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Abstract Introduction to the current issue, including editor's picks. Our expectations and presuppositions lead us to see what we want to see.

Editor's Introduction: Perceptions and Expectations

Daniel C. Peterson

In 1894, Albert Michelson delivered the main address at the dedication of the Ryerson Physical Laboratory of the University of Chicago. Michelson took the opportunity to declare that "The more important fundamental laws and facts of physical science have all been discovered." The physics community thought that there was not much new to learn about our universe.

Ten years later, Albert Einstein published the first of his papers that were to revolutionize our understanding of nature and the universe. Einstein's discovery that energy and matter are actually two different forms of the same entity ($E=mc^2$), that matter can be made from energy, and that the flow of time is not a constant, changed mankind's paradigm of the world. His work rested on research performed by Albert Michelson.

Changing one's paradigm is not easy.¹

As I have had frequent occasion in these pages to note, we tend to see what we are disposed to see.

Lately, I have been looking at a biography of the eminent British political philosopher and essayist Sir Isaiah Berlin, who died at an advanced age just few years ago. Sir Isaiah had a remarkable career that rather unexpectedly made him a celebrity. The famous British philosopher A. J. Ayer reported that, once,

¹ Gerald L. Schroeder, *The Science of God: The Convergence of Scientific and Biblical Wisdom* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), xi-xii.

when he was introduced at a London party as “the cleverest man in England,” someone exclaimed, “Oh, so you must be Isaiah Berlin.”²

That anecdote in itself illustrates my point. But there is another, even better.

Isaiah Berlin spent the years of World War II in Washington, D.C., and New York City, where his charm and wit and erudition—and probably his Englishness, as well—gained him access into the most exalted circles of American academic and political life. And he used those contacts to garner information about American attitudes and intentions that he then quietly passed on to a very appreciative British prime minister, Winston Churchill, who was eager for anything he could glean about Britain’s vitally important allies in the United States. But Churchill had never actually met his highly valued source of American background information.

During roughly the same period, it happens that the prominent American songwriter *Irving* Berlin was also devoting a substantial portion of *his* talents to the support of the war effort—though, of course, in a very different way.

In early February 1944, Clementine Churchill told her husband that Irving Berlin was in London. She thought it might be appropriate, in view of the composer’s generous patriotic efforts, for her husband to greet Berlin, to shake his hand and thank him, and perhaps to pose for a quick photograph with him. To her surprise and puzzlement, however, her husband insisted that Berlin come to the prime minister’s official residence for a formal meal.

At the end of lunch, Churchill turned and said, “Now, Mr Berlin, tell us what in your opinion is the likelihood of my dear friend, the President, being re-elected for a fourth term.” Berlin, who spoke in a heavy Brooklyn accent, said he felt sure that Roosevelt’s great name would ensure him victory. He added for good measure, “But if he won’t stand [for re-election] again, I don’t think I’ll vote at all.”

² Michael Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 170.

"You mean," asked Churchill, "that you think you'll have a vote?"

"I sincerely hope so."

Churchill muttered that it was a good sign of Anglo-American cooperation if the Professor had a vote in America. Churchill's subsequent questions about the state and volume of war production in the States elicited only vague and noncommittal replies. Churchill, growing exasperated, asked Berlin when he thought the war would end. "Mr Prime Minister, I shall tell my children and grandchildren that Winston Churchill asked *me* that question." By now thoroughly confused, Churchill asked what was the most important thing that Mr Berlin had written. He replied, "White Christmas."

Sensing social disaster, Clementine Churchill said gently that they should all be grateful to Mr Berlin because he had been so generous. "Generous?" her husband growled, looking about him in consternation. By this time [Churchill's secretary] Jock Colville was gently kicking the Prime Minister under the table. "What are you kicking me for?" Churchill growled, and then turned his back on Berlin. Shortly thereafter the lunch broke up. Berlin returned to the hotel where he was staying with the producer Alexander Korda. He reported that it had been a puzzling lunch. He did not exactly seem to hit it off with the Prime Minister.³

Within a short while, when Churchill learned what had really happened, he roared with laughter at the misunderstanding and all was well. In fact, as the story got around, it cemented Isaiah Berlin's reputation as a man to be taken seriously far beyond the exalted academic enclave of All Souls, Oxford.

But the incident is also instructive. Winston Churchill was certainly not dense. Yet, despite all the clues to the contrary—including Irving Berlin's thick American, indeed Brooklyn, accent and his distinct if similar name—Churchill persisted in supposing that his conversation partner was the already distinguished Oxford

³ Ibid., 125–26.

political philosopher and observer Isaiah Berlin *because that was what he expected*.

Our expectations and presuppositions play a crucial, almost unavoidable role in our intellectual and spiritual lives, too. They are very difficult to overcome. That, indeed, is one of the reasons why conversion is often termed a "miracle." Early Christians knew that acceptance of the truth was very likely to require overcoming one's preconceptions, and that this could be disconcerting and sometimes even painful:

These are the secret words which the Living Jesus spoke and Didymos Judas Thomas wrote.

And He said:

Whoever finds the explanation of these words will not taste death. Jesus said:

Let him who seeks, not cease seeking until he finds, and when he finds, he will

be troubled, and when he has been troubled, he will marvel and he will reign over the All.⁴

I recently ran across some E-mail correspondence between a very fair-minded and well-informed evangelical and one of his coreligionists. The first commented that he had read a vast amount of Latter-day Saint writing, probably more than all but a few Mormons themselves, and that he had tried to be both sympathetic and reasonable in his reading. Knowing him somewhat, I am confident he is not misstating the situation. Yet, he said, he has emerged from his extensive investigation of Mormonism and of the best of Mormon apologetics unconvinced by the claims of the restoration—a fact that, he thought, ought to give pause to intelligent Latter-day Saints. And, of course, in a sense he is entirely right. We need to do our job even better, probably, though we should be under no illusions about our capacity ever to argue somebody into the church. But our evangelical friend needs to remember that there are also Latter-day Saints who have read a large amount of evangelical Protestant scholarship and apologetics, and who themselves remain unconvinced. I am one of those.

⁴ A. Guillaumont, H.-Ch. Puech, G. Quispel, W. Till, and Yassah 'Abd Al Masih, trans., *The Gospel according to Thomas* (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 3.

That fact ought to give him precisely as much pause as his own case should give us. Both sides come to any interaction with distinctive expectations and preunderstandings. These affect our judgments, because they affect what counts for us as evidence and demonstration and what will be required to produce conviction.

The situation is rendered still more difficult by the fact that not everybody involved in such interactions is operating in good faith. Communication is made much worse for most people because there are not a few individuals out there who are actively devoted to the production of phantasms and specters, designed to obscure the vision of those who want to see. I shall have more to say about one such individual, "Dr." Walter Martin, in the next issue of the *Review*. Although he has been dead for a decade, he continues to be an almost talismanic figure in certain relatively small but militant Protestant circles. Only lack of time—I leave for Iran in the morning—prevents me from examining here one of his self-glorifying tales that is yet again circulating among the Martinistas as evidence of his superiority to the benighted and spineless Latter-day Saints. Stay tuned.

Editor's Picks

As has become customary in this space, I now list certain texts or items treated in the present issue of the *Review* and offer my own (inevitably subjective) ratings. In some cases, my evaluations derive from personal and direct acquaintance with the materials in question. In every case, I have determined the ranking after reading the relevant review in this issue and after further conversations either with the writer of the review or with those who assist in the production of this *Review*. The final judgments, however, and the final responsibility for making them, are mine. This is the scale that I use in the rating system:

- * * * * Outstanding, a seminal work of the kind that appears only rarely.
- * * * Enthusiastically recommended.
- * * Warmly recommended.
- * Recommended.

Here, then, are my ratings for the items that we feel we can recommend from the present issue of the *FARMS Review of Books*:

- * * Matthew B. Brown and Paul T. Smith, *Symbols in Stone: Symbolism on the Early Temples of the Restoration*
- *** Collector's Library '98
- * H. Clay Gorton, *A New Witness for Christ: Chiastic Structures in the Book of Mormon*
- *** GospeLink
- * * Walter Krajewski, "Voice from the Dust: A Literary Analysis of the Book of Mormon"
- *** Hugh W. Nibley, *The Ancient State: The Rulers and the Ruled*
- * Mark A. Smith, *The Power of God*
- **** John L. Sorenson, *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life*
- **** John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *King Benjamin's Speech: "That Ye May Learn Wisdom"*

I am grateful to those who have made this *Review* possible. Above all, I thank the writers, volunteers all of them, for their unpaid work. I am grateful, too, to Shirley Ricks for her indispensable efforts and for other staff members who have assisted: Josi Brewer, Alison Coutts, Melissa Garcia, Rebecca Isom, Jessica Taylor, Melvin Thorne, and Wendy Thompson. The opinions and interpretations expressed here are those of the authors. They are not necessarily those of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, and they are not necessarily mine. But I hope that they are always interesting, provocative, and useful.