



4-1-1999

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Recommended Citation

Judd, Daniel K. (1999) "Moral Agency: A Doctrinal Application to Therapy," *Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy*. Vol. 24 : No. 1 , Article 11.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/irp/vol24/iss1/11>

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DANIEL K.
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Moral Agency

A DOCTRINAL APPLICATION
TO THERAPY

Wherefore, men are free according to the flesh; and all things are given them which are expedient unto man. And they are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself. And now, my sons, I would that ye should look to the great Mediator, and hearken unto his great commandments; and be faithful unto his words, and choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit.

—2 Nephi 2:27–28

One of the philosophical discussions that is central to the majority of academic disciplines, as well as the helping professions, is the debate over free will and determinism (see Williams, 1992). As clinicians, we often deal with questions pertaining to the degree to which our clients are free to exercise their moral agency. Just how free to choose is the person who has become drug addicted? Is a person who has become enslaved to alcohol always going to be an alcoholic, or to what extent can he or she choose otherwise? What of same-sex attraction—is a person who feels the pull of homosexual attraction born with such feelings as a predetermined eventuality? What about those of us with explosive tempers, feelings of inferiority, mania, depression, eating disorders, or anxiety—do we have the capacity to think, feel, and act differently? Our understanding and beliefs about the answers to such questions, as a culture and as individuals, have great relevance to how we go about our work as therapists.

While it would be more than presumptuous to propose that one paper could adequately describe the free will–determinism debate, let alone provide an original addition to the body of literature (see Rychlak, 1981), it is my intent to provide a brief theological introduction and several clinical applications. This paper will also provide a philosophical strategy for thinking more clearly about moral agency and its counterfeits. My underlying assumption is that a correct understanding of the Latter-day Saint doctrine of moral agency has much to offer humanity in general and therapists in particular as we strive to understand and embody such an important principle.

Determinism and Moral Agency Defined

Simply stated, the argument of determinism states that our thoughts, feelings, and actions are determined by forces outside our volitional control. “Free will, by contrast, is the assumption that the agent could have acted otherwise, all other factors remaining the same” (Slife & Fisher, 2000, p. 84). Those who espouse the theory and practice of determinism believe that human behavior is determined in the same naturalistic way as eye color or physical stature. Determinism takes many forms. Some people focus on deterministic forces as being genetic in origin, and others concentrate on the

biochemical, social, and familial aspects. Regardless of the form, “for many, if not most schools of psychology, determinism is the essential principle that allows psychology to be a science” (Williams, 1999), thus allowing no room for the legitimacy of moral agency.

While the philosophy of determinism, as it is generally taught, is incompatible with the doctrine of moral agency, it is important to understand that the Lord has established bounds to the agency he has given us. Latter-day Saint theology embraces the doctrine of agency but also teaches that some of the events of human experience are caused and are outside the boundary of moral agency. Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1996) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles stated:

Of course our genes, circumstances, and environments matter very much, and they shape us significantly. Yet there remains an inner zone in which we are sovereign, unless we abdicate. In this zone lies the essence of our individuality and our personal accountability. (p. 21; see also Oaks, 1989, pp. 10, 1–17)

Moral Agency

From before the foundation of the world, the doctrine of moral agency has been central to the existence of humanity. Prophets, both ancient and modern, have taught us that it was the agency of man over which the “war in heaven” was fought (Rev. 12:7; see also D&C 29:36–38). Our Father’s plan included agency, the moral choice between right and wrong; Lucifer’s plan “sought to destroy the agency of man” (Moses 4:3) by eliminating choice.

The traditional understanding of how Satan attempted to destroy the agency of humankind and enslave their souls includes the adversary’s use of forced obedience. In an account of Latter-day Saint parents exercising unrighteous dominion over their teenage daughter, Carlfred Broderick (1996) illustrated how easy it is to misunderstand agency. Dr. Broderick’s account begins with his referring a Latter-day Saint family to a Jewish colleague for therapy. After encountering resistance from the parents to the counsel to “lighten up a little” with their rebellious teenager, the therapist sought Dr. Broderick’s counsel: “Every time I suggest any movement in the direction of loosening up, they [the parents] patiently explain to me that I just don’t understand their religious obligation, as

Mormon parents, to keep this kid in line. Frankly, I don't know how to deal with this. I don't want to attack their religious beliefs, but the situation is explosive" (p. 88).

After some discussion, Dr. Broderick suggested a particular strategy wherein the therapist would express interest in the family's religious beliefs—specifically “the war in heaven.” The therapist followed the suggestion and called some time later in wonderment at how well Dr. Broderick's counsel had worked.

Dr. Broderick's colleague indicated that even the rebellious teen had offered to share with him a copy of a book about their faith with a picture of the family in the front (a missionary edition of the Book of Mormon). The therapist was most surprised with the mother's dramatic change. After describing how the mother had responded quickly at the opportunity of sharing her beliefs, her enthusiasm came to an end as quickly as it had started. Dr. Broderick's colleague described what happened:

“In seconds she had launched into some story about a council in heaven and two plans and she gets about three minutes into it and she stops cold in her tracks and gives me a funny look and says, ‘All right, Doctor, you've made your point.’ From that moment on they were like putty in my hands. It was like magic. Carl, what is this war in heaven?” (Broderick, 1996, p. 89).

Obviously, the mother had come to the realization that what she was doing in the name of her religion was in reality the same satanic deception designed by the adversary to destroy her family. Just as Satan was attempting to “destroy the agency of man” (Moses 4:3), she, too, was attempting to destroy the agency of her daughter.

While most prophetic and academic descriptions of Lucifer's plan indicate that his method was to selfishly force mankind to do right, Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1982) offered an important alternative understanding:

When the Father announced his plan, when he chose Christ as the Redeemer and rejected Lucifer, then there was war in heaven. That war was a war of words; it was a conflict of ideologies; it was a rebellion against God and his laws. Lucifer sought to dethrone God, to sit himself on the divine throne, and to save all men without reference to their works. He sought to deny men their agency so they could not sin. *He offered a mortal life of carnality and sen-*

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suavity, of evil and crime and murder, following which all men would be saved. His offer was a philosophical impossibility. There must needs be an opposition in all things. Unless there are opposites, there is nothing. There can be no light without darkness, no heat without cold, no virtue without vice, no good without evil, no salvation without damnation. (pp. 666–667; italics added)

Elder McConkie proposed that the way in which Lucifer “sought to destroy the agency of man” (Moses 4:3) was to eliminate any distinction between right and wrong, allowing humankind to live in any way that they desired, and that in the end he (Satan) would redeem them (see Moses 4:1). We see the anti-Christ Nehor teaching a similar false doctrine in the Book of Mormon:

And he had gone about among the people, preaching to them that which he termed to be the word of God, bearing down against the church; . . . And he also testified unto the people that *all mankind should be saved at the last day*, and that they need not fear nor tremble, but that they might lift up their heads and rejoice; for the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and, in the end, all men should have eternal life. (Alma 1:3–4; italics added)

Robert J. Matthews, former dean of religious education at Brigham Young University, described Lucifer’s lie and those who believed it in premortality:

It seems strange to me that a third of all the spirits that had the potential to be born into this world would have favored a plan based on forced obedience. Most of us do not like to be forced. As I see it, the real issue was not so much one of force as it was that Lucifer said he would *guarantee* salvation for his spirit brothers and sisters. He promised salvation without excellence, without effort, without hard work, without individual responsibility. That is the lie he promulgated in the preearth councils.

That so-called shortcut to salvation captivated many gullible and lazy spirits. They wanted something for nothing. (Matthews, 1990, p. 272)

Whether Lucifer’s plan was one of authoritarian power, relativistic indulgence, or both, the scriptures plainly teach that he was and is “a liar from the beginning” (D&C 93:25) and that he “will not support his children at the last day, but doth speedily drag them

down to hell” (Alma 30:60). I believe that as therapists we need to be ever on guard for the counterfeits that the adversary attempts to employ to destroy the agency of man—for the war in heaven continues on earth, and the battle for the souls of men continues to rage in countries, communities, and perhaps especially in families.

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Moral Agency and Free Agency

Throughout this paper, I have and will use the words *moral agency* as opposed to *free agency*. My intent in doing so is to honor the subtle and yet profound doctrinal distinction between “moral” agency and “free” agency made by President Boyd K. Packer (1992, p. 67) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “The phrase ‘*free agency*’ does not appear in scripture. The only agency spoken of there is *moral agency*, ‘which,’ the Lord said, ‘I have given unto him, that every man may be *accountable* for his own sins in the day of judgment’” (D&C 101:78; italics added). The phrase *free agency* implies that we are simply making choices between logical alternatives with no regard to moral agency. *Moral agency* implies a choice between right and wrong where agency and morality are intimately connected. President Packer (1992) also stated:

Regardless of how lofty and moral the “pro-choice” argument sounds, it is badly flawed. With that same logic one could argue that all traffic signs and barriers which keep the careless from danger should be pulled down on the theory that each individual must be free to choose how close to the edge he will go. (p. 66)

Those who argue for same-sex marriage, abortion on demand, or a host of other issues are arguing for a free agency where morality plays no part. They want to characterize agency as choosing from alternate lifestyles the one that will best suit their own desires. Such is not the agency given us by God (see 2 Ne. 2:27). The Apostle Paul taught of the relationship of agency and morality as he addressed the Saints in the city of Corinth. After identifying such problems as fornication, adultery, idolatry, homosexuality, theft, drunkenness, abuse, and extortion, he asked, “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and *ye are not your own*? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit,

which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:19–20; italics added). Some of the Corinthian Saints were apparently misusing their newfound Christian liberty, or perhaps a Greek disdain for the physical body was serving as license for them to do with their bodies whatever they pleased. Interestingly, the word *licentiousness* has the same etymological root as the word *license* (Barnhart, 1995, p. 431). Although we hear such things as "It's my body" and "It's my life, I will do as I please," the Lord has clearly taught us that we are not our own and that the only way to truly find meaning and purpose in life is to use our God-given gift of agency to follow him.

The Nature of Man

Another Latter-day Saint doctrine that has important bearing on the exercise of moral agency concerns the nature of man. Many philosophers, theologians, and therapists who come from a traditional Judeo-Christian theology teach that man is born evil and thus has a natural disposition to rebel against what is right (Luther, 1525). Others, mostly intellectual descendants of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, believe that children are born innately good and that if left to themselves without the influence of a corrupt culture they will naturally choose the right (Thomas, 1988, p. 274). Others, often following a more academic tradition, believe a child at birth is a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate that is molded and motivated by his or her environment (see Judd, 1996).

As one compares these three philosophies with Latter-day Saint theology, it becomes apparent that while there may be some truth to them, there are also falsehoods that can lead to the erroneous exercise of agency. For example, if parents believe their child is "born evil," they may be more likely to believe that "beating the devil" out of their child is their God-given responsibility (Aries, 1962, pp. 128–133). Conversely, parents who believe their children are born "good" may be more likely to indulge them, believing that the children will naturally choose that which is good because they are good. Those parents who believe children are "blank slates" may compel them to "be somebody" by overly involving them in activities designed to "make something" of them. Professor David Elkind described this dynamic as "the hurried child" (Elkind, 1981).

A Latter-day Saint Perspective

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord stated that at birth children are not blank slates nor are they good or evil; they are innocent:

Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, *innocent* before God. And that wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through *disobedience*, from the children of men, and because of the *tradition of their fathers*. (D&C 93:38–39; italics added)

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Though complicated by our own sins and the traditions of our fathers, to each of us is given the gift of agency. In the Book of Mormon, we read, “Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other” (2 Ne. 2:16). We are not compelled to be good or evil by an inner disposition to be so, nor are we simply blank slates acted upon by our environment. The scriptures teach that we are “agents unto [our]selves” (D&C 58:28) with the capacity to choose right or wrong. While we become the “natural man” (Mosiah 3:19) through our “disobedience” and “the tradition of [our] fathers” (D&C 93:39), we certainly were not “born that way” (see Alma 42:12).

Counterfeits

In his teachings, the Prophet Joseph Smith described and defined agency as “that free independence of mind which heaven has so graciously bestowed upon the human family as one of its choicest gifts” (J. Smith, 1949, p. 49). While most of us would agree that agency is a gift given by God, it is important to remember that Satan attempts to counterfeit this precious truth. President Joseph F. Smith (1949) stated:

Let it not be forgotten that the evil one has great power in the earth, and that by every possible means he seeks to darken the minds of men, and then offers them falsehood and deception in the guise of truth. *Satan is a skilful imitator*, and as genuine gospel truth is given the world in ever-increasing abundance, so he spreads the counterfeit coin of false doctrine. Beware of his spurious currency, it will purchase for you nothing but disappointment, misery and spiritual death. The “father of lies” he has been called, and

such . . . has he become, through the ages of practice in his nefarious work, that were it possible he would deceive the very elect. (p. 376; italics added)

President Brigham Young taught, “If true principles are revealed from heaven to men, and if there are angels, and there is a possibility of their communicating to the human family, always look for an opposite power, an evil power, to give manifestations also; look out for the counterfeit” (1998, pp. 68–69).

One method I have used over the years to help myself and those I am working with understand truth and counterfeit is to draw diagrams that contrast the various philosophies. An example follows:

Truth	Counterfeit
moral agency	determinism
bounds	indeterminism

Satan’s counterfeit of the doctrine of moral agency is a false philosophy I have labeled “indeterminism.” While I wholeheartedly believe that it is our privilege and responsibility to assist our clients in understanding that they are “free to choose” (2 Ne. 2:27), I also believe we are responsible to help them understand that there are certain limitations to agency as well. We read in the Doctrine and Covenants that “unto every kingdom is given a law; and unto every law there are certain *bounds* also and conditions” (D&C 88:38; italics added). Dallin H. Oaks provided two simple examples of such bounds in a symposium address at Brigham Young University: “In the flesh we are subject to the physical law of gravity. If I should hang from the catwalk in the Marriott Center and release my grip, I would not be free to will myself into a soft landing. And I cannot choose to run through a brick wall” (Oaks, 1989, p. 10).

In the spiritual sense, the Lord has set boundaries he has asked us not to cross, for he knows that if we were to do so we would be in danger of losing our agency and being “under the bondage of sin” (D&C 84:51). The Lord has also taught us that as we follow his will freedom will follow: “Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, 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; italics added). Other bounds are set by our own experience. As much as I might want to play the piano I cannot because I have not learned how and am therefore not free to do so at this time. More serious examples of these bounds are found in the lives of those with whom we work. Most, if not all, of us have worked with individuals who have physical and psychological limitations from which they will not be free until the Resurrection. Our responsibility is to help them be as free as they possibly can while helping them to identify and accept the truth of their limitations. The Lord has told us in the Doctrine and Covenants, “And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come; And whatsoever is more or less than this is the spirit of that wicked one who was a liar from the beginning” (D&C 93:24–25). I believe “The Serenity Prayer,” made popular by the proponents of Alcoholics Anonymous, embodies the same truth: “God, grant me serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference (*“Pass it on,”* 1984, 252, 258n).

For years I have known a woman who fell out of the back of a pickup when she was a child and suffered serious brain trauma. While this good woman is able to care for herself and lives a productive life, she continues to experience serious consequences from her accident. I have been inspired by her example of exercising agency within the limitations imposed on her by her accident. I know from conversations with her that she had therapists early on who, coming from a deterministic perspective, wanted to institutionalize her, judging that she would never be capable of living independently. On the other hand, therapists working from an indeterministic philosophy have made demands upon her that appear to me to be inappropriate based on her limitations. It is my experience that each of us tends to lean one way or the other—we have either bought into the deception of determinism, indeterminism, or both.

False doctrines such as these often come in pairs. Commenting on the strategies of Satan, the British philosopher C.S. Lewis (1960) taught, “He [Satan] always sends errors into the world in pairs—pairs of opposites. And he always encourages us to spend a lot of

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time thinking which is . . . worse. You see why, of course? He relies on your extra dislike of the one error to draw you gradually into the opposite one” (p. 160). Could it be that some of us have taken such a strong stand against determinism that we have fallen into the counterfeit of what I have labeled indeterminism? And others of us may have felt so strongly about the dangers of indeterminism that we have become deterministic in our approach to therapy?

Dogmatism and Relativism

Dogmatism and relativism are another example of a counterfeit pair of opposites that are related to our clinical understanding of the doctrine of agency. Sometimes the terms directive and non-directive therapy are used in the counseling community to describe a therapist’s philosophical approach to assisting clients. A therapist who is directive runs the risk of usurping the client’s agency, while a nondirective clinician may provide no hope or direction for the client because of the therapist’s attempt to be respectful of a client’s right to exercise agency.

Most Latter-day Saint psychotherapists would agree that agency is inextricably connected to morality and that God’s will is central. As therapists, however, we must always be aware of the danger of forcing our will on our clients. Dogmatism is the counterfeit of absolute truth while relativism is the counterfeit of relative truth.

Truth	Counterfeit
absolute truth	dogmatism
relative truth	relativism

A good example of what I am attempting to describe is the Latter-day Saint teachings concerning the sanctity of life. Murder (as opposed to killing) is always wrong, but abortion may be the right moral choice under carefully defined circumstances. President Boyd K. Packer (1990) taught the following:

The scriptures tell us, “Thou shalt not . . . kill, nor do anything like unto it” (D&C 59:6). Except where the wicked crime of incest or rape was involved, or where competent medical authorities

certify that the life of the mother is in jeopardy, or that a severely defective fetus cannot survive birth, abortion is clearly a “thou shalt not.” Even in these very exceptional cases, much sober prayer is required to make the right choice. We face such sobering choices because we are the children of God. (p. 85)

A circumstance where abortion is the moral choice is an example of relative truth because the choice involves a consideration of circumstances. The Prophet Joseph defined relative truth this way:

That which is wrong under one circumstance, may be, and often is, right under another.

God said, “Thou shalt not kill;” at another time He said, “Thou shalt utterly destroy.” This is the principle on which the government of heaven is conducted—by revelation adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed. Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire. (J. Smith, 1949, p. 256)

The major way relative truth differs from the satanic strategy of relativism is that the former (relative truth) places God’s will at the center of the decision, while the latter (relativism) does not.

Salvationism and Humanism

The philosophical relationship of determinism and moral agency has an important parallel found in the history of Christianity. Even though latter-day prophets have taught that reformers such as Martin Luther came as “servant[s] of the Lord to open the way” for the restoration of the fullness of the gospel, there were many doctrines the reformers misunderstood. While Martin Luther was able to articulate many of the failings of the Roman Catholic Church, of which he was an Augustinian priest, he continued to believe and preach the doctrine of the depravity of man. Unlike the traditional Catholics of the day, Luther believed that God’s redemptive grace did not need to be connected to the sacraments of the church but could come to man freely without any kind of works involved. Martin Luther dismissed free will and believed man is powerless to do anything of his own volition to be redeemed from his fallen state (Luther, 1525). The French reformer John Calvin added another dimension to Luther’s teachings by arguing

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that man's salvation was predetermined by God even before birth. It was not until much later that reformers such as John Wesley brought more acceptance of the doctrine of free will. Wesley, the eighteenth-century cofounder of Methodism, stated:

He [mankind] was endued[*sic*] with a will, exerting itself in various affections and passions; and, lastly, with liberty, or freedom of choice; without which all the rest would have been in vain, . . . he would have been as incapable of vice or virtue, as any part of inanimate creation. In these, in the power of self motion, understanding, will, and liberty, the natural image of God consisted. (Wesley, 1852, p. 50)

We have much thanks to give John Wesley and others like him for teaching the doctrine of moral agency, but the virtue of what they taught also became distorted. Though the theological acceptance of individual agency (self-determination) was a major part of what led to the French and American revolutions, it also supported the acceptance of a humanistic philosophy that eventually displaced God and placed man at the center of civilization. Both counterfeits are diagrammed in the following table:

Truth	Counterfeit
grace	salvationism
works	humanism

Latter-day Saint theology in general and the Book of Mormon teachings specifically have clarified the proper relationship between the doctrines of grace and works. While we talk of the importance of exercising our moral agency, we must also be aware that redemption is not something we acquire through our own efforts (see 2 Ne. 2:3 and 2 Ne. 25:23). Most readers are aware of the famous poem "Invictus" by William Ernest Henley, which concludes with the following proud, almost defiant, expression: "I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul" (Henley, 1958, p. 95). Although Henley's poem rings with a certain strength, it could also be considered humanistic in that it underscores man's own hope of extricating himself from his fallen state. In an attempt to show the great

need we have for Christ, Orson F. Whitney, of the Quorum of the Twelve, wrote the following response to “Invictus”:

Art thou in truth?
Then what of him
Who bought thee with his blood?
Who plunged into devouring seas
And snatched thee from the flood?

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Who bore for all our fallen race
What none but him could bear.—
The God who died that man might live,
And endless glory share.

Of what avail thy vaunted strength,
Apart from his vast might?
Pray that his Light may pierce the gloom,
That thou mayest see aright.

Men are as bubbles on the wave,
As leaves upon the tree.
Thou, captain of the soul, forsooth!
Who gave that place to thee?

Free will is thine—free agency,
To wield for right or wrong;
But thou must answer unto him
To whom all souls belong.

Bend to the dust that head “unbowed,”
Small part of Life’s great whole!
And see in him, and him alone,
The Captain of thy soul. (Whitney, 1926, p. 611)

Submission to Christ

The Book of Mormon plainly teaches that without Christ there would be no hope of resurrection or eternal life. In fact, the prophet Jacob explained that without Christ we would “become devils, angels to a devil” (2 Ne. 9:9). I believe that, for therapists’ help to truly be of worth, we must be forerunners to our clients’ coming more fully unto Christ, for it is only in him that we can truly be free.

The Savior taught, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it” (Luke 9:23–24). In the following, C. S. Lewis (1960) provided some explanation of what it means to lose one’s self:

Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favourite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end: submit with every fibre of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will ever be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in. (p. 190)

In addition to eloquently inviting readers to find themselves by submitting to Christ, Lewis (1960) also described the role of Christ in the development of personality:

Our real selves are all waiting for us in Him. . . . The more I resist Him and try to live on my own, the more I become dominated by my own heredity and upbringing and natural desires. . . . It is when I turn to Christ, when I give myself up to His Personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own. (Lewis, 1960, p. 189)

President Ezra Taft Benson (1988) added a latter-day witness of the blessings of submitting our will to God:

Men and women who turn their lives over to God will discover that He can make a lot more out of their lives than they can. He will deepen their joys, expand their vision, quicken their minds, strengthen their muscles, lift their spirits, multiply their blessings, increase their opportunities, comfort their souls, raise up friends, and pour out peace. Whoever will lose his life in the service of God will find eternal life. (p. 361; see also Matt. 10:39)

Conclusion

The debate between the proponents of free will and those of a deterministic view of human behavior will obviously continue. One of my most serious concerns is that the philosophy of determinism is coming to be seen as the more sophisticated of the two perspectives and the arguments for moral agency are being judged as naive. It has been my experience that to be taken seriously in most academic and clinical circles, one must generally accept the postulates of determinism.

What concerns me even more than the apparent consensus in professional circles is that this same “sophistication” seems to be increasing among Latter-day Saints. Perhaps this is one reason it appears that there is a higher-than-average rate of antidepressant consumption among the population of Utah even though the incidence of depression among the Latter-day Saints has been shown to be similar to the general population (Judd, 1999). What I think this consumption rate might be telling us is that an increasing number of Latter-day Saints are coming to see their lives in deterministic ways and are losing their sense of moral agency. They are coming to see their emotional problems as being caused by something over which they have little or no volitional control, much like being diagnosed with diabetes.

While this belief may be good news in some situations where the problems are indeed physical and those who are afflicted can be helped by competent medical assistance, it can be spiritually deadening in others. Some kinds of depression are related to imbalanced biochemistry, and antidepressant medications can be a part of an effective treatment, but hopefully neither we nor our clients will always see our problems in such naturalistic and deterministic ways. Sometimes “despair cometh because of iniquity” (Moro. 10:22) and will be healed only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance of our sins, and baptism, and by responding to the sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost. If people go to their physicians to obtain medication for feelings of despair that have come as a result of sin and never accept the Savior’s invitation to “come unto me” (Matt. 11:28), they are on the wrong road, heading the wrong direction. We need to teach our clients that the possibility exists that

some experiences with depression (and other emotional problems) can be brought about by physical causes alone and they need to accept medical treatment as a blessing from God. Other clients' problems may be tied to both sickness and sin and may require both the physician and the bishop—as well as the help of the Lord—to be overcome.

My intent has been to teach the doctrine of moral agency and to assist the reader in being aware of the various associated counterfeit philosophies. It is my sincere hope that each of us can come to a better understanding of the doctrine of moral agency and not be too quick to enslave ourselves to either a deterministic or indeterministic philosophy when liberation and redemption can be found at the hands of the Master Physician, Jesus Christ.

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