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To the glory of God

Mormon Essays on Great Issues — Environment — Commitment
Love — Peace — Youth — Man

ENVIRONMENT — COMMITMENT
LOVE — PEACE — YOUTH — MAN

Contributors

Hugh W. Nibley, C. Terry Warner, Reed H. Bradford,
Neal A. Maxwell, David H. Yarn, Jr., Truman G. Madsen,
Chauncey C. Riddle, Robert K. Thomas, Leonard J.
Arrington, Martin B. Hickman, Richard L.
Anderson, Monte S. Nyman

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MORMONISM
AND THE NATURE OF MAN

Chauncey C. Riddle

CHAUNCEY C. RIDDLE is Dean of the Graduate School at Brigham Young University, where he has been a faculty member since 1952.

He has earned the reputation of master teacher during his distinguished educational career. He earned the B.S. degree in mathematics and physics at BYU, and then attained the M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in philosophy at Columbia University in the City of New York.

He has been an active member of the Church and at present is a high councilor in the Sharon Stake.

His wife is the former Bertha Janis Allred, and they are the parents of twelve children, ten of whom are living.

The purpose of this paper is to delineate some of the factors pertinent to a monistic (literally "one thing") conception of man as contrasted with a dualistic conception. In the monistic thinking presently in vogue, man is seen as a material being wholly governed by the laws of the universe as discovered and formulated by science. Some persons grant that man has a spirit, but in their accounts of and treatment of man, the spiritual aspect is nonfunctional; such persons may appear to be dualists but are here classed as functional monists. The dualistic concept entertained in this paper posits mortal man as a spirit, which is the real person, and a body, which is the tabernacle of the spirit person. Though both the spirit and the body are of a material nature, dualism obtains because each represents a different order of matter; this difference is manifest in that the set of laws and influences governing the spirit aspect of man is different from that which governs the fleshly body. Basic to this whole discussion, of course, is the assumption that law and order govern all things in the universe, that all events are caused, and that there is a regularity or uniformity in the universe.

The thesis of this paper is that the key concepts of the gospel of Jesus Christ have consistency and significance only when one conceives of mortal man as a dualistic being, these values being lost if a monistic conception is adopted. The key concepts here discussed are the fall of Adam, free agency, spirituality, sin, the atonement of Jesus Christ, salvation, and righteousness.

The Fall

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve were in a monistic

state, we may presume, because they were subject to only one set of laws and influences, those of God. Their whole being was of a spiritual order, with spirit matter being the life-substance of their bodies. In this condition the range of their freedom was limited; they simply responded positively to the commands of the Father.

The influence of Satan in tempting Eve and Adam in the garden brought a new and opposing set of forces and laws to bear. The Father granted Adam and Eve freedom in the garden in that he allowed the influence of Satan to work upon them. He allowed them to choose between His influence and that of Satan. Eve, having been deceived by Satan, and Adam, choosing to follow her into mortality, the anticipated death came upon our first parents. In this process their bodies were rendered spiritually dead; spirit was replaced by blood in their veins and their spiritual bodies lost the ability to perceive things in a spiritual order.

Fallen Adam was a paradigm of dualism in that his body was fully of the order of what we call physical matter, subject to the laws and forces of a fallen realm, while his spirit, though within the physical body, was yet subject to the laws and forces of the spiritual order of the universe. The true person, the spirit, was now set in opposition to the physical body, since each was subject to a different set of laws and forces. The Fall was thus a sundering of man, resulting in a duality. This duality is the basis of both conflict and progress in the individual person.

What would the Fall mean if man were construed monistically? Under monism, death could only be physical; if literal, the death of the body. But since physical death is explicitly not part of the Fall, a monist must reject a literal interpretation. When the spiritual death of the Fall is construed non-literally, it is usually seen either as a change of place, the process of being cast out of the presence of God, or as a change of the nature of man. Change of place (removal from the Garden of Eden) did occur, but this change

does not exhaust the scriptural teaching concerning the Fall. If man's monistic nature were considered to change in the Fall, that change could only be accounted for by external forces. Under a monistic system, there is only one set of laws and forces. It follows that there could be no meaningful choice, and thus Adam could not be held responsible for his fall. If Adam is not responsible for his fall, he is likewise not responsible in any way to the opportunity of redemption. This, of course, renders the gospel meaningless.

Free Agency

Freedom is the opportunity to choose; agency is power. Man's free agency is then the freedom to choose and the power to attain what is chosen. Whereas God is completely free, man is but infinitesimally free; but man is free enough to respond to the influence of God, by means of which influence to become like God, or to respond to Satan and by means of that contrary influence to become like Satan.

The free agency of man, then, is limited, specific. It is a freedom given of God to the spirit in man to become free of the dominating influence of one's own physical body. It is the freedom and power to respond to the commandments of God through the Holy Spirit, thus bringing the flesh into subjection by overcoming the power and influence of Satan, which operates through the flesh. As father Lehi put it, the agency of man is to be "free according to the flesh." When that freedom is full and final, the body of man functions only under the powers, forces, and influences of the spiritual order of existence. This is to say that Satan never again has power over that being. He is free forever.

If man is construed monistically, freedom from the flesh makes no sense, for this man is only flesh. On the monistic view, if man feels free, it is either a psychological illusion or simply a physical freedom of a physical body to act without external restraint. Under monism, self-discipline is meaningless, for all discipline is a thing that must be

superimposed upon a person by outside force. Monistic freedom is the absence of that dualistic freedom, discipline of the body by the spirit, which the gospel affords.

Spirituality

In the gospel, spirituality is the condition of the spirit of a person being responsive to the commandments and influences of God, specifically the influence of the Holy Spirit. Spirituality is manifest in the control of the flesh wherein the walking, talking, eating, drinking, working, etc., of a person are models of fulfilling the words of the prophets of God to the degree to which the person is spiritual. The more spiritual a person is, the more complete and absolute will be the discipline of the spirit over the body.

It should not be supposed that spirituality enjoins what is often called "asceticism." While self-denial is a frequent choice of a spiritual person, pleasure of itself is not considered an evil. But pleasure is not sought for its own sake. A spiritual person seeks first the kingdom of God and then to establish in the earth the righteousness of God. In line of duty of serving God and blessing his fellowmen, the spiritual person will strive for health, cleanliness, comeliness, strength, and skill. But these are sought as means, not as ends. They are means by which to glorify God and to build his kingdom, and are an integral part of the control of the appetites and proclivities of the physical tabernacle of the spirit. Furthermore, this control, when sought for the glory of God, redounds to the blessing of the person spiritually and temporally. One of the blessings will be pleasure that is pure, unmixed with lust, because it is allowed rather than directly sought. Pleasure that is spiritually pure does not turn to pain, regret, and remorse of conscience as do pleasures sought to gratify the appetites of the flesh.

Especially noteworthy is that the more spiritual a person becomes, the less he will depend upon physical evidence (through the flesh) as to what he believes. This does not

mean he ignores physical evidence; he accepts the responsibility of accounting for it, but he believes and interprets all things as he is instructed by the Holy Spirit. He will not judge on the basis of appearance.

Under a monistic system, spirituality must be classed with insanity. Since the bodies of men are demonstrably very similar, any person who does not respond "normally" to physical stimulus must be tagged as "abnormal"—insane. The more spiritual one is, the more suspect he would become to persons espousing the monistic view. Persons with great self-control cause those without it to wonder and to feel uncomfortable. To sin a little, to laugh at the possibility of perfection, to justify pleasure sought for its own sake are normal to the monist. Youth, strength, and worldly learning are honored above all else in monistic thinking because they represent the fullest accommodation and power in the realm of the physical, the realm of the flesh.

The monist also takes a curious stance of omniscience. He will not pretend in theory to know all things, but will assert that he does know all the factors pertinent to a given social problem and can therefore prescribe its solution. Thus he reserves to himself a practicing omniscience. Having denied the existence and influence of God, as a naturalist, he finds it necessary to pronounce himself at least a demi-god in order to justify rationally his practical decisions; or his intellectual systems and heroes become his demi-god. Judging by appearance and arrogating to himself sufficiency, the monist has left a trail of blood, slavery, and failure, confronted only occasionally by a John the Baptist or a Socrates who points out that he does not really know what he is doing. But the monist has ways of dealing with John and with Socrates.

To a monist, spiritual people are indistinguishable from spiritualists—those possessed of evil spirits; both are classed as insane because they do not act "normally." History shows that what is "normal" changes from age to age. There are vogues as to what is socially acceptable, fostering first one

species and degree of carnality, then another. But the gospel is the same in every age: dominion of spirit over body through the gifts of God through Jesus Christ.

Sin

Sin in the gospel is breaking a commandment of God; it is acting to yield to the influence of the world upon the flesh rather than responding to the influence of God upon the spirit. Faith is willing obedience to God's Holy Spirit, and whatsoever is not of faith is sin. Sin is the triumph of the flesh over the spirit, and is therefore the triumph of Satan over the person.

In a monistic system there is no meaningful concept of sin. People are said to act strictly according to their heredity and environment, and are not to be blamed for any act, since they are not free. To change people's actions means simply to change the influences that touch them. Monists say that it is institutions of society that control men's actions. This is why control of educational programs and information media are crucial to the monist—though he never can quite account for how the governor of the system can himself escape what he is trying to cure in those whom he "benevolently" controls. The monist does not fathom the concept of repentance, because it, too, has no gospel meaning in his thought. He will look upon sex sin as "normal" and excuse any offender as if it were a light thing. Should he be a church worker, he may see social control (socialism) as the ultimate panacea, and think that in promoting social control he is doing God a favor.

The Atonement

The atonement of Jesus Christ is the central and crowning concept of the gospel. In living a perfect life as a dual being, Christ overcame the power of Satan. His life was the great triumph of spirit over flesh, the example and pattern for all mankind. In his death, the Savior climaxed that triumph by seizing from Satan the keys of death.

Through his suffering in taking the bitter cup, the Savior satisfied the demands of justice, making possible for all men an eternity free from the consequences of sin. Through his sacrifice of his life, the Savior made it possible for all men to be raised again in the resurrection with a spiritual physical body, thereafter to serve God through the spirit in eternity. As in Adam man became dual and fallen, even so in Christ men may be made spiritual and whole again, redeemed to the spiritual order of existence of their own choice.

In a monistic system, the atonement of Christ can only be by the suffering and death of just another person, having efficacy for us only as it might affect us in a physical way. A monist would see the atonement at best as a symbol, as a noteworthy deed, as an ultimate protest. But he will see no connection between the shedding of the Savior's blood and the forgiveness of our sins, since the physical world affords no such causal connections; in fact, he is likely to be appalled by this idea and see it as a barbaric superstition. Thus it is possible that one who in the relative innocence of youth was cleansed and forgiven through the blood of Christ might later in his state of monistic "erudition" shed the blood of Christ afresh and put him to an open shame, not being able then to see any point in the atonement.

Salvation

Salvation in the gospel is to come to be beyond the power of one's enemies. It is a thing of degree, progressing step by step as the spirit of a person triumphs over his own flesh through faith in Jesus Christ. Considered in the aspect of being able to stop sinning, salvation is self-denial of the lusts of the flesh, and the ultimate demonstration of it is in voluntarily giving up the life of the body. Only in our death is salvation fully manifest and only in willingness to die is it fully attainable. To be free of the control of the flesh, through faith in Christ and through death, is to be forever free from Satan. If through the Savior

we also gain a remission of the sins we have committed, we can then go on to inherit all that Christ has.

But salvation for the monist is quite opposite. It is ease, opulence, pleasure, comfort, and security for the flesh. The greatest of all evils for the monist is pain, though pain is challenged for that position by death. The body is the object of concern, the thing to pamper and perpetuate. Sacrifice of things material is a great misfortune. Indeed, the monist often conceives it the moral obligation of the man who has physical salvation to furnish it to others who do not; thus the monist tends to choose coercive redistributive legislation over freedom of choice and conscience. He does not even comprehend the voluntary charity of a free agent, since he cannot comprehend either charity or agency in the gospel sense.

Righteousness

In the gospel, righteousness is the way a man acts toward his neighbor when he has overcome the flesh through Christ. It is the power and authority of a saved being to bless others in leading them to Christ. A righteous man is concerned about both the physical and the spiritual needs of his fellowmen, but has no illusion that the physical needs are greater. He has kept the great law, and loves the Savior with all his heart, might, mind, and strength. And because he has kept the commandments of Christ, he is able then to love his fellowmen with the same pure love that he receives from the Savior. His goal is to make a heaven on earth where all who want to be saved can be saved, where Christ and his pure love reign supreme, where spirit has triumphed over the flesh. This involves concern for the temporal, for the material circumstances of men, as well as the spiritual. But the spiritual aspect of things is always seen as the key to progress in the material realm.

For the monist, righteousness has little meaning because sin has little meaning. To the monist, righteousness could be but conformity to human norms. The problem which the

monist ever pursues is how to make a society of pleasure-seeking people productive enough to give each person all the fleshly freedom and pleasure he wants. Since that goal has never been attained (and obviously, to a dualist, cannot be attained) the substitute is slavery. With slavery, at least some can enjoy fleshly freedom and pleasure even if others have to suffer. Thus the long series of social arrangements to perpetuate control of one person by another; clergy over lay, nobles over commoners, powerful over weak, educated over uneducated, majority over minority, voters over taxpayers, caste systems, party members over nonparty members, etc.—all are bolstered by religious or moralizing theories, and all anti-Christ.

Now the real question of the whole matter is simply this: Is the universe monistic or dualistic? If the universe is monistic, then all the attendant ideas so abhorrent to the dualist are true, and the dualist is indeed insane. But if the universe is dualistic, if there is a real Savior Jesus Christ in opposition to and opposed by a real Satan, then man is a dual being, spirit opposed to flesh, and the monist is indeed in sin.

The answer would seem to lie within the individual. Does he acknowledge the voice of conscience which warns him not to yield to the lusts of the flesh? Has he sought for the influence of God through humble prayer? Has he experimented with the word of God to see if the promises are fulfilled? The testimony of the prophets is plain. They teach us of God. They teach us of dualism. They teach us to experiment honestly with our own conscience, to observe the fruits of doing the best which we know. It would seem that only the honest in heart can acknowledge the things of God, and that only those who hunger and thirst after righteousness can fully find the means by which to come unto God.

The whole purpose of life is to bring under subjection the animal passions, proclivities, and tendencies, that we might realize the companionship always of God's Holy Spirit.

—David O. McKay