acceptable to a group of rational, self interested persons who would not know before hand under which circumstances they would

enter society. That is, he tried to design a system that as a whole met the requirements of the categorical imperative, would solve some of its problems, and would be just.

Rawls' justice theory has a number of strengths. Of most importance, it reflects the basic values of our society better than the other systems, and the starting point of its analysis provides moral justification for the system that the others lack.

And as usual, it suffers from some weaknesses. Some critics say that many in the original hypothetical group may well prefer pure utilitarian principles, for example, and would hence reject his system from the outset as unjust. And when are liberties "compatible"? To make this determination, we are forced to weigh some rights against others. This requires a resort to values. Rawls does not help us here. And what is a "benefit" and who is "disadvantaged"? What is "fair" opportunity? Again, we see the critical role of values in making any moral reasoning system work.

Conclusions Respecting Good and Evil

Our goals overall might be defined to be to:

1. Identify our values respecting the issue at hand, and from this develop an idea of what it is that we seek, and what are the costs to be dealt with.

2. Collect as much data as reasonably possible respecting the matter in issue, and its associated utilities, costs, rights and justice related issues. Bear in mind that utilitarian analysis deals only with aggregate social welfare, while ignoring the interest of the individual and issues related to fair distribution of benefits and burdens.

3. Identify the rights that are relevant to the issue at hand, consider their relative importance in light of the values identified above, and hence which should give way to which, how much, and in what ways. Bear in mind that rights theory proceeds from the individual's point of view, and often neglects aggregate well-being and concerns related to distributive justice.

4. Determine how the utilities (benefits) and costs (burdens) in question can be most justly distributed in light of the values that have been accepted. But bear in mind that justice's point of view is concerned primarily with distributive issues, and often neglects the individual and concerns related to maximizing total utility.

5. Determine, using the values selected in step one, which of the three subsidiary theories (utility, rights or justice) should take the lead respecting the issue in question, and which of the other two should take subsidiary roles. Resolve conflicts between the three systems on that basis.

As I go through this process, I constantly make value judgements, many of them so engrained in my thinking that I do not know I make them. Someone once said that fish, paradoxically, do not know much about water until they are taken out of it. We have water of various types that dominate our environment, and are hence unknown to us.

Two people who agree with respect to values could use my suggested model above reasonably well. They may have trouble measuring utility, identifying rights and principles of justice etc., but

once they had done so they would probably be able to agree with respect to the morality of the matter in question. However, if they have a difference of view respecting values, once that has been encountered my model is not likely to be of much use to them.

For example, lets assume that I highly value orderliness and safety. This will affect what I perceive to create utility, it will heavily influence my views respecting whether certain rights exist or not, where and how limits should be placed on rights, and which outcomes in society are just and unjust. We have seen a marked shift in the Western world in this direction since September 11, 2001, and predictably some say the pendulum has swung too far in that direction while others think it should swing further. These opinions are driven by what people value.

So, from society to society, and from sub-group within society to sub-group, as we find different values we will find what look like different moral codes. What does not work in my society given its values and realities and is therefore considered to be evil (polygamy, for example) may work well, or even be essential, in another society, and hence in that context would be considered good. I have read, for example, of societies within which resources are scarce and there is lots of war. Not coincidentally, this describes the world from which Abraham and the other Semites come to us with their polygamous practises. In such societies, many young men are killed while at war and masculine attributes (the ability to protect the family and find scarce resources to support them, for example) are important. Hence, it is easy to see why polygamy or something resembling it would be considered "good" in those circumstances. It serves a useful function – it creates utility.

Perhaps a more extreme example might also help to illustrate this point. In many societies it has been acceptable to put old people out on the ice floes, or the equivalent, to end their lives. This would seem to violate the right to life. However, when this custom is thought of in terms of Kant's categorical imperative with an understanding of the harsh environment and limited resources the society in question faced, perhaps it is understandable. In fact, this behaviour is so engrained within some societies that old people themselves exit to the ice flows, and are applauded by all for the morality of this behaviour. So we have one group of people saying that old people should kill themselves and that when they get old they will do the same to themselves, and we see the current crop of old people walking under their own steam out to the ice floes. It seems that this system satisfies the Golden Rule, at least on the surface.

Religious belief and human sociology being what they are, it is a short step from making a societal decision of the type described above to sacrilizing it (whether it be polygamy, abortion or some form of genocide) and determining that things must be as they are. It is short hop from there to the determination that all other ways of doing things are at least deficient if not evil. Campbell says that the basic function of mythology is to help us make sense out of our existential questions. There is nothing like the stamp of god himself on something that we find troubling to put our minds at ease.

I note parenthetically that my perception of joy seems to be completely divorced from conceptions of good and evil in the absolute sense. That is, I do not appear to be capable of recognizing things that are evil (or at least not good) in an absolute sense if such is the case. On the contrary, as long as I act in a fashion that I believe to be good, using and developing my strengths and virtues (more relative, subjectively perceived concepts), a sense of joy will accompany me regardless of what the absolute merit of my actions may be. I do not see anything in the lives of those around to indicate that my experience is unusual. As a result of my observations in this regard, I have decided that the joy in my life will be determined by my actions relative to my understanding of good and evil, not good or evil in an absolute sense.

This idea is consistent with the LDS notion that we will all eventually be judged in accordance with the "light and knowledge" we had in this life. It is also consistent with Popper's critical preference theory as outlined above.

Does this mean that I accept all behaviour as equally good? No. It means that I recognize that my joy is a function of my understanding of the relative merits of different behaviours on a scale of good and bad, regardless of whether that understanding is accurate. Things I think are good and bring me joy may be evil (or not good) from many other points of view, and things that I shun as evil may be good in the same way. Now that I recognize this, I am comfortable with the idea that the purpose of my life is not to find out what good and evil is first, and then find joy by doing good, but rather it is to experience joy all along the way by doing the best I can to do good for myself and others as I perceive it. As I am successful in "purifying" myself (to use Buddhist terminology), using the critical preference model set out above, my perception of good, evil and how to find joy will become more accurate and I will in fact do more good.

Part of my personal mythology, which I will test as I go through life, is the belief that as I go through the above process the joy I am capable of experiencing will also graduate to a higher order. Does this mean more of what I now experience, or more intensity in that regard? I doubt it. And I emphasize that we are well into pure mythology once again - I suspect the experience will be different in kind rather than amount or intensity. I am excited to find out what this will be like.

Utility Theory in the Mormon and Christian Context

I have chosen to pick on Mormonism and Christianity because I am still a cultural Mormon, although no longer a member of the Mormon Church, and I am a liberal Christian. The same type of analysis I have here could be used respecting many other religions as a result of the fact that individuals in groups tend to overuse utility theory in ways that auger against the interest of particular individual group members.

Having decided that the radical fringe of utilitarian theory must be restrained by rights theory, we should be uncomfortable with certain basic elements of Christianity and many other religiously oriented behaviors that come from the same root.

As noted above, Christianity's central value is compassion and its basic moral decision-making framework is rights theory, in the form of the Golden Rule. However, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the story of Jesus' crucifixion, if taken literally, illustrates the classic abuse of utility theory – one is sacrificed in a brutal way for the benefit of many. This story is, however, so much a part of the wallpaper with which we live that its barbaric nature has to be pointed out before we can see it, and even then many resist what for me has become obvious. The story of Jesus' death displays classic "the ends justify the means" rationalization.

Some have indicated that Jesus' sacrifice was voluntary and that is one of the things that makes it wonderful. To this I would reply that such a sacrifice is stated by Christian theology, and at least implied by the Bible, to be a necessary part of god's plan for the salvation of his children. Hence, if not Christ, then some other innocent would have been sacrificed. And Christ's plea that the cup be taken from him arguably indicates that he was steeling himself for what must be done, although I recognize that other interpretations could be put on that part of the narrative.

What do we make of the fact that the foundational event of Christianity, which we consider to be the primary source of our moral system, is something most of us would agree is immoral

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whether Christ volunteered for the task or not? Did god really mean that we should follow the example set by his son in this regard? Did he mean that such behaviour is good or somehow moral? If we take the Bible seriously, it is hard to resist this conclusion. Joseph Smith apparently thought this way, since the story of Nephi killing Laban in the Book of Mormon succinctly justifies that act on that basis that it is better that "one man should perish than a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief" (1 Nephi 4:13). I suggest that other religious leaders, and particularly Mormon religious leaders, have often taken the same position relative to a broad range of issues, in contravention to what is Christianity's guiding moral principle – compassion – within the framework of the Golden Rule.

When we think about the Crusades, the Inquisition (and Galileo's treatment at its hands in particular), the Salem witch trials, September 11 and other religiously motivated moral catastrophes, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the extreme edge of utilitarian thinking has been used to justify outrageously immoral acts committed in the name of religion. Some philosophers refer to this kind of unethical activity as the ethics of conviction. That is, once one is sufficiently convinced that his cause is right and of sufficient importance, the ends come to justify the means no matter how abhorrent those means may be. The Holocaust is somewhere near, if not at, the high water mark of this type of behaviour in the non-religious sphere.

Acts such as the Inquisition, Holocaust, Crusades etc. could never be justified on the basis of compassion and the Golden Rule. The same applies to the LDS "faithful history" policy, which basically posits that it is all right for religious leaders to shade the truth, or even lie, as long as it serves a greater good. How about excommunicating "intellectuals" who only publish and speak about things of legitimate academic interest, and refuse to be muzzled? Here again we sacrifice the few for the sake of the many, since if those few are allowed to continue to study, write and speak, they may harm those whose faith is still "tender" (such as mine was, as a 45 year old former Bishop with three university degrees).

Utility Theory Overrides Rights Theory in the Mormon Context

As Dallin Oaks put it relative to the LDS Church discipline that was imposed on Linda King Newell for her authorship of the book "Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith":

> My duty as a member of the Council of the Twelve is to protect what is most unique about the LDS church, namely the authority of priesthood, testimony regarding the restoration of the gospel, and the divine mission of the Saviour. Everything else may be sacrificed in order to maintain the integrity of those essential facts. Thus, if Mormon Enigma reveals information that is detrimental to the reputation of Joseph Smith, then it is necessary to try to limit its influence and that of its authors." ("Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith: Psychobiography and the Book of Mormon", Introduction, fn 28)

None of this would surprise Nietzsche, who wrote:

> That the lie is permitted as a means to pious ends Is part of the theory of every priesthood – to what extent it is part of their practice is the object of this enquiry. (The Will to Power, p. 89)

We hear echoes of this same approach from Michael Quinn as he explains some of the more unsavoury aspects of Joseph Smith's behaviour in the following terms:

Smith remained aloof from civil office, but in November 1835 he announced a doctrine I call 'theocratic ethics'. He used this theology to justify his violation of Ohio's marriage laws by performing a marriage for Newel Knight and the undivorced Lydia Goldthwaithe without legal authority to do so... In addition to the bigamous character of this marriage, Smith had no license to perform marriages in Ohio.

Although that was the first statement of this concept, Smith and his associates put that theology into practice long before 1835, and long after. Two months later Smith performed marriage ceremonies for which neither he nor the couples had marriage licenses, and he issued marriage certificates "agreeable to the rules and regulations of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." Theocratic ethics justified LDS leaders and (by extension) regular Mormons in actions which were contrary to conventional ethics and sometimes in violation of criminal laws.

This ethical independence is essential for understanding certain seemingly inconsistent manifestations in Mormonism. Some had already occurred - reversals in doctrine and divinely revealed procedures, and the publication of unannounced changes in written revelations and historical texts. The Knight marriage was a public example of Joseph Smith's violation of laws and cultural norms regarding marriage and sexual behavior - the performance of civil marriages by legally unauthorized officiators, monogamous marriage ceremonies in which one or both partners were undivorced from legal spouses, polygamous marriage of a man with more than one living wife, his marriage proposals to females as young as twelve, his sexual relationships with polygamous wives as young as fourteen, polyandry of women with more than one husband, marriage and cohabitation with foster daughters, and Mormon marriages of first cousins, brother-sister, and uncle-niece. Other manifestations of Mormonism's theocratic ethics would soon begin in Kirkland and continue intermittently for decades - the official denials of actual events, the alternating condemnation and tolerance for counterfeiting and stealing from non-Mormons, threats and physical attacks against dissenters or other alleged enemies, the killing and castration of sex offenders, the killing of anti-Mormons, the bribery of government officials, and business ethics at odds with church standards. (Mormon Hierarchy – The Origins of Power, p. 88)

The practise of theocratic ethics has continued within the LDS Church. The fact that Church officials lied about their continuing illegal practise of polygamy for 15 years after the Manifesto in 1890 is another illustration of this phenomenon. When this behaviour of the Church's leadership is combined with what Mormon scripture still says about the importance of polygamous marriage (see D&C 132), and some charismatic authority figures within the polygamous groups, it does not surprise me that these seemingly archaic and dangerous groups continue to thrive in many places, including Canada. The Church has sown the wind in that regard, and as a result some unfortunates reap the whirlwind.

The faithful history policy referred to above and the systematic excommunication of intellectuals who refuse to be silenced since the early 1990s are further examples of theocratic ethics. And note the similarity between the ethics of conviction, as summarized above, and theocratic ethics.

While theocratic ethics does not illustrate the "few sacrificed for the many" pattern in an obvious manner, in my view it is part of the same phenomenon. The essence of extreme utilitarian theory is the ends justify the means. Theocratic ethics is guided by that rule. For example, lying about polygamy is justified because polygamy is a holy, god commanded practise that

must be preserved at all costs. However, in a more subtle way, the few are still being sacrificed for the benefit of the many. The women (including my great-grandmother) who suffered through polygamy in the manner so well described by Todd Compton in his book "In Sacred Loneliness" sacrificed much of their lives in the belief that they and their posterity would reap certain rewards of inestimable value in the Celestial Kingdom. Husbands were asked to sacrifice their wives and fathers their young teenage daughters by offering them in marriage to Joseph Smith on the same basis – the probability of the eternal salvation of their posterity, and they themselves, would be enhanced. And then there was the sacrifice required of the wives and daughters themselves.

As I envision these transactions being concluded, I find it impossible to resist the image of a slick carpetbagger or modern stock promoter dealing with uneducated but sincere and believing rubes. That is not to say that I believe Joseph Smith to have been a conscious fraud. Indeed, the most effective stock promoters I have seen in action have bought their own story, but have somehow managed at the same time to ensure that their position is well secured while that of their investors is less well so. While most of my anger respecting Mormonism and what I experienced at its hands is now gone, I must confess that I feel the embers stir as I think about this.

And what of the practical effect within the Mormon community of expressing doubts respecting Church authority? A master's degree thesis at the University of Lethbridge a number of years ago summarized a study of missionaries returned from the Arizona mission, and found that 80% of those who became disaffected from the Church and whose spouses did not, went through a divorce. Having recently navigated the treacherous waters surrounding those rocks with my wife, I can understand why this statistic is as it is. Marriages will founder as one spouse is less able than the other to deal with the gap between the reality of Mormon origins and practises and what the Church offers for public consumption in that regard.   And other family relationships will also suffer, as have mine.

How can we justify religious beliefs that cause ruptures such as those I have described between good hearted, moral, family members who love each other, treat each other otherwise with respect, and have dedicated themselves to building their lives together? Does not such rupture of relationships suggest a dysfunction in the belief system that causes it? It is clear to me that this is yet another illustration of the "sacrifice the few for the benefit of the many" philosophy articulated above. A few marriages may have to break up in order to keep many other members faithful, or at least silent about their lack of faith, due to the fear that their marriages will end if they allow their feelings and beliefs to be known.

Let us consider how the principles of compassion and the Golden Rule would apply to some of the situations outlined above.

LDS Church leaders seem to have taken the position that they must withhold information from the members because if the members had that information, they may not use it wisely. I suggest that the leaders would not wish to have the same done to them. Most of us appreciate having advice directed toward us by helpful, credible sources. Few of us would be prepared to agree that another should in effect make decisions for us by controlling the information we see. Western democratic society has rejected that elitist model, and recent history has proven to my satisfaction that the pros of free speech and government accountability to the uneducated rabble far outweigh the cons. All we need to do to make that point is contrast life in the communist world with that in the democratic west.

I would make the same point respecting each of the other situations posited above. It is difficult to imagine that the religious leaders in question would willingly submit to the sacrifices and loss of free will that they cheerfully impose on their mostly unwitting followers.

And what about differences in values? One of the reasons for which I do not want others to make my decisions for me is that their values may well be different than mine, and hence their perception of the evidence and objectives to be achieved in any particular case should be expected to differ from my own. This is particularly the case when those who would decide for me are responsible for a huge organization whose interests are in many ways inimical to my own. I should expect that frequently what they value as institutional leaders will oppose what I value.

The Protection of Individual Rights Against Group Oriented Utilitarian Initiatives

And so we come to the nub of the issue. As pointed out above, there is a basic tension between utilitarian theory and rights theory. Utilitarian theory is designed to maximize the benefit for all, whereas rights theory is designed to protect certain important rights of individuals and minority groups from being trampled by the utilitarian orientation of the larger group and those who lead it. That is why within society debates rage constantly respecting the manner in which constitutional law protects individual rights against utilitarian oriented legislation. In that context, we have impartial courts charged with the responsibility of protecting each of us individual members of society against the utilitarian leanings of the larger group, represented by democratically elected legislators. And occasionally those courts overturn legislation that unduly interferes with individual rights. This failsafe mechanism shows the wisdom of democratic society. We have recognized that as a group we have the inclination to act against the interest of individuals, and hence that each of us individually needs to be protected from the rest of us acting as the faceless mod. That is, we recognize that there is a dark underside to the psychology of all groups, even those composed of moral, well-intentioned people.

There are relatively rare cases in which the group acts spontaneously to protect the individuals among them against utilitarian abuses. The modern trend toward the establishment of constitutional rights in favour of individuals is the most important and widespread example of this trend. A example that makes for a more interesting read, however, was provided by the spread of Nazism during the run up to World War II. And it shows both the operation of radical utilitarian theory in support of a bad meta-value, as well as how that type of malevolent instrument can be blunted by action motivated by rights and justice theory.

Just before the Jewish New Year in the fall of 1943, a German diplomat in German occupied Copenhagen risked his life to warn the Danish authorities that the Gestapo intended to strike at Friday sundown on the Jewish New Year and carry off all the Danish Jews to concentration camps. Danish organizations of all descriptions, immediately and without debate as to what they should do, cooperated to first hide, and then smuggle Jews out of Denmark. By the appointed strike date, all of the Jews had been hidden and the Gestapo only captured a few dozen. The Nazis offered to trade the hidden Jews for the Danish officer corps that the Nazis had arrested the month prior when the Danish Navy scuttled itself so no Danish warships would serve the Third Reich. The official Danish response was a terse note that said they would not trade one Dane for another.

In the meantime, the Jewish - Danish Nobel Prize-winning nuclear physicist, Niels Bohr, went to Sweden to negotiate asylum for the Danish Jews there. Two days later the head of the Danish

Lutheran Church issued a pastoral letter that was read from the pulpit of every church in the Kingdom. The letter said that there were times when man's laws were superceded by God's laws and that this was one of those times and it was every Dane's duty to break the law, defy the Nazis, and save the Jews. In many churches, the congregations gave standing ovations at the conclusion of this address. Civil servants in many municipalities went to their offices to alter Jewish names to more Danish-sounding ones so the Nazis would not find them; the Danish police interfered with Nazi troop movements near the coast so the refugees could be transported to the fishing vessels and other craft assembling there; physicians prepared sedation so Jewish infants wouldn't cry and give away their location; the Danish coast guard ignored the Nazis demand to stop fleeing boats; and sympathetic Germans in the command center for Nazi naval operations in Denmark ordered all ships to port for "maintenance."

Then word came that Dr. Bohr's visit with the Swedish King had been successful and Radio Sweden broadcasted an offer of asylum to all the Danish Jews. Over the next three nights, a rag-tag flotilla of fishing boats, row boats, pleasure yachts and any other thing that would float, transported all 7,000 Jews to safety in Sweden where they survived the war.

The Nazis punished Denmark severely for this resistance, including carrying off many Danish police to the concentration camps in Germany and machine-gunning to death civil servants caught altering records. But when Danes were asked why they risked so much and paid such a heartbreaking price to defy the Nazis and do no more than protect a minority among them, the invariably surprised answers were all the same: "How could we possibly do otherwise?" The Danes felt that as human beings, there was simply no other option but to risk their lives for total strangers. That is, in their society rights and justice trumped utilitarian considerations. A review of other modern Danish social practices leads to the conclusion that their behaviour in protecting the Jews is in line with their tendency to sacrifice utility for justice and rights.

However, we must acknowledge that the Danish resistance to the Third Reich is more the exception than the rule. The example set by the Nazis themselves is closer to the norm of group behaviour in terms of doing things that are intended to improve the lot of the group at the expense of certain individual members of the group.

In light of the universal tendency of mankind acting in groups and the leadership of groups to behave as I have outlined above, why are we surprised to find that the leaders of the Mormon and other religious groups use extreme utilitarian ethics? Of course their inclination will be utilitarian. Of course they will act to preserve and strengthen the institution which they lead and from which they derive their status, even if this means harming some of the individual members of the group. This is how millennia of experience have proven that most human beings in groups behave. The same experience also proves that religious leaders will attempt to persuade their followers that these laws of sociological gravity do not apply to them, and they may even believe this themselves. This means that while Christ taught compassion as the first principle of Christian life, and the Golden Rule as the best means of deploying that principle, we cannot reasonably expect institutional religion to behave in a manner that is consistent with those teachings. But, we can expect human leaders of all types to invoke Christ's name (or any other that will help their cause) as they attempt to control their followers.

So the question becomes, if we have established that individual rights require the protection of constitutions and judges within society, what provides that protection in the religious context? The answer is that no protection is provided. And to make matters worse, many religious institutions (including the Mormon Church) hold themselves out as providing that protection to

their members. The church is the mother figure of spiritual life, providing nurture, love and guidance as required. However, the fact of the matter is often quite different.

As Boyd Packer, a member of the Mormon Church's Council of the Twelve Apostles put it:

> In the Church we are not neutral. We are one-sided. There is a war going on and we are engaged in it. It is the war between good and evil, and we are belligerents defending the good. We are therefore obliged to give preference to and protect all that is represented in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and we have made covenants to do it. …
>
> There is much in the scriptures and in our Church literature to convince us that we are at war with the adversary. We are not obliged as a church, nor are we as members obliged, to accommodate the enemy in this battle. …
>
> Suppose that a well-managed business corporation is threatened by takeover from another corporation. Suppose that the corporation bent on the takeover is determined to drain off all its assets and then dissolve this company. You can rest assured that the threatened company would hire legal counsel to protect itself.
>
> Can you imagine that attorney, under contract to protect the company having fixed in his mind that he must not really take sides, that he must be impartial? Suppose that when the records of the company he has been employed to protect are opened for him to prepare his brief he collects evidence and passes some of it to the attorneys of the enemy company. His own firm may then be in great jeopardy because of his disloyal conduct.
>
> Do you not recognize a breach of ethics, or integrity, or morality?
>
> I think you can see the point I am making. Those of you who are employed by the Church have a special responsibility to build faith not destroy it. If you do not do that, but in fact accommodate the enemy, who is the destroyer of faith you become in that sense a traitor to the cause you have made covenants to protect. ("The Mantle Is Far, Far Greater Than The Intellect" given by Boyd Packer at the Fifth Annual Church Educational System Religious Educators' Symposium, 22 August, 1981 at Brigham Young University. (See *Brigham Young University Studies*, Summer 1981)

This idea has been echoed many times. One such echo worth repeating came from Dallin Oaks, another Apostle and a former judge. At a conference for LDS Church educators in August of 1985, while purporting to lecture professional historians respecting the importance of their use of balance and good scholarship in the writing of Church history, he said that:

> Balance is telling both sides. This is not the mission of the official Church literature or avowedly anti-Mormon literature. Neither has any responsibility to present both sides.

Oakes also referred in his address to in the battle in which the Church is engaged with the anti-Mormons who do not tell the whole truth, and hence the Church is obliged to tell its side of the story only and as persuasively as possible. That is, Oaks believes that the Church is in the role of a legal advocate (he was a lawyer and then a judge after all) who is hired to pitch his client's case to the judge and jury, instead of a protective parent who can be relied upon to act in the best interest of her child. It seems likely that Oaks was following Packer's lead on this point.

I am a practising lawyer. The North American litigation system, following the English model, required advocates from each side of the dispute to prepare one-sided arguments and present them to the judge. The judge, being wise, experienced and unbiased, can then decide which of the competing arguments has the most merit.

It should be obvious that this method will not work in the case of the Church, its adversaries and its members. The members are cast in the role of the judge while the Church and its adversaries are the lawyers. The members are not, however, wise, experienced or unbiased. And furthermore, they have no idea that the Church has cast them in the judge's role and is presenting a one-sided argument to them. They think the Church is the source of all truth and is protecting them from evil, much as a judge would be perceived to be.

And I also note that even in a real adversarial litigation system, there are restraints on what the advocates can present to the court. A lawyer must not, for example, mislead the court by allowing false evidence to be presented, or even evidence that by its incomplete nature is likely to mislead the Court. Hence the Church fails to abide by even the low standards of one sided legal advocacy in the manner in which it presents information respecting its origins to its members, potential converts and the public.

Meta-Values and Fear

One of the features of religious thinking that in my view contributes to the use of radical utilitarian theory in religious circles is the idea of absolute or near absolute values. These might be called meta-values. This is the idea that there are some things that override virtually all others. The value of compassion, for example, is generally regarded as the Christian meta-value and much lip service is paid to it by all Christian churches, including the LDS Church. However, it is my observation that the LDS Church teaches its members to use other meta-values that clearly override compassion. In this, Mormons are not unlike the Jews of Jesus' day of whom he was critical because they put ritual purity and other values ahead of compassion. This is what makes the Good Samaritan story so compelling. Jesus was saying that there is something fundamentally wrong when the religious leaders of a society (the Priests and Levites) are required by spiritually oriented laws (in this case related to purity) to pass by a wounded man on the road, leaving him to likely death. It is my assertion that Jesus would level a similarly devastating critique against certain Mormon practises and priorities today.

For example, in Mormon theology the importance of qualifying for life in the Celestial Kingdom can hardly be overemphasized. Hence, anything that threatens this is profoundly bad, and should be avoided even if what seems to be required for avoidance would breach the norms of compassionate behaviour and the Golden Rule.

Let us consider what is likely to happen within a faithful Mormon family when one spouse decides the Mormon church is not what it purports to be, and declines to continue to follow church authority. As noted above, one study of which I am aware showed that 80% of the marriages in which this happened ended in divorce. When my wife and I went through this process she was counselled by at least one and I believe several of her faithful LDS friends and family members to leave our marriage because she had a duty to protect our children's eternal salvation from my corrosive influence. Many LDS acquaintances, most of them my friends, have expressed their surprise to me that she did not end our marriage. These people are not familiar with the study referred to above, but their experience led them to expect a divorce as a result of my change of religious conviction. And it is not uncommon for other family members to lash out in a most uncompassionate manner against the "apostate". These actions are all

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driven by belief in the extreme importance of qualifying for life in the Celestial Kingdom, and a resulting fear associated with any influence that might prevent loved ones from being there. I suggest that such actions find justification in scriptures such as Matthew 10:37 which says:

> He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

and Matthew 5:29 which says:

> And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that the whole body should be cast into hell.

These scriptures, and others similar to them, suggest that Christ taught the radical fringe of utility theory. As I note below, the antidote to this view is a metaphoric understanding of both Christ's resurrection and scriptures of this type.

The utilitarian and fear oriented weakness of institutional religion outlined above varies from one religion to another. The LDS Church suffers from this malady more than most. In general, the more fundamentalist and hence literalist a religious institution, the greater its difficulties will be in this regard because the more absolute it will tend to see the values it represents, and hence the stronger the role the institution will be likely inclined to play in steering its members toward those values.

I also note the role of fear in shaping institutional and membership behaviours. The more I fear the consequence of an action or inaction, the more vigorous and insistent I am likely to be in avoiding what I fear. Hence, if my belief in the fire and brimstone of hell or the reality of the Celestial Kingdom is literal and vivid, anything that threatens to send me or my loved ones to hell or cause us to miss being in the Celestial Kingdom together will likely cause significant and persistent action on my part. If I fear sufficiently, that fear may cause me to override other values in which I believe, such as compassion, free speech, free will, etc. If, on the other hand, my beliefs are more metaphoric in nature, I am less likely to fear, and less likely to act in the same way. In that case, the other values referred to above are more likely to assert themselves, which is good from many points of view, but from my religious institution's point of view, I am not likely to be as productive a foot soldier.

As one evangelical pastor recently to put to me, there is a reason that the evangelicals are building the biggest churches and sending out the most missionaries. It is that they feel an urgency to save the rest of the world from the Christ-less, and hence by definition, incomplete and sinful life they live. This is an important task because even a Buddhist (one of the examples I like to use to find out where a church is on the "fundamentalist" spectrum) who exemplifies Christian living without knowing it will not be saved unless he has accepted Christ. As soon as you accept that people such as that Buddhist are probably going to "heaven" because they lived a good life, the donations dry up, the volunteers lose a lot of enthusiasm and hence the institution is weakened.

As a result of the foregoing, it should be clear that the certainty offered by any religion of the "there is only one way to heaven and it is my way" type, creates more energy for institutional tasks than is created by more metaphorically oriented religions. The pastor in question, of course, felt the "certainty" orientation of evangelical Christianity was also better for each and every individual than any alternative approach could be.

It is easy to see how those who wish a religious institution to be strong would prefer this approach, and also easy to understand how, having adopted that approach, they would be inclined to eliminate all influences that would have the effect of watering down its effectiveness, even if some uncompassionate behaviour was required to achieve that. That is, the value of a strong institution that has the strength to "save" many souls is more important that compassionate behaviour toward some particular individual who is acting like sand between the institution's gears. I suggest that this is precisely what Christ preached against within the Jewish culture of his day.

While I was a faithful Mormon, I held certain meta-values with respect to my religious belief that differed radically from the values that governed the rest of my life. Hence, my reasoning process was bifurcated. And I had one type of reasoning that I used regarding religious matters, and another I used for everything else. My religious reasoning was dominated by a desire to reach the Celestial Kingdom with my family, and hence the "obedience to authority" meta-value. This was a black and white process for me, which is what Gordon Hinckley said it should be in an address at last April's General Conference of the Mormon Church. He said:

> The book of Revelation declares: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth" (Revelation 3:15–16). …

> Each of us has to face the matter—either the Church is true, or it is a fraud. There is no middle ground. It is the Church and kingdom of God, or it is nothing.

Hence, once I understood god's message, as delivered by his leaders, the thinking had been done and all I had to do was execute. If I did not behave in this way, I feared that I would lose my place in the Celestial Kingdom, be separated from my family, etc. This produced a deep, motivating fear in me. In some cases there was room for rationalization, but not much. I was a true believer, and felt that rationalization of the type I saw in others was a sign of weakness or lack of faith.

I was encouraged in this point of view by my local LDS Church leaders who saw in me a potential leader, in large measure because of my "get it done" attitude, willingness to sacrifice personal and family time and resources to do that, and inclination to encourage those within my sphere of influence to follow my example. So I was quickly called to higher positions of authority, culminating in my calling as bishop of the Ward in which we lived just after my thirty-first birthday. The message of my quick rise through the local leadership ranks could not have been lost on those who observed it. As James Faust, then a member of the Church's Quorum of Twelve Apostles, pointed out during a meeting I attended at which he installed a new Stake Presidency in Edmonton, Alberta in the early 1980s, leaders are called to be the paradigm behavioural examples within the area over which they preside. Hence, my approach toward obedience and sacrifice was, in our area and I would say generally throughout the Church, the behaviour that was encouraged.

The starting point for my reasoning was something pretty close to the critical preference model outlined above, and was dominated on the moral level by the Golden Rule and compassion. However, one of the important tests to which I put every major decision was "what does god want me to do?" This meant checking my actions against standards established by scripture and Church authority, and acting based on fear of the eternal consequences of things I saw happening around me.

For example, when our oldest daughter started to struggle with a variety of things as a young teenager, my impulse was to control her. I feared that her actions would cause our family to not be together in the Celestial Kingdom, and I feared this more than I could articulate to myself. Hence, I did all kinds of things to try to persuade, cajole and finally force her to get back in line. I recognized that what I was doing was not in keeping with what D&C 121 says about how priesthood influence should be exercised, but the deep fear I felt overcame my understanding of what I should do. The meta-value of getting my family to the Celestial Kingdom trumped the less powerful and urgent behavioural values set out in D&C 121 (which is little more than an specific application of compassion and the Golden Rule), my daughter's free will, and common sense.

What is the Antidote?

It is my view that the tendency of religious leaders to abuse utilitarian theory in the fashion described above shows their psychology to be of the "will to power" variety articulated so well by Nietzsche. This tendency is consistent with what sociology tells us both about religious and other groups. And it is inconsistent with Christ's message.

As noted above, there is a correlation between fundamentalist religious leanings and extreme utilitarian ethics. Who is responsible for September 11? Who is killing each other in and around Palestine? From whom do we often hear the most strident racial rhetoric in the U.S.? Which religious groups are among the most intolerant of those who differ from themselves in terms of anti-feminist or sexual orientation?

Because of the manner in which I have answered the above questions, it is my suggestion that the first thing that can be done to correct the problem referred to above is encourage a metaphoric understanding of scripture, and broaden our appreciation of how other religious traditions intersect in various ways with our own.

I note in particular that the tendency of the crucifixion narrative in the Bible to support immoral institutional behaviour can be counteracted by a metaphoric interpretation of the text. If the text is about the kind of marvellous second birth we can each experience as we mature from a spiritual point of view, and not about a physical death and literal, universal, physical resurrection, the text does no harm and could do much good.

And it is easy to understand how the early Christian community, reeling under persecution, still remembering the presence of a great man as he was in the flesh, and aware of earlier mythologies of heroes killed who returned to life, could have gone a little overboard in their stories about Jesus. In fact, how can we reasonably suggest that during the course of the 30 to 60 years that passed between his death and when the Gospels were recorded that exaggeration did not occur, given our understanding of how people communicate and how the smallest stories with which we are familiar are regularly blown out of proportion during a matter of hours?

And we should also remember that the Jungian archetypes that gave rise to both animal sacrifice and those other mythologies were working within the early Christian community just as they had been among the Greeks, Egyptians, Sumerians etc. who produced strikingly similar characters in their own mythologies.

Rene Girard, a highly respected if controversial scholar and a Christian, has put forward the view that Christ will be eventually understood as the one who broke the cycle of violence in which human society had from the beginning been stuck. His theory is that the imitative nature of human beings causes us to want the same things and imitate each other's bad behaviour until violence escalates out of the control. He argues persuasively that the institution of the scapegoat is what was used until Christ to occasionally defuse the violence that would otherwise have engulfed society. Scapegoating is nothing more than the paradigm illustration of radical utility theory – the one will be killed, or exiled, in order to bring peace back to society.

Christ, says Girard, brought the message that scapegoating should no longer be tolerated, and that rather than imitating each other's bad behaviour we should imitate Christ's compassionate example. Christ's behaviour, which illustrated the value of compassion and respect for the equal nature of all human beings embodied within the Golden Rule, would therefore become humanity's guiding paradigm. Hence, by responding to his tormentors in the way he did, Girard implies, Christ was calling for an end to the radical use of utility theory – he was branding it as an archaic, immoral practise. He was saying that all scapegoating and by implication radical use of utility theory is wrong, compassion is the meta-value, and most importantly that he as the most innocent of all innocents, would go to his death to make that point. It is high irony that his death (which I believe occurred) coupled with his resurrection (which I do not believe occurred) is now used by the literalists within the Christian tradition to support the radical use of utilitarian theory in the manner described above.

I do not believe that Christ's message was that we should never use utility theory. Rather, it was that the radical fringe of utility theory leads to immoral decisions, and we should use compassion as our meta-value as we use the various branches of moral reason available to us. His emphasis on rights theory was likely the result of the fact that it was grossly underutilized in his day.

But what of the troubling scriptures from Matthew referred to above, which suggests that following Christ must come before our most important personal relationships? I suggest that the meaning of this scripture depends upon what it means to love Christ. Since his law of compassion is based on the Golden Rule, and since he taught that when we have done it unto the least of men, we have done it unto him, I read the passage quite differently that do those who suggested to my wife that she leave me because of my refusal to continue to follow Mormon authority.

If loving Christ means living the Golden Rule and so abiding by his principle of compassion, then the only kind of love for a parent or child that would be problematic is that which would cause us to break the Golden Rule. For example, if I love my child so much that I hurt others in my attempt to help him in some way, then I would have breached the Golden Rule. If I love my mother so much that I harm an innocent in order to protect her from the consequences of her own actions, then I have broken the Golden Rule. If I do such things, I am unworthy of Christ because I have broken the moral code he articulated and hence I have taken a step backward on the inward journey toward the peace of which he spoke. And I of course recall that he also said that he did not bring peace at all, but a sword. That too can be interpreted in the inner world. He did not bring the physical sword, but rather a sword to be used to bring peace "not of this world" to our inner regions.

This kind of analysis focuses us on the individual, inward nature of the journey Christ pointed us toward. I do not see any conflict here between the kind of love I wish to cultivate for my parents and children, and my love for Christ, which as I noted above is really the love for everyman.

However, when love for Christ becomes equated with obedience to religious authority, insurmountable problems are often encountered. This equation requires me to reject family members who do not agree with me as to the source of god's authority thus acting less than compassionately toward them.

And how about the injunction to cast off our "members" that offend us so that the entire body does not perish? I first note that the word offend is perhaps better interpreted as "to cause to stumble". I then note that the metaphor (which it must be, since we will assume Christ was not referring to literal dismemberment) could be taken to refer to things of a cultural nature instead of to our personal relationships. The use of the word "member" in the King James version of the Bible may have caused this passage to be used as license for excommunicatory practises that are now justified in the LDS church as well as elsewhere.

The part of Jewish culture of which Jewish was most critical was its purity code, and the manner in which that code negatively affected compassionate relationships between people. Hence, the story of the Good Samaritan as noted above, his dining with tax collectors and sinners (sources of impurity), his improper associations with women (sources of impurity) including the scandalous manner in which he permitted a woman to enter a place in which men were preparing to dine and use her hair to wash his feet, etc. He was primarily focussed on teaching compassionate human relations, and overturning cultural institutions (especially those associated with the Jewish religion) that were not compassionate.

Hence, it is my view that the members he asks us to cast from us are those aspects of our culture and worldview that lead us to do uncompassionate things to our fellowman. It is a horribly ironic inversion of Christ's teachings in this regard when they are used to justify the treatment by one person who interprets Christ's message in one way of another who he deems defective because he does not see things in the same way, and to then justify behaviour such as the insults, ostracism etc. that the believers rain down upon the "apostate". As we consider the course of the history of Christianity and other religions, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that uncompassionate behaviour of this type is more the rule than the exception.

One of the things I like about science (as well as philosophy) is that its constant reminders of the uncertainty of even things that seem certain beyond question inoculates me against the kind of attitude Christ seems to tell us we should avoid – that of judging others on the basis of presumed absolutes and then treating them as lesser beings. Perhaps it is this very uncertainty, or at least our inability to perceive things as they are, which promoted Jesus' teaching that take great care in how we judge. And it is obvious that this attitude will help us to be more humble, childlike and compassionate, all attitudes Christ taught that we should adopt.

Nietzsche, while awfully dark at times, had many insightful things to say about institutions of all kinds, including those of the religious variety. He noted, for example, that:

> [Religious leaders] have to set aside the concept of a natural course of events: but since they are clever and thoughtful people they are able to promise a host of effects, conditioned, of course, by prayers or the strict observance of their laws. …
> The holy lie [lies told by all religious leaders for pious purposes] therefore applies principally: to the purpose of an action (natural purpose, reason are made to vanish: a moral purpose, the fulfillment of a law, a service to God appears as purpose): to the consequence of an action (natural consequence is interpreted as supernatural and, to produce a surer effect, the prospect of other, uncontrollable consequences is held out.)

In this way a concept of good and evil is created that seems to be altogether divorced from the natural concept "useful," "harmful", "life-promoting", "life-retarding" – in so far as another life is imagined, it can even be directly inimical to the natural concept of good and evil.

In this way the famous "conscience" is at last created: an inner voice which does not measure the value of every action with regard to its consequences, but with regard to its intentions and the degree to which this intention conforms with the "laws". (The Will to Power, pp. 90, 91)

His point, in essence, is that religious authority tends to establish a system of right and wrong that is divorced from reality. Its purpose is not to provide us with sound guidance and the kind of personal development Christ, Buddha and other spiritual leaders have outlined, but rather to conform to laws established by the religious leaders themselves, some of which are interpretations of scripture, and others that are created out of whole cloth on the basis of the leaders' presumed god-given authority. A system of this type is quite simply designed by the few to control the many.

The requirement of obedience to the institution regularly causes the kind of behaviours outlined above that run hard against the essence of Christ's ethical system. Institutional religion uses certain aspects of Christ's teachings as a control tool, but more frequently uses the presumed authority from Christ to create new control rules that conflict with the most basic of his teachings. This produces tremendous cognitive dissonance in many religious people because they can feel themselves pulled in opposite directions. I wanted to be in the Celestial Kingdom with my daughter, and she was disobeying so I felt I must do whatever I had to in order to correct that. But I could feel at the same time that what I was doing was in blatant contravention of the Christian and Mormon moral code (see D&C 121) I had been taught to obey. I hope that those who recently counselled my wife to leave me felt at least a twinge of similar cognitive dissonance as they did that.

I lay the above problems at the feet of institutional religion and its intrusion into what I believe was intended by Christ to be a deeply personal, inward journey toward spiritual enlightenment. However, now that I have had the chance to think through these things, it is obvious to me why we have the problems with religion that we do. The nature of human beings functioning in groups makes these problems inevitable. This fact has led to the creation of constitutional rights to protect individuals from the tendencies of the group.

I am a realist. The world is becoming more and more uncertain in many ways. I doubt that many will find the will to address the uncertainty that a metaphoric interpretation of religious texts and a rejection of institutional religious authority will create. It is particularly unlikely that those who lead religious institutions will adopt this point of view in large numbers since it works directly against their personal interests. Hence, I assume that the literalists are with us in the long term, and that if they do not grow as a percentage of the world's population, some of them will at a minimum tend to become more literalistic in their point of view in reaction to the increasingly empirical nature of the world and the doubt that this perspective casts on their faith claims. It is this trend that has already given us September 11. See Karen Armstrong's "The Battle for God" for an overview of the thinking that has been done in this regard.

It is therefore my view that the most important thing that any religious group could do to deal with the problem I have attempted to outline in this essay is to follow the example of democratic society. The group should explicitly recognize that it is unlikely to take care of the interests of

the individual, and should set up failsafe mechanisms to help ensure that this is done. How that could be best accomplished is beyond the scope of this essay, but here are the few ideas that occur to me at the moment.

1.   The institution could commit itself to transparency. That is, its finances, leadership minutes etc. should be open to all members.

2.   The leaders should be appointed by the members in some kind of democratic process.

3.   The institution could commit itself to the support of the basic human rights that are a part of the US and Canadian constitutions, and then it could appoint an independent ombudsman, perhaps a respected non-member of the institution with training in ethics and human rights. This person would not necessarily need to have the authority to overrule the leaders, but all of her decisions would be made public and hence would allow the members to see how their leaders' behaviour stacks up against the institution's stated values.

4.   The institution could go out of its way to educate its members with respect to the importance of their individual rights and the tendency of all human organizations not to respect such rights. That is, the members should be taught to have a healthy scepticism respecting the manner in which the institution will look after their interests when they conflict with its own.

Conclusion

I have come to the view that the overuse of utility theory is one of the fundamental weaknesses of organized religion, and that this should be expected of organized religion as it is nothing more than a collection of individual human beings. The tension between collective rights as manifested through the use utility theory and individual rights is well known, and we should expect that tension to exist within religious institutions, and should not expect the human beings who run those institutions to be capable of adequately protecting individual rights. We should no more expect this than to expect the IRS or its Canadian equivalent to respect individual rights without the oversight of the Courts.

I have also come to the view that the existence of meta-values created by religious thinking creates a fearful mentality that causes individuals to employ what looks like extreme utilitarian ethics, but is motivated by something different. This I would characterize as a by-product of the utilitarian oriented teachings of religious institutions. That is, by teaching the importance of obedience to church authority as a means of reaching the Celestial Kingdom, the LDS Church strengthens itself at the expense of its individual members. This causes the individuals to fear not reaching the Celestial Kingdom, and to make fear based decisions that override other values they may feel are important, such as showing compassion for family members whose religious views differ from their own, expressing their feelings and doubts about spiritual matters, etc.

I suggest that we take the steps we can to recognize and root out of our lives the tendency of our Christian faith to cause us, when acting in groups or individually, to use immoral, extreme utilitarian reasoning to consciously or subconsciously justify certain actions that conflict with Christ's primary value of compassion. I also suggest that we withdraw our support for any religious leaders who continue to use such reasoning to justify their actions. Many of these

religious leaders are so accustomed to acting in the immoral fashion they do that they will not be able to see this problem even when it is pointed out to them. However, when financial contributions and attendance begin to dry up, and members are resigning their membership in droves, they will pay attention.