

The Mormon Conception of Freedom

August 16, 2004

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The price of freedom is eternal vigilance. Thomas Jefferson

Introduction

I woke up this morning with the title of Terry Warner's best selling Mormon book of a few years ago on my mind – "Bonds that Make Us Free". This is, no doubt, the result of the reading I have been doing over the last while in the writings of Michael Ignatieff, Isaiah Berlin, and Steven Hassan. The first two are well known philosophers who have written a lot about freedom in different contexts, and the third is a respected cult exit counsellor. I highly recommend his book - "Releasing the Bonds – Empowering People to Think for Themselves". It contains the most accessible, complete summary I have yet found regarding how the forces of cognitive dissonance etc. are used by organizations ranging from religions to multi-level marketing organizations to create an illusory world for the purpose of controlling other human beings.

I read Warner's book as a faithful Mormon. It is largely a rehash of some good ideas Martin Buber had many years ago – that we should not use other people as objects (he called this the "I – it" paradigm, in which we treat other human beings as "its" and use them for our purposes), but that we should rather live in an "I – you" paradigm, in which we value other people as we do ourselves. Much of this aspect of Buber's thought can be understood as an extended, interesting, application of the Golden Rule. And a large part of Warner's book runs along the same lines, loaded with the usual anecdotal/testimonial stuff for which self-help books are infamous. However, as the title indicates, it uses an interesting twist that has the effect, whether intended or not, of helping Mormons to feel comfortable while yoked in their tiny Mormon world. The purpose of this piece is to explore a few ideas in that regard. Since Warner's book sparked these thoughts, I will come back to it from time to time to illustrate the difficulties I see in the Mormon points of view regarding freedom.

Different Conceptions of Freedom?

First, let's look at a couple of concepts respecting freedom from Berlin (referring to Fichte, Rousseau, Saint Simon and Maistre) and certain Mormon leaders. The thinkers Berlin summarizes all did their work during the few decades prior to the commencement of Joseph Smith's prophetic career.

Berlin starts by asking the question "Why should anyone obey anyone else?" He then provides a classic definition of freedom or liberty that involves balancing my right to do things against how my actions may impact on the similar rights of other individuals. Underlying this analysis is the notion that all individuals have the same rights. Oddly enough, while I was a faithful Mormon that is how I thought of freedom, and I saw nothing in the Mormon system that was inconsistent with it. However, even a casual inspection of the Mormon system of governance discloses that both the thinkers Berlin profiles in his book "Freedom and Its Betrayal" and Mormon leaders believe that there are certain individuals (the "leaders") who by virtue of their wisdom, ability or authority, have more rights than the rest of humanity, and as a result a double moral standard exists that justifies their doing things to control the "lesser" beings by whom they are surrounded.

As this concept came into focus for me a couple of years ago, I was staggered. How, I wondered, could something so obvious have escaped my notice into middle age? After all, the idea of freedom is central to Mormon theology. Agency, or as Mormons call it "free agency" is central to the Mormon system of thought. Mormons believe that we all lived with God in a life before this life called the "Pre-existence", and that there we were given the choice to follow God, which meant coming this earth under the conditions in which we find ourselves, or to follow Satan who had his own idea as to how things would work. The fact that we are here is prima facie evidence that we choose to follow God instead of Satan, and in this life, we still had our agency to decide whether to obey, or not, and how to live our lives. Or so I thought.

In the summary that follows, I do not attempt to deal with the many interesting issues related to the concept of freedom that involve determining when the rights of individuals should take precedence over those of the group and vice versa; how to balance the need for individual autonomy with the need for rules; and a host of other issues. The problems with the Mormon conception of freedom are more basic than this. They relate more to who should have the right to address the type of question just indicated – the group as a whole, or an elite that for one reason or another has ended up in control of the group. That is, who should be trusted to exercise ultimate power, each member of the group itself, or an elite that derives its power from something other than the appointment of the group? Another way to think of this issue is to ask what is the ultimate source of power within the group? Is it the group itself, acting through each individual member, or it is some source of power that is alleged to be outside the group, such as God, or the force that the elite can bring to bear, etc.? These questions underlie the analysis that follows.

Submission to Authority

Berlin summarizes part of Fichte's thought as follows:

As for freedom, individual freedom and individual conscience, and right and wrong, whether discovered or invented, what has become of those now? What of that individual freedom of which we spoke earlier, which the British and French writers defended, the freedom of each man to be allowed, within certain limits at least, to live as he likes, to waste his time as he likes, to go to the bad in his own way, to do that which he wants simply because freedom as such is a sacred value? Individual freedom, which in Kant has a sacred value, has for Fichte become a choice made by something super-personal [Fichte believed that the nation was a force that should dominate the individual]. It chooses me, I do not choose it, and acquiescence is a privilege, a duty, a self-lifting, a kind of self-transcendent rising to a higher level. Freedom, and morality generally, is self-submission to the super-self – the dynamic cosmos. We are back with the view that freedom is submission. (Freedom and Its Betrayal, page 71)

Compare Fichte's ideas to those of Neal Maxwell (see "Swallowed Up in the Will of the Father," Ensign, Nov. 1995, at page 22):

Seventy years ago, Lord Moulton coined a perceptive phrase, "obedience to the unenforceable," describing "the obedience of a man to that which he cannot be forced to obey" ("Law And Manners," Atlantic Monthly, July 1924, p. 1). God's blessings, including those associated with consecration, come by unforced obedience to the laws upon which they are predicated (see D&C 130:20-21). Thus our deepest desires determine our degree of "obedience to the unenforceable." God seeks to have us become more

consecrated by giving everything. Then, when we come home to Him, He will generously give us “all that [He] hath” (D&C 84:38).

In conclusion, the submission of one’s will is really the only uniquely personal thing we have to place on God’s altar. The many other things we “give,” brothers and sisters, are actually the things He has already given or loaned to us. However, when you and I finally submit ourselves, by letting our individual wills be swallowed up in God’s will, then we are really giving something to Him! It is the only possession which is truly ours to give!

Consecration thus constitutes the only unconditional surrender which is also a total victory!

May we deeply desire that victory, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The Voluntary Assumption of Chains

In his summary of the work of the French thinker Rousseau, Berlin says:

In short, the problem goes somewhat as follows: You want to give people unlimited liberty because otherwise they cease to be men; and yet at the same time you want them to live according to the rules. If they can be made to love the rules, then they will want the rules If your problem is how a man shall be at once free and yet in chains, you say: “What if the chains are not imposed upon him? What if the chains are not something with which he is bound as by some external force? What if the chains are something he chooses himself because such a choice is an expression of his nature, something he generates from within him as an inner ideal? If this is what he above all wants in the world, then the chains are no longer chains.” A man who is self-chained is not a prisoner. ... if the chains are of your own making, if the chains are simply the rules which you forge, with your own inner reason, or because of the grace which pours in while you lead the simple life, or because of the voice of conscience or the voice of God or the voice of nature, which are all referred to by Rousseau as if they were almost the same thing; if the chains are simply rules the very obedience to which is the most free, the strongest, most spontaneous expression of your own inner nature, then the chains no longer bind you – since self-control is not control. Self-control is freedom. In this way, Rousseau gradually progresses toward the peculiar idea that what is wanted is men who want to be connected with each other in the way in which the State forcibly connects them. (Freedom and Its Betrayal, pages 43-44)

Compare Rousseau's statement to that of Boyd K. Packer (see “Agency and Control,” Ensign, May 1983, at page 66), which echoes an often-repeated Mormon refrain.

Several weeks ago I had in my office a four-star general and his wife; they were very impressive people. They admire the Church because of the conduct of our youth. The general’s wife mentioned her children, of whom she is justly proud. But she expressed a deep concern. “Tell me,” she said, “how you are able to control your youth and build such character as we have seen in your young men?”

I was interested in her use of the word ‘control’. The answer, I told them, centered in the doctrines of the gospel. They were interested; so I spoke briefly of the doctrine of agency. I said we develop control by teaching freedom. Perhaps at first they thought we started at the wrong end of the subject. A four-star general is nothing if not a

disciplinarian. But when one understands the gospel, it becomes very clear that the best control is self-control.

It may seem unusual at first to foster self-control by centering on freedom of choice, but it is a very sound doctrinal approach.

While either subject may be taught separately, and though they may appear at first to be opposites, they are in fact parts of the same subject.

Some who do not understand the doctrinal part do not readily see the relationship between obedience and agency. And they miss one vital connection and see obedience only as restraint. They then resist the very thing that will give them true freedom. There is no true freedom without responsibility, and there is no enduring freedom without a knowledge of the truth. The Lord said, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32.)

The general quickly understood a truth that is missed even by some in the Church. Latter-day Saints are not obedient because they are compelled to be obedient. They are obedient because they know certain spiritual truths and have decided, as an expression of their own individual agency, to obey the commandments of God.

We are the sons and daughters of God, willing followers, disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, and "under this head are [we] made free." (Mosiah 5:8.)

Those who talk of blind obedience may appear to know many things, but they do not understand the doctrines of the gospel. There is an obedience that comes from a knowledge of the truth that transcends any external form of control. We are not obedient because we are blind, we are obedient because we can see. The best control, I repeat, is self-control.

James Faust summed things up as follows (see "The Abundant Life", The Ensign, November, 1985, p. 7):

President Gordon B. Hinckley reminded us,

As a Church, we encourage gospel scholarship and the search to understand all truth. Fundamental to our theology is belief in individual freedom of inquiry, thought, and expression. Constructive discussion is a privilege of every Latter-day Saint. (Ensign, Sept. 1985, p. 5.)

The Savior said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." (John 10:10.) How is the abundant life to be obtained? The abundant life involves an endless search for knowledge, light, and truth. President Hugh B. Brown said:

God desires that we learn and continue to learn, but this involves some unlearning. As Uncle Zeke said: 'It ain't my ignorance that done me up but what I know'd that wasn't so.' The ultimate evil is the closing of the mind or steeling it against truth, resulting in the hardening of intellectual arteries. (Baccalaureate address, Utah State University, Logan, Utah, 4 June 1965.)

No stone wall separates the members of the Church from all of the seductions of the world. Members of the Church, like everyone else, are being surfeited with deceptions, challenges, and temptations. However, to those of enduring faith, judgment, and discernment, there is an invisible wall which they choose never to breach. Those on the safe side of this invisible wall are filled with humility, not servitude. They willingly accept the supremacy of God and rely upon the scriptures and counsel of His servants, the leaders of the Church. These leaders of the Church are men with human frailties, and are imperfect in their wisdom and judgment. Perfection in men is not found on the earth. But almost without exception these leaders sincerely, humbly, and prayerfully render great and dedicated Christian service to the best of their ability. More important, they hold a divine warrant and commission through which great and eternal blessings come to those who sustain and follow them. They are God's servants.

I believe that few things in life deserve one's complete confidence. I testify that the Church is worthy of our full trust. There is no inconsistency between truth and faith. I know that everyone who sincerely and righteously seeks to know this can have it spiritually confirmed. May we open up our minds, hearts, and spirits to the divine source of truth. May we reach above ourselves and beyond our mundane concerns and become heirs to the knowledge of all truth and to the abundant life promised by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I pray that this may be so, in His holy name, amen.

That is, according to Faust we should seek the truth ourselves. This is a promising start. But then he tells us to remember that the truth is whatever the Mormon Church's leaders say it is. We should trust them, and obey them. We should not question them. We should use, in essence, blind faith instead of the best of your rational abilities.

Joseph Fielding McConkie, a BYU professor, tells this story about his father, Apostle Bruce McConkie:

It was an unusual Sunday that found Dad without a conference assignment and hence at home. It was on one of those Sundays when I was in my early teens that I took occasion to see how the doctrine of agency worked. When it came time to leave for church, I announced that I had decided to exercise my agency and not attend church that day. Dad assured me that I had agency, which in our family meant that I could go to church willingly or I could go unwillingly. The choice, he said, was mine. Then he added, "Now get your coat on. You don't want to be late."

Some years passed before I understood the principle involved. When I was baptized, I chose to be an agent for Christ. As His agent, that is, as one committed to represent Him, I had already made the decision of whether I would attend my meetings or not. The covenant I had made assumed the responsibility to attend meetings and fill assignments. Properly understood, agency is the right to act, the right to do our duty. It is not and cannot be the source of excuse for refusing to do the same. (The Bruce R. McConkie Story: Reflections of a Son)

That is, the fact that he as an eight year old child had been baptized meant that he had surrendered his agency with respect to countless decisions that could not then have been contemplated by his childish mind. And he came to accept that this was the case, and apparently still accepts this as an acceptable exercise of choice. In my view, this is just another way to justify the absence of real choice.

Deception by the Leaders is Sometimes Necessary

Next, Berlin summarizes the one Saint Simon's ideas related to the elite who he believed should govern, as follows:

About the elite he sounds a very modern note, when he says that they must practice two moralities. What was so wonderful about the priests of Egypt, for example, who were a very early and original elite, was that they believed one thing and fed the population with another. That is good, that is exactly how things should be conducted, because the people cannot be expected to face the truth at once, but must be gradually educated. Consequently we must have a small body of industrialists and bankers and artists who gradually wean mankind, who gradually condition them to take their proper part in the industrial order. That is a familiar kind of neo-feudalism. The great phrase, indeed, on which Communism is built – “From everyone according to his capacity ...” – comes from Saint-Simon and the Saint-Simonians. Again, when Stalin said that the artists – novelists, for example – are “engineers of human souls”, that their business is applied, not pure, that the end of art is not itself, but the moulding and the conditioning of human beings – that is a Saint-Simonian idea.” (Freedom and Its Betrayal, page 125)

Compare this to the following quote from Boyd Packer:

Church history can be so interesting and so inspiring as to be a powerful tool indeed for building faith. If not properly written or properly taught, it may be a faith destroyer...

There is a temptation for the writer or the teacher of Church history to want to tell everything, whether it is worthy or faith promoting or not. Some things that are true are not very useful...

The writer or teacher who has an exaggerated loyalty to the theory that everything must be told is laying a foundation for his own judgment...The Lord made it clear that some things are to be taught selectively and some things are to be given only to those who are worthy...

That historian or scholar who delights in pointing out the weaknesses and frailties of present or past leaders destroys faith. A destroyer of faith - particularly one within the Church, and more particularly one who is employed specifically to build faith - places himself in great spiritual jeopardy. He is serving the wrong master, and unless he repents, he will not be among the faithful in the eternities...Do not spread disease germs!" (Boyd K. Packer, 1981, BYU Studies, Vol. 21, No. 3, pp. 259-271)

Or this from Dallin Oaks:

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 Savior. Everything may be sacrificed in order to maintain the integrity of those essential facts. Thus, if Mormon Enigma [a book respecting which his opinion was sought] 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, page xliii, footnote 28)

The root of these ideas is found with Plato and his "philosopher kings". They were the wise few who Plato felt were justified in deceiving the masses when it was necessary to do so, since the masses were incapable of understanding what was in their best interest. This concept is closely related to Nietzsche's notion of the "pious" or "holy" lie, which he said is the foundation of all priesthoods and describes behaviour in the religious sphere that is consistent with the philosopher king concept. Nietzsche condemned the pious lie, as do I, as did Joseph Smith. In the so-called "Plan of Salvation" (the Mormon idea of how we lived prior to this life with God; were sent to this earth to be tested; and if we pass the test, will return to live with God and will become like Him), Satan beautifully articulated the philosopher king and pious lie approach, and was vilified for it.

It is clear, in my view, that Joseph Smith behaved in classic philosopher king fashion, and that the Mormon "faithful history" policy (the policy of only teaching versions of Mormon history, particularly with respect to Mormonism's foundational events, that will encourage the members to be more obedient to current Mormon leaders) discloses a group of modern philosopher kings who feel justified in telling pious lies.

Fear is Necessary to Restrain Chaos

Berlin summarizes Maistre as follows:

Maistre stresses tradition, the past, the unconscious, dark forces, not the amiable imaginary attributes of the folk soul, as did its enthusiastic champions – the "German romantics – or the champions of the simple life (which he too always praised). On the contrary, he stresses the stability, the permanence and the impregnability of the authority that belongs to the dark mass of half-conscious memories and traditions and loyalties, and the power of institutions in exacting obedience, especially in regard to the supernatural. He lays great emphasis on the fact that absolute rule succeeds only when it is terrifying, and he fears and detests science, precisely because it pours too much light, and so dissolves the mystery, the darkness, which alone resists skeptical enquiry. (Freedom and Its Betrayers, page 153)

A large part of the Mormon system is built on fear – fear that we cannot cope with the wicked world outside of Mormonism; fear that if we are not obedient that we will not be able to live with our families after death; fear that we will lose blessings if we are not obedient to various Mormon rules; fear that God will punish us for the same reason; etc.

The "Higher" or "Real" Self Needs Help to Come Forth

Berlin Summarizes Rousseau on this point as follows:

I know what any man's true self seeks for it must seek what my own self seeks, whenever I know that what I am now is my own true self, and not my other, illusory, self. It is this notion of the two selves which really does the work in Rousseau's thought. When I stop a man from pursuing evil ends, even when I put him in jail in order to prevent him from causing damage to other good men, even if I execute him as an abandoned criminal, I do this not for utilitarian reasons, in order to give happiness to others; not even for retributive reasons, in order to punish him for the evil that he does. I do it because that is what his own inner, better, more real self would have done if only he had allowed it to speak. I set myself up as the authority not merely over my actions,

but over his. This is what is meant by Rousseau's famous phrase about the right of society to force men to be free.

To force a man to be free is to force him to behave in a rational manner. Any man is free who gets what he wants; what he truly wants is a rational end. If he does not want a rational end, he does not truly want; if he does not want a rational end, what he wants is not true freedom but false freedom. I force him to do certain things which will make him happy. He will be grateful to me for it if he ever discovers what his own true self is: that is the heart of this famous doctrine, and there is not a dictator in the West who in the years after Rousseau did not use this monstrous paradox in order to justify his behavior. ... This is Rousseau's central doctrine, and it is a doctrine which leads to genuine servitude, and by this route, from this deification of the notion of absolute liberty, we gradually reach the notion of absolute despotism. There is no reason why human beings should be offered choices, alternative, when only one alternative is the right alternative. Certainly they must choose, because if they do not choose then they are not spontaneous, they are not free, they are not human beings; but if they do not choose the right alternative, if they choose the wrong alternative, it is because their true self is not at work. They do not know what their true self is, whereas I, who am wise – I know this. (Freedom and Its Betrayal, pages 46, 47)

Berlin says that Rousseau's worst perversion is the idea of the "real" or "true" or "higher" self. Once we accept that such a self exists, and that the "leaders" know what that self would do were it only in control of the individual in question, the high road to despotism is wide open. In the final essay of his illustrious career, Berlin develops this idea further (See The Power of Ideas, pages 17, 18), and in that regard, indicates the following:

The notion of positive freedom has led, historically, to even more frightful perversions. Who orders my life? I do. I? Ignorant, confused, driven hither and thither by uncontrolled passions and drives – is that all there is to me? Is there not within me a higher, more rational, freer self, able to understand and dominate passions, ignorance and other defects, which I can attain to only by a process of education or understanding, a process which can be managed only by those who are wiser than myself, who make me aware of my true, "real", deepest self, of what I am at my best? This is a well known metaphysical view, according to which I can be truly free and self-controlled only if I am truly rational – a belief which goes back to Plato – and since I am not perhaps sufficiently rational myself, I must obey those who are indeed rational, and who therefore know what is best not only for themselves but also for me, and who can guide me along lines which will ultimately awaken my true rational self and put it in charge, where it truly belongs. I may feel hemmed in – indeed, crushed – by these authorities, but that is an illusion: when I have grown up and have attained to a fully mature, "real" self, I shall understand that I would have done for myself what has been done for me if I had been as wise, when I was in an inferior condition, as they are now.

In short, they are acting on my behalf, in the interest of my higher self, in controlled my lower self; so that true liberty for the lower self consists in total obedience to them the wise, those who know the truth, the elite of sages; of perhaps my obedience must be to those who understand how human destiny is made – for if Marx is right, the it is the Party which alone grasps the demands of the rational goals of history) which must shape and guide me, whichever way my poor empirical self may wish to go; and the party itself must be guided by its far-seeing leaders, and in the end by the greatest and wisest leader of all.

There is no despot in the world who cannot use this method of argument for the vilest oppression, in the name of an ideal self which is seeking to bring to fruition by his own, perhaps somewhat brutal and prima facie morally odious, means (prima facie only for the lower empirical self). The "engineer of human souls", to use Stalin's phrase, knows best; he does what he does not simply to do his best for his nation, but in the name of the nation itself, in the name of what the nation would be doing itself if only it had attained to this level of historical understanding. That is the great perversion which the positive notion of liberty has been liable to: whether the tyranny issues from a Marxist leader, a king, a Fascist dictator, the masters of an authoritarian Church or class or State, it seeks for the imprisoned, "real" self within men, and "liberates" it, so that this self can attain to the level of those who give the orders.

This goes back to the naïve notion that there is only one true answer to every question: if I know the true answer and you do not, and you disagree with me, it is because you are ignorant; if you seek to disobey me, this can be so only because you are wrong, because the truth has not been revealed to you as it has been to me. This justifies some of the most frightful forms of oppression and enslavement in human history, and it is truly the most dangerous, and in our century in particular, the most violent, interpretation of the notion of positive liberty." (See pages 17b and 18).

Berlin indicates that this attitude leads to idol worship and a form of sacrifice. I quote:

Someone once remarked that in the old days men and women were brought as sacrifices to a variety of gods; for these, the modern age has substituted new idols: -isms. To cause pain, to kill, to torture are in general rightly condemned; but if these things are done not for my personal benefit but for an -ism - socialism, nationalism, Fascism, Communism, fanatically held religious belief, or progress, or the fulfillment of the laws of history - then they are in order. Most revolutionaries believe, covertly or overtly, that in order to create the ideal world eggs must be broken, or otherwise one cannot obtain the omelette. Eggs are certainly broken - never more violently or ubiquitously than in our times - but the omelette is far to seek, it recedes into the infinite distance. That is one of the corollaries of unbridled monism, as I call it - some call it fanaticism, but monism is at the root of every extremism. (The Power of Ideas, page 14)

There are innumerable quotes from Mormon leaders that could be marshalled to show the influence in Mormon thought and culture of the "higher self" idea. In fact, much of what is above regarding deception, fear, submission etc. ties into the idea of the "higher" self. But one more quote is useful to show how far this doctrine can be taken in the name of freedom in the hands of leaders who "know" what is best for those who follow them.

Blood Atonement is the doctrine that if a person has committed certain sins, salvation is on possible if that person is killed. Brigham Young, in reference to this doctrine, said:

I could refer you to plenty of instances where men have been righteously slain, in order to atone for their sins. . . .This is loving our neighbor as ourselves; if he needs help, help him; and if he wants salvation and it is necessary to spill his blood on the earth in order that he may be saved, spill it." (Journal of Discourses, vol. 4, p. 220).

So, we are doing a person a favour when we kill him. This, in my view, is arguably worse than even the noxious doctrines of Hitler and Stalin that required the extermination of large numbers

of people in order to establish the kind of society they felt was required for the progress of man. At least they thought, it appears, that the carnage for which they were responsible was an evil, albeit necessary. Brigham Young took this a large step further, in my view. He taught that death of some people is an unmitigated good that would be welcomed by even those who are murdered if they had the spiritual maturity, sensitivity, whatever, to appreciate "reality". This is what their higher selves would wish, were that aspect of themselves in control. This, in my view, is the high water mark of evil that can be justified by Plato's philosopher king idea, or Rousseau's "higher" self.

When I recently mentioned this quote to an intelligent, relatively open-minded young returned missionary of my acquaintance, he laughed and said something like, "Oh that Brigham Young! He was such a nut case!" And that seemed to be the end of that as far as he was concerned. I note two things in this regard. First, Brigham Young was for decades if not well over a hundred years accepted as God's prophet and was obeyed, revered etc. as such by the Mormon people. It is only in the light of relatively recent times that many of his ideas have been rejected as belonging to the lunatic fringe. So, are we to simply laugh off the fact that a lunatic was the *de facto* dictator of the Mormon people for decades? This is no laughing matter for those whose lives were sacrificed in various ways to his vision. And if the light of future generations showed Young to be a lunatic, are faithful Mormons justified in assuming the something similar will not occur with regard to current, or future, Mormon prophets who are and will be obeyed and venerated in their time as was Young? I suggest not.

Second, I think that it is possible to see Young as a product of his time. He could have quoted Rousseau (and may have for all I know) to support ludicrous positions such as the one just outlined, and Rousseau was one of the most respected thinkers of his time. Of course, Young did not need to quote people like Rousseau because his word was law on its own.

In my view, the main problem with Mormonism is not so much how nutty it was when it was established (since a lot of what went on back then was nutty from our current point of view), but rather that it operates on a system that dramatically slows change, and hence preserves much of the founders' nuttiness as absolute truth must be preserved. I read once a summary of attitudes toward females that was dominant in the mid-1800s, and was struck by how similar it was to the attitudes within Mormonism today toward females.

One way to frame the question regarding the utility of Mormonism is this: are we likely to be better or worse off if we absorb the ideas produced by our culture at a pace somewhere between decades and centuries slower than most of the rest of educated humanity? Think about racial attitudes; attitudes toward family size; attitudes toward dress; attitudes toward sexual orientation; etc. In some cases a trend will come and go without Mormon culture absorbing it. And in some cases it will be possible to say that it is a likely good thing that Mormons in general missed a particular bus. However, the really "good" ideas - the ones that persist and are eventually accepted by the broader population - will be absorbed to one extent or another by Mormonism. Some Mormons of my acquaintance who I think are aware of most of the difficulties with the Mormon point of view defend it on this basis - it is good to be conservative.

The problem with saying that "conservatism is better" and defending Mormonism on that basis is, still, that the Mormon perspective requires surrendering much of the decision as to whether one will be conservative in general, or on any particular issue, to a group of elites who are not acting with the individual member's interest in mind, but rather act on the basis of a combination of the group's interest and their own interest as leaders of the group who derive much of their

status and even self identity from that role. I am not aware of any persuasive argument that supports an individual surrendering her decision making authority to such persons.

The leaders' need to remain in control dominates all else within Mormonism. This is the tail that wags the dog. And in order to keep those leaders in control, it is important that the attitudes about authority that allowed them to take power do not change. It is no surprise to me that in Utah, where the male attitudes toward the power roles are the strongest, that the gradual dilution of that power is met with male angst, and that this angst translates into violence.

It was recently noted in the Salt Lake Tribune (see <http://deseretnews.com/dn/view/0,1249,595084383,00.html>) that the spousal homicide rate in Utah is far above the national average. I have read elsewhere that Utah also leads the US in spouse abuse, rape, financial fraud, anti-depressant use, and personal bankruptcy. Not all of this can be laid at the feet of Mormon dogma and the culture it inspires, but surely part of it can. This is a culture that is dominated by ideas that were freeze dried in the 1800s and preserved to this day. These ideas include many related to male dominance, black and white thinking in terms of what is right and wrong, and angst related to obedience to authority of various kinds. The culture that arises from these dominant ideas is at odds in many ways with the surrounding culture, which is gradually encroaching upon Mormondom. Those who feel that encroachment are under stress. It may be that the Internet and other change accelerating forces in our society now exacerbate that stress. Hence, it should not be surprising that we see in the data emerging from Utah signs of a group of human beings in distress.

The leaders of the Mormon Church have for at least the last decade or so recognized spousal abuse as a problem within the Mormon community. I was puzzled by the consistent messages that Gordon Hinckley, for example, delivered in this regard. However, when the big picture comes into focus, his counsel seems a little like Marie Antoinette's infamous (and apparently inaccurately attributed to her) statement that the poor people starving in Paris for lack of bread should simply eat cake. Hinckley tells Mormon men to stop abusing their wives and children, while maintaining the absolute authority of the priesthood he holds, by which he continues to govern the Mormon people and by which every man governs his household. Hinckley is between a rock and a hard place. He advocates, essentially, the benevolent exercise of dictatorial power. History shows that this approach seldom works. And we should not expect it to work within the Mormon community to heal any of the ills noted above.

Mormon Leaders Side with Rousseau et al

Packer, Maxwell, Faust and Oaks were members of the Mormon Church's governing Quorum of the Twelve Apostles when the statements provided above were made, and Young as the Mormon Prophet. And, those statements are representative of many others on the topics referenced above that have come from Mormon leaders over the years. Mormon leaders clearly side with Rousseau, Fichte, Saint Simon and Maistre instead of the other thinkers Berlin summarized who believed freedom is determined by the degree of autonomous choice an individual possesses.

How Can Individuals Be Persuaded to Voluntarily Put On Chains?

Rousseau, Fichte and Saint Simon do not provide a manual as to how men who will voluntarily chain themselves might be produced; or how "submission" might be elicited. Hassan, however, does this, as does Mormonism.

Hassan is a former Moonie who has dedicated the last several decades to researching the methods the various cults and counselling primarily the loved ones of cult members as to how they can interact with those under the control of a cult so as to maximize the probability that they will rejoin the “real” world. I should note that in accordance with Hassan’s definition of cult behavior, contemporary Mormonism is not a full-blown cult. I would put it at a six to seven on a scale of ten, with organizations like the Hare Krishna, some Mormon polygamists, the Moonies and other communally oriented organizations near ten, and most of the Anglicans, Episcopalians, etc. at near one. Mormonism in its earlier years would have been close to a ten.

Hassan focuses on mind control techniques, and notes that these are not necessary good or bad. Rather, they can be used for good or bad purposes. For example, it is possible to use mind control techniques to help people to break addictive patterns, develop good habits or learn just about anything. In most such cases, the autonomy – and hence freedom and range of choice - of the individual is increased. The same techniques can, and are, used by cults of various kinds to reduce human freedom. Hence, the question to ask is how mind control techniques are being used in our lives, and whether as a result of our interaction with them our freedom increases, or decreases.

Hassan uses the acronym “BITE” to remind us of the dimensions of mind control that cults use. Behavior, Information, Thought, Emotion. He summarizes the cog dis literature, as I have in a more lengthy fashion in an essay titled “Religious Faith: Enlightening or Blinding?” at <http://mccue.cc/bob/spirituality.htm> , and shows how it is used to control elements of each of these facets of the “mind”. Hassan provides an extensive check list (see pages 42 – 45) that can be used to assess the mind control attributes of any organization. While this is too long to review in detail here, I will provide a few highlights as far as Mormonism is concerned. The bracketed information is my off the cuff thoughts as to the elements of Mormonism that fit Hassan’s paradigm.

Behavior Control

Regarding Behavior control, he notes the following as cult characteristics:

- Control of time so as to permit little chance to question or find alternative social groups. (Think through, hour by hour, the weekly schedule of a TBM and count the number of rituals and the time they take. It is mind numbing.)
- Extensive system of rewards and punishments that dominate the individual’s time and attention. (If you want to be with your kids when they get married, you must have a temple recommend. We know what holding one of those requires. “Service” mentality. The most respected community members are those who hold the heaviest callings. Requirement that any behavior that breaks the major commandments be confessed to authority figures. And the big one – being in the CK after death. Etc.)
- Rigid rules and regulation regarding many types of behavior. (No comment required.)

Information Control

Regarding Information control, he notes:

- Use of deception, such as deliberately withholding and distorting information about the organization particularly for recruits and new members – information is distributed on a “need to know” basis once members are fully committed. (Faithful history.)
- Access to information not controlled by the organization is discouraged or restricted. (Counsel to avoid the Internet. All “questioning” or “anti-Mormon literature as a form of “cancer”. Counsel to teach lessons only from lesson manuals. Youth are given “canned” materials from which to give talks so that they do not have to do research. Etc.)
- Use of “outsider v. insider” and “black v. white” thought systems. (No comment required.)
- Use of system that has members spying, and reporting to leaders, regarding each other’s activities. (Home teaching, visiting teaching, concerns reported by quorum leaders re activity, etc.)
- Use of confession and other systems to engrain authority and abolish identity boundaries. Past “sins” used to manipulate and control current behavior. (Regular interviews, particularly of youth. Need to confess certain sins. Temple recommend interviews require acknowledgement of authority. If “sin” again, effect of former repentance is nullified, and the weight of all prior sin falls back on the sinner. Etc.)
- Hassan says: “Looking at a group’s attitude toward information is the fastest way to evaluate whether it is using destructive mind control. A legitimate organization will allow people the freedom to think for themselves, read whatever they like and talk to whomever they choose in order to arrive at their own decisions, whereas a destructive mind control group will want to do the thinking for the people.” (page 50)

Thought Control

Regarding Thought control, Hassan notes the following:

- The group’s doctrine must be internalized as “truth”. Berlin would call this a “monist” perspective. That is, there is only one right answer to every question. This approach fell out of favour well over a century ago in most aspects of human endeavour, giving way to various forms of pluralism. That is, there may be more than one right answer to many questions. (The “one true church” idea is classic monist thinking.)
- The use of clichés to truncate critical thought. (“I know the church is true!” “Follow the Prophet” etc.)
- Use of “thought stopping” techniques, such as singing songs, chanting mantras, in order to prevent “bad” thoughts from influencing us. (I was taught to sing “I am a Child of God” whenever a “bad” thought came into my mind. That song still comes on in my head from time to time.)
- Rejection of any form of reasoning that questions the group’s, or the leader’s, authority. (No comment required.)

Emotion Control

Regarding Emotion control, Hassan notes:

- Narrow the range of the individual's emotional spectrum. This is done by directing the individual's attention toward cult directed priorities. Love bombing makes the individual feel good about the cult. Fear is used extensively to bind the individual to the cult. Fear of after-life consequences, as well as the evil nature of the "world outside" and what would happen to the individual without the support structure provide by the cult and its leaders. (No comment required. See extensive analysis of the fear issue in "Religious Faith: Enlightening or Blinding?")
- Use of ritual to create powerful emotional responses that can be used as evidence that the cult is "true", indispensable, etc. (testimony meetings; youth conferences; leadership meetings; temple weddings, father's blessings; blessings of health, etc. The Church interposes itself as a third part in our most intimate moments, and then takes credit for the good things that we feel there, while blaming us if anything goes wrong.)

Hassan also has some great advice regarding the things he has seen work to help cult insiders begin to use their own minds again. But that is beyond the scope of what I am writing here.

Bonds That Make Us Free

Overview and Analysis

Back to Warner and "Bonds that Make Us Free". Warner's thesis, with a few of my comments and criticisms, is as follows (all pages references are to "Bonds that Make Us Free"):

1. Much of our difficulty in relationships comes from selfishness and self-deception. Another way to put that that has been used by many other writers is that we are not sufficiently self and other aware to make good decisions.

I agree with this. So far, so good.

2. There is an external reality regarding other people that is real. That reality is "the truth" about those other people. We can read it in their faces, their actions, their words (page 21). So, the reality of other people is their subjective perception of what lies outside of them, as broadcast to us by their expressions of emotion etc.

The ground beneath us just got very soft. Our perceptions are often misguided, and what we need to hone in on are those presumably similarly misguided impressions of other people, as communicated to us. That is, their subjective reality is our reality? In my view, this misses the boat entirely. Having said that, I agree that it is important to try to understand other people. But, it is much more important to understand the more objective form of reality by which we are all surrounded. As we come to understand that, we put ourselves in a position to appreciate why we and those we love are sometimes anguished, sometimes elated, sometimes fight, etc. I do not see in Warner anything to set the exchange of subjective interpersonal views on which he spends so much time in the context of what I would call "reality". The question of to what extent objective "reality" can be proven to exist is beyond the scope of what I am writing here. Those interested in this kind of thing might want to read Peter Godfrey-Smith's book "Theory and Reality – An Introduction to the Philosophy of Science".

3. The reality of other people manifests itself to us in the form of feelings that well up within us (page 20). We betray ourselves; are dishonest with ourselves; deceive ourselves, when we act contrary to those feelings (page 20). There is a truth about us that is similarly real.

In this, Warner follows philosophers such as Kierkegaard and Levinas for whom "truth" of this kind was so basic that it cannot be questioned. They are part of the tradition that questioned the "rational" point of view presented by other philosophers such as Locke and Kant on whose ideas the "Enlightenment" (which questioned religious and other irrational or dogmatic values) was based.

4. However, we are enclosed in a box that often distorts our view of both ourselves and others (page 124, 136). This box is created by what we perceive. Our perceptions are often distorted by our jealousies, selfishness and other things. These perceptions form what many people call our "conscience" (pages 132 - 134). Because of the distortions just mentioned, our conscience is often misleading (page 111).

I agree with most of this. But, Warner's next big mistake is that he fails to mention the host of things that go into creating the "box" he described. This is the socially constructed nature of perceived reality that has fuelled a huge amount of writing during the past century. As a result of this failure, Warner and his readers are doomed to focus on things that exist within their dominant paradigm instead of the paradigm itself. This an approach for people who wish to question the periphery of their lives, and then get comfortable within the context their culture provides. It does not question the basic elements of context. One of my faithful LDS friends whose judgement I respect and who has attended one of Warner's courses at his Arbinger Institute as well as carefully studied his book was kind enough to read this essay and provide me with his comments. He felt that I was reading Warner out of context. He said that the book was not about social construction or deconstruction, but rather about relationships and that Warner was advocating that we try to get rid of blinders that interfere with our behaviour in a relationship context. He wondered how I could justify the sweeping remarks I made regarding how Warner supported this or that ideology when the book was not about ideology.

My response was that our behaviour within relationships is one of those places where the results of social theory and other forms of ideology become the rubber that meets the road. Of course ideology is relevant to a discussion about relationships. When I decide what is "right" or "wrong" behaviour, am I not relying upon my ideology? Does ideology not spring largely from my conscience in an automatic fashion? And, Warner's book is about questioning certain assumptions we make regarding our behaviour; become more self aware; more honest with ourselves; etc. so that we can improve our behaviour. In his view, this exercise is largely one of discovering, and then submitting to, certain "truths" that will free us from a variety of difficulties. But, as noted above, he has a short list of things that he is prepared to submit to questioning; of things he would encourage us to become aware of.

It is my view that to talk about relationship behaviour without at least alluding to how this is derived from our most basis ideologies is misleading, particularly when writing to an audience that is known to make some strong assumptions in that regard. Unless, that is, one is consciously or unconsciously trying to shore up those assumptions, which is my initial criticism of Warner – that he was decorating Mormon chains.

5. The only way to make our conscience reliable is to rid ourselves of distorting influences so that we can see "the truth" about others and ourselves.

Here we run into a number of other problems. First, how are we to see this truth, and how are we to know that we have finally found it? The obvious concern with approach is that once we feel that we have found "the truth", we are likely to stop questioning as long as our relationships proceed in a fashion that is satisfactory to us. He later advises (see page 321 quoted below) that we should keep digging, which leads me to wonder what he means by "truth". My comments in that regard are below. Second, why is the list of "distorting influences" of which we should seek to rid ourselves so short? This echoes my concern as expressed in paragraph 4 above.

6. Warner advises that we find the truth largely through the application of the Golden Rule, and in particular as it is framed in Martin Buber's "I-it" v. "I-you" paradigm. That is, we shouldn't treat other people as objects that will help us to gratify our wants and needs. We should treat them as other human beings; as we would be treated. And, the more we understand the perspective of other people, the more inclined we will be to empathize with them, to act harmoniously with them, and to love them.

No problem here. This is good advice, as far as it goes.

7. After having roundly warned us about how our conscience can deceive us, Warner then numerous times assures that we can "know" this "truth" which he has assured us is out there. Since this is the crucial issue, I am going to quote how he describes it in several different ways.

a. At page 36 he says: "Our undistorted sense of right and wrong calls us to do that right toward others, to act as love dictates."

And, he has told us above how to make our sense "undistorted" in this sense.

b. At page 139 he says: "Our sensing of right and wrong, of how we ought to respond to others, is like a current in which we float downstream: We seldom notice it until we try to swim against it."

This, in my view, speaks to Warner's view regarding our justification of going with the dominant unconscious influences that have created our conscience. That is, we do not need to question our dominant social influences.

c. At page he says 219: "Not doing right when we know what's right is doing wrong. And in fact, one of the best strategies for escaping the emotional troubles we've been talking about in this book is simply to do what we honestly perceive to be the right thing to do."

Again, a clear indication that we should trust our conscience and the influences that have created it.

d. At page 231 he says: "How, then, can we tell whether we are caught up in dishonest feelings or proceeding honestly? What yardstick do we use to make certain we are not making a mistake? The answer is that there is no yardstick. No handy tape measure or scale or barometer exists by which to assess the difference. ... Yet the difference between counterfeit and genuine is plain, as plain as bright daylight or the darkness of a moonless night. We not only can't rely on anything external to tell the difference, but we don't need to. This is something that human beings are simply able to do."

More encouragement from Warner to trust our conscience – the deepest voices within us. This makes sense when thinking about things like selfishness and the application of the Golden Rule to that in Western culture. It would work in that context. It does not work in cases where our deepest societal values are perhaps misguided. What about gay Mormons? What about the Untouchables in Hindu society? Etc.

e. He says at "pages 317, 318: "... doing the right thing no matter what others think requires faith – faith of a peculiarly practical kind. It takes faith not to rely upon eternal evidence, or anything else that can be seen, for our sense of acceptability. We must trust instead in certain things we cannot see ..."

Another approving reference to our deepest unconscious forces. He advocates surrender to them, and hence to those who control them.

f. At page 320 he says: "... the key personal characteristic is a consistent readiness to yield to the truth in all circumstances, no matter what the apparent cost."

More of the same.

g. At page 320 he says: "I believe that the ultimate source of [love and truth] is God. Without the constant intervention of his perfectly just love and loving justice, we would long ago have fallen by the wayside, one by one. We would have been left to draw our emotional nurture from other beings who are trying to draw their nurturance from other likes of us. The delicate emotional ecosystem upon which we all depend would have long since collapsed. Consideration would have given place to collusion everywhere and love would have turned in recrimination and then to hate. (Anyone who has lived in or observed a family going bad knows just how this happens.) In order for our species to have maintained a viable social existence – in order for there to have been renewals of kindness and hope from time to time, as surely there have been – a loving and just influence must have been everywhere available to those who've chosen to attend to it. We could not have thrived, we could not have survived without the gently disruptive nudges that encourage us even while pulling us up short in our arrogance and evasions. Call this divine influence the spirit of truth, if you will. Call it the loving justice that governs the relationships we've talked about in this book. Whatever it be called, it seems to me a constant gift that intelligent organisms cannot produce on their own. This gift is given. It is abundantly available to each of us, whether or not we acknowledge its source. We are not only beneficiaries of more gifts than we can see; we are beneficiaries of more gifts than we can imagine."

This is a disturbing quote. Warner alleges a number of things that I don't think can be backed up from an empirical point of view. Are we to believe that the largely godless countries of Scandinavia are about to fall apart, when on most social measure they are doing better than North America? And how about much of China and Japan? The don't believe in a god, and have found ways for create moral systems without His help. We must we look to some kind of a god for our innate goodness? Could that not be simply part of what we are; what was built into us during the course of evolution so that we would get along with each other? And Warner is here reduced to fear mongering in support of his thesis. A weak ending.

5. And the ending gets worse. Warner leaves the door ajar for additional learning, perhaps even learning that may alter perspectives in fundamental ways. At page 321 he says in reference to the quote immediately above in paragraph 4(g): "This of course is my personal conviction and lies beyond the focus of this book. But there's a closely related principle not

personal to me or separable for the ideas we have been discussing here. It is this: To the degree that we become receptive and responsive to the truth, life will keep instructing us. It will teach us all sorts of fresh things about matters we thought we already understood. This is partly because we will not longer perceive them distortedly. We will be more open to seeing things as they are instead of anxiously twisting them to validate any lies we may be living. Not only will the possibility of a practical faith take on new meaning, but so will goodness, nature, beauty, friendships, family, work, and many other dimensions of life."

Does this mean that the "truth" on which we have previously acted will be overturned by later "truth"? Or, does it mean that the "truth" we have been told to accept and act upon was in fact another lie? In my view, in his conclusion Warner shows how wrong headed his entire approach is. Why not dispense with the word "truth" and help people to adjust to the reality that we are never sure about what we are doing. After spending the better part of an entire book telling people that the truth exists and that that should trust the dominant, unconscious forces within them to guide them to it, in his epilogue he essentially says that those truths as well may be lies. And what about the final, great truths that we discover near enough to death that they are not overturned before we die? May they not be found to be "lies" by subsequent generations. The notion of "truth" and the encouragement to rely upon it instead of humbly recognizing the faith by which our every step is taken – even our most confident steps or perhaps especially our most confident steps – is in my view deeply misguided.

I think it fair to compare Warner to the health authority who writes a treatise on how to avoid illness that focuses exclusively on personal hygiene. There is no doubt that this is important, and that poor hygiene causes many illnesses. And, we can all likely benefit from learning more about hygiene. This is on my mind because this morning I learned that children are taught in many day care facilities to wash their hands, with soap, for as long as it takes to sing happy birthday twice. People who work in the food preparation business are similarly instructed. I wonder how many adult males behave this way? So, I acknowledge that it would do me good, for example, to learn more about hygiene as it relates to disease control.

However, hygiene is only part of a much larger picture, and to fail to even mention the broad context within which hygiene operates relative to disease is to do a profound disservice to those who read the book. Those most likely to be damaged by this approach to the topic of disease control are the people who are likely inclined by their already limited point of view to feel that they don't need to consider certain other types of information on that subject, such as information respecting antibiotics. The fact that the book does not expressly state that certain other sources of information should be avoided does not get the author off the hook when one understands that many who read the book – as is well known to the author – are frequently told that certain types of information are misleading and should not be looked at. By not expressing a contrary point of view, the author can be taken to endorse the accepted belief of those he knew would read him and whose beliefs he understands.

I think this analogy works well for questions of human behaviour and morality of the type with which Warner is dealing. All we can be confident of from time to time is that based on limited perspective and given what we value, our behaviour either "works" or "does not work" to achieve what we hope for it. We wash our hands and get sick less often. That is good. It works. It is not "the truth". We empathize more with others, are less selfish, and so get along with them. This too works, and is good, and it not "the truth".

Another example that comes to mind is that of Ptolemy and his conception of the universe, which was accepted by mankind for well over 1,000 years. It produced information that

accurate enough to allow for navigation by the stars, and to make maps. Hence, in an important sense, it worked. And yet it was based on many false notions, such as that the Earth was at the centre of the Universe. The fact that the theory worked in some ways caused many to believe it to be "true", and on that basis to resist any theories that contradicted it, such as that of Copernicus and Galileo. People prefer theories that are consistent with the dominant worldview, and Ptolemy's theory had that going for it. Its "limited truth" that supported longstanding social structures became an obstacle to the acceptance of greater truths. This has been a frequent problem throughout human history.

Warner's Conclusion to "Bonds That Make Us Free"

Warner, as does Mormonism, wavers between monism and pluralism. As noted above, for him, there is a truth, and it will direct our behavior in a mystical way if we will only not be dishonest with ourselves; have a "pure" heart; trust our feelings; etc. However, he goes to great pains to indicate how difficult this truth is to find, almost to the point that one might guess he would not be prepared to question the differing versions of "truth" various individuals are bound to come to if they take the exercise he advises seriously. So, after going through many examples of how lives can be improved by living more generously – being more "other" focused and less "I" focused – Warner concludes by explaining that the definitions of freedom that relate to what we can or cannot "do" are misleading. The only kind of freedom that has the chance to relieve us from "our bondage to our unwanted, burdensome emotional condition" is a freedom that allows us to "be" something different, to "reinvent" ourselves (see *Bonds that Make Us Free*, pages 314 – 315). And how are we to do this? He says:

The world we respond to and our response to it are one. We choose by our response whether the world will address us invitingly or threaten us menacingly. Herein lies our freedom from fear, anxiety, cynicism, and selfishness: nothing can harm us emotionally, fundamentally, if we let the truth, especially the truth about the interior lives of others and God's love for them, write itself upon our souls (see *Bonds that Make Us Free*, page 315)

This is his lynchpin statement at the end of the book. One might be forgiven for simply responding "huh?" to this opaque bit of mysticism, and moving on. However, I think it is worthwhile to spend a few minutes to unpack it, since it illustrates beautifully the kind of emotion-based, monist thinking that underlies much of Mormonism.

"The world we respond to and our response to it are one." In this sentence, Warner may be echoing the phenomenologist position I have heard from many intellectual Mormons. That is, there is no "subject – object" distinction; we and the world by which we are surrounded are a continuous whole, and the functioning of our mind creates an unreal illusion of a separateness between "the individual" and the rest of existence. Martin Heidegger, who is one the most difficult of all the philosophers I have read, is the hero of a number of the Mormons with whom I have interacted who think in these terms. I am not even going to try here to explain Heidegger. Thinking about Warner's first sentence gives a fair indication of what it is like to read him. I do believe that this sentence conveys any useful information. I am sure Warner would disagree (he wrote it after all) and would love to discuss this with him sometime.

"We choose by our response whether the world will address us invitingly or threaten us menacingly." This sentence reminds me of Fichte, and others like Victor Frankl who have followed in his footsteps. Fichte took an unusual approach to the topic of freedom. In a time when most people were thinking about how to be free relative to the actions of other human

beings, Fichte was thinking about how to be free from the constraints of nature herself. He concluded that the way to do this was to desire and fear as little as possible. The less we desire or fear, after all, the less we are controlled by external factors, and hence by his definition of freedom, the freer we are. By this definition of freedom, the comatose (or dead) person is the freest of all. This idea has some parallels in the Buddhist notion of the "middle way" – that course of conduct that runs precisely between the twin forces of fear and desire that cause most of humanity's troubles. By living so as to be free from both fear and desire, we are truly at peace, or free. Nirvana is defined as finding the middle way. The extreme forms of self immolation that were or are found in some Eastern religions, as well as within some branches of Christianity (think of monks carrying crosses over mountains; spending years in silence; being nailed to crosses in semblance of Christ; etc.) find their roots in this kind of thought as well.

Frankl in his masterwork "Man's Search for Meaning" tells of how while he was tortured by the Nazis, and how he came to realize that the only thing they could not take from him was his choice as to how to react to the things they did to him. This is a radical application of Fichte's, or Buddha's, philosophy, and as a coping tool it makes a lot of sense. This became one of Steven Covey's key ideas, which he attributed to Frankl, but did not seem to know that Frankl likely got the idea from Fichte or the Buddhists. I see in Warner's second sentence nothing more than warmed over Frankl, Fichte, or Buddha, without acknowledgement.

The continual squelching of fear and desire, for the same of squelching it *per se*, makes little sense to me. I think it is much healthier to work continually to broaden our perspective so that our desires and fears will become more realistic and in line with our core values. As we do this, our values are likely to change, and the things we choose to do and not do as we attempt to bring the world we value into existence around us, will also change. Much of this will be driven by our increasing understanding of the probability based cause and effect relationships that govern the world in which we live. Because we will usually not know what our efforts will result in, we will continue to walk by faith. But not faith in an unknown God or those who claim to have His authority. Rather, faith in our imperfect but gradually increasing ability to understand how the world around us works. That weak "arm of flesh" is, regrettably but really, the best guide we have.

Monism v. Pluralism

There are so many wonderful ideas out there regarding how we may choose to live our lives. History, philosophy, mythology, religious studies, etc. provide a vast store house of ideas that can be used to help us decide where we would like to go, and then chart our way. The process of shifting through this information in a dual attempt to broaden perspective and find ideas that seem to fit my values is one of the most exciting and fulfilling in which I have ever engaged. To illustrate this point, I note that while writing this essay a friend brought to my attention Don Miguel Ruiz and his book "The Four Agreements", which are basic principles or "agreements" that hold society together. This sounds a little like Rousseau's "social contract". Ruiz's principles for living are: 1. Be impeccable with your word; 2. Don't take anything personally; 3. Make no assumptions; 4. Always do your best. The same friend who introduced me to Ruiz offered the following summary:

The first says that you are totally honest and straight forward in what you say. You don't hedge or become a sophist or say things to please others. It tries to give you the ability to be straight forward and open and true to your real feelings. Too often we're trying to say the right thing instead of the honest and open thing. Think of how liberating this is

compared to the things we used to say in church to please others and to conform with what we think we're suppose to believe

The second is my favorite. Things others say about you are said from their limited perspective and understanding of the world. Even if a person says something flattering like "that Bob McCue is the smartest person alive," you shouldn't take it personally. It is just the limited opinion of one person. Or if they say "Steve Benson is a troubled twit of an apostate," it really doesn't matter and Steve shouldn't take it personally because he realizes that it is just someone's uneducated opinion and it is virtually meaningless. What really matters is your own true feelings inside and only you know what they are. This is such a liberating concept when you comprehend and start using the concept. You no longer feel you have to justify your true feelings to anyone but yourself.

3. We assume things because of our background and understanding of the world. Many of these assumptions are bogus and lead us into foolish decisions. We need to examine things more carefully and try to forget about our pre-conceived notions in order to have a better grasp of reality.

4. Doing your best means that you do things properly and with much thought and good intentions toward yourself, others and the outcome. You also stay true to yourself. It doesn't mean that if you run a marathon you have to win.

These are derived from the wisdom of the Toltec people of Mexico, and once understood in the context Ruiz teaches them, provide a simple, thought-provoking life paradigm (See <http://www.miguelruiz.com/> for more information). This is yet another "way" that is certainly useful.

Once we lose the idea that there must be one "true" or at least "best" way (that is, the "monist" point of view), and content ourselves with learning about the for all intents and purposes limitless pool of ideas that can enrich our lives, life begins to feel less like an endless search for the needle in the haystack or a pitched battle of some sort, and more like a wonderful banquet or day at an immense, intensely stimulating and beautiful, art gallery. There are of course limits to how many rules we will choose to live by, and how much we are capable of changing. But at a minimum, the process of creating our own values (to the extent our self awareness permits, at least), and sorting through the many ways in which we might attempt to live in accordance with them, will help us to appreciate more of what other people choose to do. In my case this has had the effect of dramatically increasing my tolerance. I am now respectful of many more ways of living than I previously was. And, it has heightened my sensitivity to the importance of certain issues – such as restraining the power of elites – and hence has made me less tolerant of a few ways of living. The way advocated by the Mormon Church is one of those.

What is the Conscience?

Back to Warner again. His lynchpin is: "...nothing can harm us emotionally, fundamentally, if we let the truth, especially the truth about the interior lives of others and God's love for them, write itself upon our souls." This echoes a refrain he used countless times in the book. There is a "truth", and God will somehow make it known to us. He does this when we are not dishonest with ourselves; as we open our hearts to his truth; etc. All this does, purely and simply, is allow the individual's "conscience" to guide him.

It seems clear that the conscience is mostly the effect of our social conditioning. Matt Berry puts it this way:

Nothing in life requires more patience than unravelling this inherited mess we have blithely labelled, "the conscience". The strange but natural ill feeling one has when one breaks with custom is confused with "sin". Any move away from the custom is then checked by one's sensation of guilt. Once fully indoctrinated, the believer can roam "freely" ... and never stray from the prescribed routine. Born Mormons tend to remain Mormons, Buddhists, Buddhists. (Post-Atheism, pp. 46-47)

Nietzsche adds more analytical meat when he says:

[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)

I would summarize by saying that social custom holds the herd together. An inauthentic stamp of God is often put on these customs, usually by well-intended religious or other social leaders under the direct or indirect influence of emotional experiences had by many of their followers as well as themselves. Some customs, however, are rooted in behavioral truth discovered and proven through trial and error. The only way to sort out what is what is to focus on cause and effect relationships. Guilt associated with the breach of good customs (such as the Golden Rule) is something for which we should be grateful, as is guilt that arises as a result of our subconscious recognizing that we are not being truthful with ourselves. These twinges of conscience are often the first signs that we are becoming more self-aware, and will soon be in a position to change for the better.

Who Controls Our Conscience?

So, in the end Warner assures us that there is one, absolute truth (although as noted above he acknowledges that it is hard to identify and may even completely contradict himself at the end of the book) and that we find freedom by surrendering to it as our conscience (formed by the dominant social force in our lives, and tweaked by his book and the anecdotes it contains) directs us. So, those who control our conscience (see Hassan's mind control stuff above) are the source of absolute truth, and will control us. I see no practical distinction between what Warner teaches, in the end, and what Fichte and Rousseau talk about in terms of the wisdom of

submitting our individual wills to the collective force that dominates our environment, and voluntarily putting ourselves in chains.

Think, for example, of how a faithful Mormon whose child is declares himself to be a homosexual would likely react. He would likely seek the counsel of his religious leaders. He would likely to be told about an organization affiliated with the Mormon Church that uses various behaviour modification techniques to try to deprogram homosexual behaviour in particularly invasive ways. I understand, for example, that this organization's techniques have included forms of therapy that involve watching homo and hetero pornography, and being shocked or made to feel ill during the homo erotica and made to feel euphoric during the hetero. I do not know how it operates today. I think it is fair to assume that many faithful Mormons would feel at least somewhat uncomfortable with what the Mormon Church advises respecting homosexuals. How would Warner's book play into this situation?

Warner's advice is designed to allow the dominant influence in our conscience to be accepted as "truth", and to allow us to feel good about that – to feel free as we surrender to the "bonds" defined by this truth. He advocates a number of good things, like being less selfish. But in the end, it is his advice that the truth that wells up from within should be accepted, and that we should surrender to it, that is in my view deeply misleading. What will that truth be for the average faithful Mormon faced with a Bishop of Stake President who is encouraging him to use the Mormon Church's program for helping homosexual people? Even though this will be painful for the young gay person, is it not a form of love to encourage him as strongly as possible to get rid of his gay tendencies? If he does not do this, after all, he will forfeit his right to be with his family in the Celestial Kingdom. To do all that is possible to get him into the Church's program is accordingly an act of love, even through there is a near consensus in the medical and psychological communities that programs of this kind are both ineffective and dangerous to the physical and mental health of those who participate in them. This is not as bad as Brigham Young's blood atonement, but it runs along the same lines.

It is my view, and that of most social scientists I have read, that the conscience is largely a social construct. Notice that Warner's book suggests that we use the truth that wells up within us to decide which of the social forces in our lives we should question, and which we should allow to dominate us. He advise, for example, that the social constructs related to selfishness, for example, should be questioned. And our society has a strong tendency toward the gratification of individual wants, and I think many people would agree that it is healthy that we question the validity of this approach to life. Warner has a number of good suggestions in this regard.

However, as noted above, Warner does not suggest that institutional religion might be a source of influences in our lives that should be questioned, nor does he point to any particular conception of democracy, or attitudes toward free markets v. more socialistic methods of regulating the economy. There are a host of powerful forces that shape our attitudes, and give rise to the "truth" that will manifest itself to us, according to him. In fact, he does not allude in any way to the idea that the "truth" that wells up within us may be a social construct.

Whether so intended or not, Warner's approach is tailor made to several markets. One that comes to mind is the conservative religious market, and that should not be surprising since Warner is a BYU professor and would have trouble keeping his position were he to publish material that suggested it was appropriate to question the teachings of religious institutions. So, a group to whom Warner's book would appeal are those who are monists from a moralistic point of view, as are many evangelical and fundamentalist religious people, and who are concerned

with some of the social trends Warner identifies as being "bad" in his book. The idea that there is "truth" that will find us somehow if we are open to it would be attractive to that group, and the idea that they should question more carefully the most dominant social institutions in their lives (that is, their religious beliefs) would be most unattractive. Warner's ideas allow those people to fine tune their approach a bit, and feel good about having overcome some of their "self-deception" while at the same time reinforcing their already strong tendency not to question the most basic social assumptions they make. Remember Don Miguel Ruiz's second agreement – make no assumptions? Ruiz would likely suggest that Warner does his readers a disservice by worsening what are likely some of their biggest blind spots.

Interestingly, however, Warner's book could be read by someone whose conscience is not under the control of a cult (or cult-like group), and it would have a much more healthy effect. A lot of his advice (cribbed from Buber, I again note) is healthy. However, he is deeply misleading with regard to the critical question – how do we improve our perspective, become more autonomous, and so become more free. We are unlikely to make significant progress in that regard as long as what for many people is the largest and strongest part of their assumptions remains unquestioned. Warner nibbles skilfully at a cookie while hiding from his reader's view the remainder of the feast. He recommends a little new paint here and there in many cases where a wrecking ball and reconstruction from the ground up are required.

While re-reading Warner's book I was again impressed with some of Warner's ideas as to how we can become less selfish and more understanding of those closest to us. The book does a good job in that regard. However, it solidifies religious belief by advocating the things noted above, and so strengthens the socially constructed barriers that create consciences. This, regrettably, makes it less likely rather than more that people within one paradigm (like the Mormon) will be able to relate in a healthy way to others who see life in a fundamentally different way. That is where the different "truths" Warner seems to imply may exist will collide head on, with no means to resolve their differences since Warner would counsel both to rely upon the truth spoken by their deepest, and in many cases darkest, voices.

As we become better informed, more self-aware, more aware of the holes that riddle our many once assumed truths, we can associate with each other, serve each other, etc. in ways that are likely to make much more sense from our point of view (as opposed to the point of view of the institution that would like to bleed us of time, energy, money and other resources) than anything we can do while in unconscious chains, whether we think we are free while in them or not. And most importantly, only as freely acting individuals can we contribute to the wonderful, creative process what has made the democratic West what it is. Only as autonomous individuals can we wrestle with questions of value, and basic meaning, and then take action to bring what we value into existence. The more people who are engaged in this process, the more quickly the creative miracle that is human existence will continue. And I do not suggest that human experience is an unbroken record of progress. But, I am convinced that much more good than ill comes from independent thought.

Who Should We Trust – Individuals or the Elite?

And so we come to the central issue – do we trust individuals to act for themselves, or not? The Mormon Church does not trust individuals, as evidenced by the fact that it requires obedience in so many ways. Warner comes to the same conclusion at least as far as Mormons are concerned, because the conscience they are told to trust will steer them in accordance with the dictates of their leaders.

The more I learn about life, the more I trust the wisdom that can only percolate to society's surface through the uncoerced action of individuals. Democracy is a better system than anything else that has been devised. It's genius is found in the manner in which it harnesses the "wisdom" of the masses, such as it is. And while rules and authority are of crucial importance as well, if we have learned anything from history, it is that those who are trusted with authority tend to abuse it, and should have checks and balances set around them to minimize the probability that they will do so again.

In my view anything that moves us toward a situation in which the masses become more educated, more self aware, more involved in the governing process has a high probability of doing more good than ill. And anything that moves in the opposite direction is likely to do the opposite. Mormonism seems to me like an island of ignorance, encouraged by its leadership, in a sea of increasing understanding. In my view, any step that can be taken to reduce the influence of ignorance is a step worth taking.

So, it is my view Warner is a servant of any elite that has the power to control the minds of its followers. I suspect, for example, that the Hare Krishna or the Moonies would have "Bonds that Make Us Free" on their recommended reading list. BYU and the Mormon Church certainly have it on theirs.

Conclusion

In the end, Warner reminds me of what Rousseau said of certain artists and writers of his day. He said that the powers that be welcomed their subjects' involvement with the arts because it helped to "wind garlands of flowers around the chains that bind them". (<http://www.age-of-the-sage.org/philosophy/rousseau.html>) Warner uses some of Buber's good ideas and many of his own, in the end, to camouflage with some interesting and even useful garlands, Mormon chains. While Warner does not advocate submission to authority in the overt manner Rousseau does, the effect, in my view, is largely the same.