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What Is Required of an LDS Perspective

Richard N. Williams, PhD

I have long had great admiration for the Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists because I think it absolutely crucial in this world that people informed and enlightened by the restored gospel of Jesus Christ stand firm against an increasingly forceful and turbulent secular mainstream. I think it is not only admirable, but crucial to the achievement of our purposes—not only as Latter-day Saints, but as professionals—that we make the gospel central to our intellectual lives and integral to our practices. This is even more important for those of us engaged in a profession that undertakes to recommend or even prescribe to others how to live more effective and meaningful lives, and provide those whom we teach or serve the means to improve their lives. There is no insight nor any understanding comparable to the restored gospel in providing meaning, focus, direction, and value to the enterprise of helping people live meaningfully and effectively, and I admire your courage and effort to stand up for what you believe and ground yourselves and what you do firmly in the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. I appreciate the professional costs often associated with taking a stand in order to be true to and informed by the gospel. I am acquainted with some of those costs, and you are to be commended and admired for standing by what you

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know to be true in spite of them. I am also aware of how important it is for one who takes a firm position, grounding him or herself in the gospel of Jesus Christ, to know that there are others who stand with you. I am sure that this organization provides you invaluable support and fellowship.

It is in this spirit of standing together that I would like to share with you what might be seen, depending on one's perspective, as either a vision or an obsession. The articulation of this vision begins with an observation that I believe to be central to Mormonism and all its claims. It is simply that the truth of Mormonism rests not on philosophical claims, nor on particular interpretations of doctrines, nor even on interpretations of particular scriptural passages. The truth claims of Mormonism rest on events. The founding events of the Restoration are the appearance of the Father and the Son in the Sacred Grove and the appearance of Moroni, of John the Baptist and later, of Peter, James, and John; also included among these events is Joseph Smith's actual receiving a set of metal plates. These are events that either occurred or did not. These precipitating events give to Mormonism the interpretive framework within which we understand scripture and philosophy. We are, as a people, obliged to certain positions and interpretations because of the literal occurrence of these events. This is not to say that interpretation is unimportant, nor even that these founding events are somehow independent of interpretation. It is simply to say that the truth claims of Mormonism do not rest on a merely interpretative foundation.

Related to the radical importance that Latter-day Saints must give these grounding events is the rather literal reading we must give to many scriptures, especially prophetic scriptures. In our contemporary culture, even in Christian circles, it is no longer common to read scriptures very literally. They are, rather, considered to be symbolic and merely metaphorical. Mormons are called to take seriously a more literal reading, however, in view of the events of the Restoration noted above. For example, what are we to do when an angel of God appears and proclaims that an ancient Old Testament prophecy is about to be
fulfilled (Joseph Smith—History, 1:36-41) except take it seriously as a literal prophecy? God, the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, at the time of the first vision took occasion to convey to Joseph Smith that the prophecy expressed in Isaiah 29 was indeed fulfilled. This brings me to the point of introduction to vision I referred to above. There is perhaps no set of scriptural passages closer to the center of our restored religion than those found in Isaiah 29 that deal with the “marvelous work and . . . [the] wonder” that is about to come forth among the children of men (Isaiah 29:13-14). These same passages, included within the message of the first vision are also found in 2 Nephi 27 verses 24-27. In the 2 Nephi version, beginning in verse 24 we read:

And again it shall come to pass that the Lord shall say unto him that shall read the words that shall be delivered him:

Forasmuch as much this people draw near unto me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their hearts far from me, and their fear towards me is taught by the precepts of men—

Therefore I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, yea, a marvelous work and a wonder, for the wisdom of their wise and learned shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent shall be hid. (vss. 24-26)

The next verse, verse 27, talks about the response of the world to this marvelous work and wonder. Here we find the grounding of the vision I am trying to articulate:

And wo unto them that seek deep to hide their counsels from the Lord! [These are, I believe, the people opposed to the Restoration, those whose lives are not informed and animated by the Restoration.] And their works are in the dark; and they say: Who seeth us and who knoweth us? And they also say: Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter’s clay. (Italics added)

Potter’s clay, in scriptural terms is worthless. It seems that from the perspective of those not participating in the Restoration, it (the
Restoration) turns things upside down. From their perspective, surely something that “turns things upside down” is not going to amount to much. It simply cannot be true; it cannot last. This “turning of things upside down” is an image worth contemplating. It is a very powerful metaphor. A turning of things upside down is not a mere course correction. It is no minor adjustment. Turning things upside down is not a process of refining. Certainly, turning things upside down requires more than just adding another dimension to the wisdom of the world. I submit that we must assume that “turning things upside down” does just that; it turns the wisdom of the world on its head.

Obviously, if the opening of the windows of heaven, the renewal of direct communication from God to man turns things upside down, it must surely be the case that things were really “upside down” before and that divine revelation was required to put them “right side up.” However, from the perspective of the doctrines of the world, the precepts men that pervade our culture, the prevailing ideas and perspectives that endow our culture with meaning, the restored gospel of Jesus Christ turns things upside down. There cannot be a much more radical image than that of “turning things upside down,” and, as I will argue below, the need of turning things upside down applies to more than just religious precepts and practices. According to Joseph Smith’s own testimony (Joseph Smith—History 1:19), when he asked which of all the sects he should join,

[He] was answered that [he] must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the personage that addressed [him] said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that “they draw near unto me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness but they deny the power thereof.” (Italics added)

The message to Joseph seems clear. The extant creeds and doctrines were all wrong. The instructions of the Father and the Son to Joseph were not that he should borrow from the various creeds. He
was not to pick and choose from among the “commandments (or precepts) of men.” What was needed was far more radical. No mere reformation would suffice; no eclectic religion could make a claim to truth. We are told in the Doctrine and Covenants (section 135) that the stand which Joseph and Hyrum took on the need for a restoration (and the condition of the world that made such a radical restoration necessary), “cost the best blood of the nineteenth century . . . for the salvation of a ruined world . . .” (vs. 6)—just as the redemption of mankind cost the best blood of all. I am convinced the restoration of the gospel cost the best blood precisely because what Joseph did turned everything upside down. He could not capitulate. He could not form alliances with professors of falsity. What was wrong with the world and with the culture could not be fixed by adjustment and accommodation. It could not be remedied by a reformation, borrowing bits and pieces of this and that to make a merely better and more attractive church. It all had to be turned upside down. We know the reason such a drastic restructuring was required—the great Apostasy.

Shortly after the death of the ancient apostles, the presiding authority and guiding revelation were lost from the earth. Mormons accept without question that theologians and thus religious traditions went wrong somewhere around the third or fourth centuries (or earlier) and that they have continued to be wrong throughout the night of apostasy until the Restoration. We might well ask, however, if while religionists went irrevocably wrong for fourteen hundred years, philosophers stayed on track and stayed right. Or, we might ask if scientists simply went on their own way discovering truth, even though the light of truth had gone out elsewhere. Are we to assume that only religion went wrong while science, philosophy, aesthetics, and moral theory went right (i.e., that only religious truth was compromised)? I submit that the effects of apostasy were not confined merely to religion. Rather, since the Lord proclaimed that what was wrong with the religion of the nineteenth century was that it taught for doctrines the commandments of men, we must assume that those commandments—the philosophies and precepts comprising nineteenth-century theology—
must also be wrong. It follows, then that whatever intellectual or artistic endeavor is based on those same philosophies and precepts, as well as the intellectual foundation on which they rest, must be as wrong as sectarian religion, and for precisely the same reasons. The Apostasy, I believe, occurred from top to bottom, infusing itself into every aspect of culture and every intellectual and aesthetic endeavor. The effects of apostasy are often subtle, not always easily recognized as such. However subtle, manifestations of apostasy are nonetheless apostate. Consequently, because the tentacles of the Apostasy reach into all of tradition, when the Restoration is brought to pass to set things right, that restoration turns upside down not just religious convention, but the whole of the Western intellectual tradition.

The western intellectual tradition has been placed in the hands of the Latter-day Saints. However, I do not think we appreciate the position that we are in. I think we do not fully appreciate the radical nature of the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ and its implications for every facet of our society, and for our intellectual life. We have the opportunity, the means, the foundation, and in my judgment, the motivation to turn it upside down and set it right. We can redeem it, we can save it, we can make something worthy. On the other hand, we can isolate ourselves from it, allowing it to continue to spend itself pursuing the direction the Apostasy set forth. Or, we can even join ourselves to the tradition, aiding it in the pursuit of its own objectives, and by so doing, save neither the tradition nor ourselves. As a social scientist, I am convinced that the contrast between apostate intellectual tradition and the Restoration are nowhere clearer than in the social sciences. In no other endeavor is the need for turning things upside down, and the consequences of failing to do so, more apparent than in the social sciences.

A few years ago when I was a graduate student at Purdue University, a society of woman from a Protestant denomination held their national convention on campus. I thought it would be interesting to see what was going on so I picked up one of their fliers to see what they were talking about and to my surprise, though it should not
surprise us very much, in the list of seminars there were no overtly religious topics. The agenda was filled with seminars and workshops on feminism, consciousness raising, psychopathologies, psychotherapies, and other coping strategies. This brought forcefully home to me that we indeed live in a secularized world, that we live in the “era of psychology.” In our present age, the social sciences are competing for that meaningful space in the lives of our brothers and sisters that used to be occupied by family, church, and other social institutions. In the past, we derived our values, goals, aspirations, and inspiration in large measure from family, and from a foundation of religious belief, but in the contemporary age, increasingly our culture turns to psychology, to therapy, to institutions dominated by natural and social scientists. This intrusion of social science into the moral fiber of our lives is, regrettably in my opinion, taking place even within the Church. A few years ago at BYU, a group of intellectuals organized themselves and issued a sort of proclamation to the effect that (a) LDS bishops might profit from clinical training, and that (b) bishops, as well as the Church, might be very useful in the therapeutic process. The implication was that bishops and the Church might serve as a support system to help people while the real change was produced by therapeutic intervention. It seems that, in the minds of many, it is not the gospel of Jesus Christ that heals; the gospel of Jesus Christ merely supplies us with a support system while the principles and practices of therapy derived from the secular social sciences really make the change. The failure to believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the source of real healing of the human soul is a repudiation of the gospel itself. In my judgment, this must surely be one of those aspects of our modern culture that must be turned upside down.

The Current Intellectual Climate

Before taking up more particularly what it might mean to bring to pass this turning of things upside down, which is intrinsic to the Restoration, it will be helpful to comment briefly on the intellectual and cultural position in which we find ourselves today. We live in an
era in which two incommensurable intellectual traditions are playing themselves out, and at the same time, vying for the loyalty of the children of God. The first tradition, which I will refer to as "metaphysical," or simply as "the tradition" comes rather directly from ancient Greek philosophy and continues forward through the modern apostate period. This tradition forms the foundation of mainstream social science and current therapeutic practice. It holds that reality is grounded in some ultimate abstraction, and that such abstractions in the form of laws, principles, or forces govern all aspects of the world including human behavior. One popular contemporary manifestation of this tradition is naturalism, the view that human beings are fundamentally natural objects, complex ones no doubt, but natural objects nonetheless. It follows, then, that since we are biological organisms, our behavior can be explained in terms of biological conditions, processes, and circumstances. Another legacy of this tradition is the idea that we are fundamentally isolated individuals (organisms) with our own private needs, motives, and underlying structures. Within this tradition all who would attempt to understand human beings and the human condition must assume that our behavior is governed by rather strict principles of determinism and lawfulness. We must understand that human behavior is a complex result of physiological causes and environmental conditions which interact in myriad ways that we have yet to understand.

This intellectual tradition has brought us as social scientists, those persons whom we serve, and, indeed, much of our culture to a view of ourselves where naturalism and determinism prevail. This perspective forms the foundation of our training as social scientists and therapists. It is seldom questioned, and, in our training programs and graduate schools, little time is spent in the criticism of this paradigm. Within this perspective, there is to be found no sophisticated defense of human agency. Indeed, little time is spent in the social sciences in defending or understanding human beings as moral agents. This perspective is so influential that within most social sciences we no longer look at its doctrines as theories or problems; they simply constitute the
reality of the world in which we live and practice. If we follow this tradition to its conceptual end, we arrive at a position of determinism and relativism, and, ultimately, in nihilism. All natural objects are confined to the natural sphere. They do not transcend that sphere, and thus have an end. This naturalistic perspective with its finitude seems contradictory to the promises made in the scriptures of the restoration of continuation, increase, and eternal lives (see, e.g., Doctrine & Covenants, section 132). Furthermore, the actions of natural objects have no intrinsic meaning. When two natural objects come into contact with one another it does not mean anything, at least not to them. Since the actions of natural objects are governed by whatever forces or laws happen to be acting upon them, the actions can be said to be relative to those forces. Thus the end of the naturalistic tradition is relativism and the death of meaning. This nihilism haunts our contemporary intellectual tradition.

The alternative tradition, still emerging in many intellectual fields and consisting of many and varied intellectual positions, is generally referred to as “postmodernism.” Although postmodernism is, as the name implies, a very recent movement, its intellectual roots can be traced back to a number of historical sources. Postmodernists, in their rejection of the modern tradition have little motivation for tracing their intellectual heritage much beyond the middle to early twentieth century, to the work of George Herbert Mead, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Lev Vygotsky, or, even more recently, to Jacques Derrida. Other postmodern thinkers will trace their lineage through Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl, and some will claim descent from the nineteenth-century existentialists, Friedrich Nietzsche, Feyodor

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2A Latter-day Saint might attempt to rescue naturalism by claiming that we really have a spiritual essence in addition to being natural objects. The difficult question for such a position, however, is why we, being spiritual beings act like natural objects while we are in the mortal state. Conversely, we might ask what use it is for us to be spiritual beings if, while in the mortal state, we are doomed to act like—and thus to be—natural objects.
Dostovesky, and Soren Kierkegaard. Postmodernism, in its most general form is a multifaceted movement; however, it is possible to summarize fundamental positions on key issues common to all or most species of postmodernism. Uniting all postmodern positions is a conviction that the tradition has got it extensively wrong. Furthermore, the “getting it wrong” was neither accident nor simple ignorance. Rather, the tradition has got it wrong in a way that privileges itself and sets itself up as the standard of truth and, thus, maintains a position of power vis-à-vis other possible intellectual positions and human beings at large.

Postmodernism essentially defines itself in opposition to the most fundamental and defining tenets of the modernist tradition. The metaphysical realities posited by the modern tradition, and the lawfulness by which they operate are seen to be myths—stories formulated for any number of purposes. Similarly, the type of certainty held by the modern tradition as the standard for all knowledge is taken to be impossible to obtain. Claims of certainty are to be regarded with skepticism or rejected as the attempts of some people and cultures to maintain positions of power over others, since knowledge is power—or at least, is taken to be power. Since the metaphysical reality posited by modernism is now profoundly problematic, and certain knowledge is impossible, the determinism that was assumed to hold sway in nature and among people is called into question. The common deterministic models have, in the minds of postmoderns, failed. Metaphysical realities, certainties, absolutes, and determinisms are best understood as myths. The reality is, rather, that human beings themselves create their lives, and thus create the meaning of their lives as well. In a very real sense they also create the world in which they live. In this world, since it is created by human beings, there is

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There is some irony that the idea that knowledge is power is, of course, a notion derived from within the modernist tradition in the first place. Perhaps some postmodernisms are not as radically antimodern as they take themselves to be.
no certainty, there are no absolute truths that transcend the purely human. There is no absolute grounding for anything. We are very much on our own insofar as life and meaning are concerned. For all its late-twentieth century trappings, these fundamental positions of postmodernism seem like echoes of ancient Athenian Sophists: Of all things man is the measure.

As social scientists we may directly encounter this kind of postmodern thinking either in our scholarly work or in the practices of practitioners. Furthermore, these days, it hovers underneath the surface of most intellectual discussions and cultural practices. This postmodern sentiment is certainly found in most species of existentialism, in all varieties of the social constructionist movement, and in most feminist positions, as well as other kinds of structuralism. Within most varieties of postmodern thinking, and particularly within the varieties that have found their way into our culture and practices, relativism is inevitable. This relativism tends rather directly and quickly toward a nihilism. In a postmodern regime of the type described here, it really does not matter what one does because each of us must construct his or her own reality. Even though these realities are constructed within what are often referred to as “local moral orders,” with the help of others with whom we share a cultural and linguistic heritage, there is still essentially no way to argue for one meaning or morality over another because there are no standards for truth and no guarantees of certainty that transcend our human discourse and local moral orders. So, lacking transcendent standards and authority, it appears

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1 It should be acknowledged here that many thinkers who have been influential in the global movement toward postmodernism have not intended nor wanted to end up in relativism and that, furthermore, they have attempted to do the difficult intellectual work to show how it is possible to escape such relativism. Such figures include those who have been perhaps most influential in the founding of the postmodern turn in intellectual life, such as Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and Emmanuel Leavens. There is considerable irony here. The original thinkers, it seems, are wiser than their impressionable adherents.
that our fundamental approach to each other and to claims of truth and morality is, or should be, simply to “lighten up.”

Now, on the surface, this might seem to be an eminently reasonable and useful therapeutic tool. Within most systems of psychotherapy it would seem like a good thing to be able to encourage clients to lighten up and to understand that the moral conflicts and crises they are experiencing can be laid aside, because in some ultimate sense, “it doesn’t matter.” It is especially comforting to be able to say this for those who feel themselves supported by cutting-edge thinking in the social sciences. However, the obvious problem incumbent in this seemingly liberating position is this: while it may seem very illuminating and liberating to let clients and students know that certain things that afflict them do not matter, if we start to pursue the question of why any particular things do not matter, we are led to conclude that they do not matter because there are no external standards against which to judge whether they should matter. Furthermore, there can be no certainty about the standards nor about any analysis that might reveal reasons for which certain things matter. The net result of this is that, once started down this commonly articulated postmodern line of analysis, we will have a very difficult time making the case that while some things that trouble us or our clients do not matter, other things do, in fact, matter. Postmodern relativism lays out before us a very slippery slope indeed. At the bottom of the slope—and it is really a very short trip—lie only relativism and, ultimately, nihilism. The final result of all this is that nothing means anything outside of ourselves and those with whom we share a social discourse, because human acts and their meanings, including the discourse of meaning itself, are purely human creations.

The Contemporary Predicament

The contemporary intellectual situation, in the social sciences and in the broader culture, is that we have two incommensurable intellectual traditions—modernism and postmodernism—vying for our respect and allegiance. Both present themselves as fundamental
accounts of the world and our humanity. We can, it seems, give ourselves over to either of these positions—although postmodernism seems currently to be the ascendant position. It is important to note in this connection that because of the defining characteristics of these two positions, they present themselves as the “only two games in town.” There are no viable alternative positions on the intellectual and cultural scene. In a very real sense, it is as if “we’ve gone about as far as we can go.” These two positions have, I believe, defined and refined themselves such that they have extended themselves to the limits—they are playing themselves out. No future substantive modifications of these positions are possible. Two thousand years of intellectual history, it seems, has been enough to extend our line of thought to its ultimate and inevitable implications. We must ask ourselves, therefore, what are the consequences of locating ourselves within the modern-postmodern dilemma? What are the consequences to ourselves and to our humanity of accepting as legitimate our current intellectual predicament? It is apparent, from all I have gleaned from my study of the western intellectual tradition, that the consequences of both modernism and postmodernism, the end toward which we are inevitably drawn in either case is relativism, and ultimately, nihilism.

This predicament—that nihilism awaits us whatever our intellectual commitment in the current intellectual climate—is extremely destructive to us, not only as human beings, but more importantly, as children of God. I submit based on my own experience and study, that there is nothing more essential to the work and mission of the adversary than to convince the children of God that a nothingness lies at the bottom of their lives and relationships, and that, therefore, their acts have no real moral meaning. In such a world, there can still be “religion,” but its role is to help us feel better in the face of the ultimate meaninglessness of life, to give us a an entirely subjective sense of well being and worth. Such a religion is not only harmless because it has no power to save, since there can be no salvation from nihilism, but it may even make people more content within the relativistic and
nihilistic world in which they live—they may be comfortable enough never to break free. Indeed, one’s religious faith may be worn as a badge of real courage within an essentially nihilistic world—a world of uncertainty and inevitable doubt. Such, it seems, is the never-ending self-appointed mission of Latter-day Saint intellectuals—to show the happy though slightly weary face of faith while proudly assuring all that their doubts run as deep and are as sophisticated as those of any contemporary nihilist.

Most Latter-day Saints would, when given a clear and direct choice, vehemently reject relativism and nihilism, and deny that they are our the ultimate grounds or the end of our humanity. However, too many Latter-day Saints, I fear, accept either or both the modern and postmodern intellectual positions unquestioningly, most often not recognizing the nihilism at their core. For these Saints, their religion becomes privatized. Since the intellectual traditions are taken as true, our religion must accommodate itself to them. Thus without our consciously deciding as much, our religion becomes a means of allowing us to live as successfully and happily as possible among the intellectual traditions, accepting their understanding of us. Since the relativism and nihilism that are the necessary legacy of these traditions haunt their fringes, they show themselves to us from time to time—often when our intellectual guard is down and we come face to face with life and meaning in their most primitive forms. What other purpose can our privatized religion serve at these moments than to help us cope with the vague fear and emptiness we sense?

But Latter-day Saints should understand their religion in much richer terms. If we believe that the restored gospel is true, then we must know that it does not help us cope with nihilism; rather, it dissipates it. The restored gospel is not given to help us cope with darkness, but to bring light to our lives. In the terms I am developing here, the restored gospel does not adapt itself to our intellectual traditions; it must supplant them and provide an alternative and correct understanding of the human situation.
Accepting the relativism and nihilism that pervade modernism and postmodernism not only destroys what we might call “the meaning of life,” and obviates any genuine morality—since we cannot be confident in making moral judgments; it also makes it impossible for us to form genuinely intimate relations with each other. In a deterministic world where human actions arise necessarily from a naturalistic substrate, our relations with each other are mediated by causal forces of various sorts. If our love for one another—our most intimate affiliation—is necessitated by or vulnerable to things outside of us, then it is no more meaningful than the activities of natural objects. In short, if we have no choice in our relations and feelings, they cannot retain their meaning. Furthermore, if our intimate relations are produced by determining forces beyond ourselves, they are perpetually vulnerable to such forces. Fidelity is always fragile. It is always a difficult and understandably unlikely product. In a postmodern relativistic world, the arbitrariness of all human actions also attaches itself to human intimacy. Our intimate relations are products of local moral orders, but there is nothing beyond ourselves and our social groups to sustain those relationships or to ground fidelity. Since meanings are constructed, the very real possibility of losing the intimacy we have constructed, or constructing intimacy in other contexts, haunts any and all relationships.

Nothing is so fragile as a human construction. If our morality and our relationships are such constructions, they are fragile indeed. Perhaps the most destructive result of the modern and postmodern intellectual traditions is the erosion of the possibility of human intimacy. Nothing will drive us farther apart from one another than this loss of the possibility of genuine intimacy. Nothing will isolate us more. This alienation is the spirit of our times. Relationships are seen, in principle, as difficult to achieve; true intimacy is virtually impossible. The spiritual consequences of all this are devastating. Nothing will allow Satan to “pick us off” more easily than our belief that we are innately and radically isolated from one another. The destruction of intimacy is the prelude to the destruction of the soul. The naturalism and relativism of our intellectual tradition is the seedbed of our own destruction.
The Way Out of the Contemporary Predicament

The prospects of the contemporary intellectual situation are not good. I am convinced that from within our culture, the two positions I have outlined here—the modernist tradition and its postmodern alternatives—are the only two options open to it. I believe that the best thinkers in the traditions have succeeded in pushing our intellectual positions as far as they can be pushed, and it is clear where they lead. We can have the relativism and nihilism that result from traditional metaphysical positions, or the relativism and nihilism that result from postmodernism. This is not a good choice, nor, really, a genuine one, but it is the one this generation faces. While I believe that it is always risky to seriously suggest that any age has come to a dead end—that, in the words of Rogers and Hammerstein, “We’ve gone about as far as we can go,” I believe in this instance we have taken our intellectual traditions to their rational and reasonable ends. The issues and possibilities within the traditions are not so complex and subtle as to obviate doing so. Traditional metaphysics and its postmodern alternatives are, I believe, about to play themselves out with no alternative in sight, and this because neither position admits any alternative position that offers a convincing alternative to them and their fundamental suppositions. So, even though it may be risky to proclaim that we have reached the end of our development in the technological sphere, I believe it is altogether possible to reach the end of human advancement in the moral sphere, and that we have done so. Certainly, if we believe in truth, particularly if the source of truth is a living God, it is necessary to believe that, lacking truth, attempts to understand or establish morality must come to an end.

It seems no coincidence, therefore, that the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ occurred when it did, in the century that saw the apotheosis of the metaphysical tradition and its most comprehensive exemplar—Newtonian physics—and the beginnings of the postmodern alternatives. In the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, we have within our grasp the one alternative that I am convinced will allow the world to escape the nihilism that currently haunts the fringes and hov-
ers around the edges of all human endeavor. We have within our grasp
the foundation for a psychology that will respond to the fundamental
and important questions of our humanity. We have been given the gift
of the Restoration, which certainly provides us the means and should
provide us the motivation to redeem and to remake the western intel-
lectual tradition and make of it something worthy of the children of
God. I am afraid, however, that we do not recognize the power and
implications of the gift we have been given. In his book *A Marvelous
Work and a Wonder*, Elder LeGrand Richards (1976) quotes Orson
Whitney, who recounted a conversation with a “learned” member of
the Catholic faith. This learned man said “You Mormons are all igno-
ramuses. You don’t even know the strength of your own position” (p.
3). This, I believe, true in the religious sphere. It is also true in the
intellectual sphere.

Given the restoration of the profound truth of the gospel in these
latter days, it seems that LDS social scientists and intellectuals are in
the position of “starving to death” while sitting on a proverbial gold
mine. Everything we need to overcome the effects of the Apostasy in
the intellectual as well as in the religious world is in place, but we
must have the courage to use it. It takes our best and most rigorous
work to see how the Restoration overthrows the fourteen hundred
years of apostasy and provides escape from the nihilism that threat-
en our entire culture. In the earlier days of the Church, I think the
challenge for LDS scholars and social scientists was to gain legitima-
cy within a scholarly world generally inimical to Mormonism, if not
to religion in general. We have, for decades, tried to find some space
within the scholarly fields where the world will allow us to do the
kinds of things we want to do, some of which were stylistically, if not
substantively, at odds with current ideas and practices. This has been
an important matter and a necessary course to pursue. However, the
next step for us, rather than fighting for space within the dominant
intellectual and cultural project, to gain acceptance of our peculiarities,
is to lead out, to overthrow and remake the dominant intellec-
tual and cultural project to bring it into conformity with modern
revealed truth. Rather than fighting for the world’s permission to do our brand of what they do, we must show the world what they should do. This is important not only for the advancement of the ends of the Restoration, but for the salvation of the world as a whole. We have available to us precisely what it takes to reform the whole Western intellectual tradition. To do otherwise is to relegate the world, our brothers and sisters, to the nihilism and emptiness that follows from the current traditions.

This grand undoing and redoing will take the best efforts of all of us. It will require of us the most rigorous thinking, the most careful research. It will demand the most diligent, sustained, and intimate involvement in our scholarly, professional, and personal lives. It will require our best spiritual efforts and energies, and perhaps a new level of moral commitment and virtue. In short, it is going to require all that we have to give it. But this is nothing new to Latter-day Saints. It requires nothing more than what we have already consecrated to the kingdom of God in the latter days. In addition to effort, however, I am convinced that this project will require a new mindset. We will need to understand and believe that the restored gospel, in its fullness, really does turn things upside down. It does not compete for space in the established traditions of our culture; rather, it overthrows them, remakes them, and, if possible, redeems them.

But the redemption of ideas, like the redemption of men and women, requires radical and irreversible changes. Traditions, like people, cannot be saved in their sins; they must be saved from them. The faith of every convert to the restored gospel must be that it will make him or her not only different, but better. Similarly, we must have faith that bringing the Restoration to the intellectual world and to our culture will result not just in something different, but something better. Pursuing this project will not make us mere crackpots and cranks, but leaders among the clear thinking, among the best and brightest in our cultures who are also honest in heart.

It is essential in this project of reclaiming the tradition and escaping the nihilism of our age that we keep clearly in mind that we will be
in a position to do truly fine work—to excel—only and precisely to the extent that we take the restored gospel seriously and allow it to inform the whole of our work. We will never, and should never, gain prominence in the intellectual and helping professions by honoring and pursuing the traditions and categories of endeavor given to us by these traditions. The temptation is to follow what is currently in vogue in psychology, a sort of eclecticism where we ostensibly try to discern and borrow what we consider to be the best truths out of all traditions. We must be wary of this eclecticism for at least two reasons. First, it is not at all clear under heavy scrutiny that the traditions have much truth to offer. How could they if they lead to relativism and nihilism? Secondly, we need to be very careful about how we handle the notion of truth, not only in our religion, but particularly in the secular world. A computer search of the scriptures reveals that the phrase “secular truth” never occurs in scripture. The word “truths” in the plural appears in scripture only referring to the contents of a previous revelation from the Lord to a person. Given this, I believe we need to challenge the idea—an article of faith in the social sciences—that there are secular “truths” out there in our traditions that we can harvest for our own use. If there were such truths, it would not be necessary to “turn the world upside down” as Isaiah 29 suggests; a simple reformation—a borrowing of bits and pieces of already existing philosophies—would suffice.

Latter-day Saints, as well as nonmember social scientists—especially, perhaps, those in the helping professions—are drawn to eclectic strategies, largely because they appear to “work.” They seem to produce good results. That certain ideas and practices seem to “work” is a completely unimpressive finding. Given what help a loving Father is willing to shed forth upon all of his needy children, and given our considerable human creativity manifest in even the darkest periods of apostasy, it is expected that many human inventions will do what they are designed to do, and that clever people will be relatively clever even when uninspired. Even Satan quite often gets results. He may be perverse but he is hardly stupid. However, the fact that ideas and practices “work” makes them neither true nor moral, since whether or not
they work is always judged by standards erected within the traditions in which they develop. Apostate practices “work” within the criteria provided by apostate standards. We can be entirely confident that ideas and therapeutic practices founded on revealed truth, no matter how unpopular they may be, will work infinitely better than other kinds of therapies not so grounded. And the brightest of the honest in heart will recognize it and come to us to be taught, or join with us to be taught of God (Isaiah 2: 2-3). The cure for our feeble and weary traditions must not be diluted by the very things that infected them in the first place.

What Is Entailed in an “LDS” Perspective?

I will submit at this point that there is no intellectual project more worthy than the overthrow (turning things upside down) and subsequent redemption of the western intellectual tradition and supplanting it with ideas, principles, and practices grounded immovably in the restored gospel. If this grand project is to succeed in the social sciences, as it must, I believe in every field of intellectual endeavor, a necessary early step will be to be clear about just what an “LDS perspective” on psychology is. This is a question more often raised and rallied around than carefully and rigorously examined. Sometimes an LDS perspective on psychology is defined as anything good LDS psychologists do. Some appear to believe that bringing the gospel to their practices or to their intellectual endeavors is a process problem—that is, a question of how they comport themselves. This position, unfortunately, is prone to degenerate into doing for the world nicely and spiritually precisely what the world wants and expects from within the problematic perspectives of their tradition. However, if there is merit to the analysis offered here, bringing the restored gospel to psychology is not simply a process problem, although we are certainly required to be good and to be spiritual whatever we do. Nonetheless, bringing the gospel to psychology or to therapeutic practice is not a “how question,” it is fundamentally a “what question.” What is it that we have received from the restored gospel that enables us to be free of our tra-
ditions and practices and bring to the world what is required for its redemption? Truth revealed in the Restoration and infused into our theories, models, and practices in ways that remake them is the heart of any worthy LDS perspective. Failure to reformulate the content of the discipline and the profession will consign us and those we serve to the relativism and nihilism that are the ends toward which extant alternatives move. At this crucial time in history, it must certainly be one or the other, the gospel or the tradition.

In pursuing this project we must be sure that we do not use the tradition that needs redemption as a measuring rod for the perspective we formulate based on restored truth, nor for the restored gospel itself. The temptation is great for many to use the critical tools provided them in their academic training on the Church. The irony is that while most Latter-day Saint academics and intellectuals would never think of joining a church whose roots are in the apostate period, they seem not at all troubled in using the intellectual tools as well as the philosophies, sciences, and aesthetics of the apostate period to criticize or judge the Church. How often do we as trained academics and professionals turn our critical powers on the (apostate) intellectual traditions of our day? How often are we as critical of our own training as we are inclined to be of the Church or its leaders? Hugh Nibley (1952, p. 154-155) summed up the predicament of many LDS academics thus:

Excuse me if I seem recalcitrant, but I find it odd that the one skill most appreciated and rewarded in those circles where one hears everlastingly of “the inquiring mind” and the importance of “finding out for one’s self” is the gift and power of taking things for granted. Even our Latter-day Saint intellectuals are convinced that the way to impress the Gentiles is not to acquire a mastery of their critical tools . . . but simply to defer in all things to their opinions.

If we are to accomplish the task I am sketching out, we need to think profoundly on the conceptual content essential to an LDS perspective. The further step will be to do the difficult conceptual work
to establish the intellectual legitimacy of this perspective. If we believe the restored gospel to be true, then we need the courage of our convictions. Truth provides a firmer foundation for theory and practice than does error. Its advantages will be demonstrable if we are good enough and rigorous enough in our work, and if we have the courage to follow our convictions. To believe otherwise is to find ourselves in the rather odd position of telling the Lord that we agree with his position, but that his argument is really very weak.

Scholarship and practice among Latter-day Saints should be more profound and effective than that available anywhere else in the world. However, this can come about only if we take seriously the Restoration and its profound implications. We can accomplish this great good in the healing professions and in the scholarly world only because of the Restoration, not in spite of it. If we are to live up to our privileges as Latter-day Saints, we do not have the luxury of merely doing the same things the world does, while adding our own stylistic flourish. We must remake the intellectual and professional discourse. To do less is to lose our heritage. By way of beginning the discourse that will hopefully result in the remaking of the tradition, I will suggest a few things, by no means an exhaustive list, that I believe to be fundamental to an LDS perspective.

_God, our Father lives and Jesus is the Christ._ The calling of every Christian is to stand as a witness for and of Christ (see Mosiah 18:9). This obligation to witness extends to all areas of our lives, including the scholarly and the professional. It is distinctly out of vogue in the modern world to “bring religion into” scholarship or other public pursuits. This is part of the privatization of religion in our culture. However, it must be kept clearly in mind that religion was dropped from scholarly discourse not because theories and perspectives invoking God as essential in the nature of phenomena and in their explanation were falsified. Rather, God was dropped from such discourse because he became unpopular. It is axiomatic in contemporary scholarly training that God is to be excluded from intellectual discourse and from professional practice. If we are to be true to the
Restoration, Latter-day Saints must transcend their training. There may be certain scholarly fields in which theories that do not include God as a real and active force in the world may function adequately, though certainly not optimally. This may be particularly true in purely technical fields. It is most certainly a grave mistake to model the human sciences and the healing professions on such technical fields. The goal of such a technologically oriented conception of psychological scholarship and therapy can only be the “management of the creature” (Alma 30: 17) and other related ideas. I do not believe we have the luxury in the social sciences and the helping professions of excluding God and his purposes, or other revealed truth, from our theories and practices.

We have been taught to pursue theoretical explanations of human behavior that “work” whether or not God exists. However, understandings of human beings and interpretations of their problems and the source of their pain that do not include God are irreconcilably different from explanations that include God. Our task is not to invoke our religion to avoid doing good scholarship, but rather to take our restored religion seriously enough to do the difficult work that will allow the superiority of scholarship grounded in restored truth to become evident. Then we must do the difficult work of being able to “tell the scholarly tale” in language that will be intellectually credible and accessible to those whom we teach and serve who are not able or willing to understand themselves and the world in religious terms. In other words, we must be able to tell the truth in effective languages, some of which may not be overtly religious but all of which must be true. We must be multilingual in the expression of gospel truths, not because there is truth in all theories and these theories must be incorporated, but because truth must be spoken in languages people can understand. This can never be accomplished, I submit, if we continue to give our allegiance to theories and perspectives that are neutral with

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1 I am indebted here to Brent Slife, my colleague at BYU, for his insight into this issue.
regard to the question of the reality of God and his Christ. In the words of C. S. Lewis (1980, p. 25):

There is no question of a compromise between the claims of God and the claims of culture, or politics, or anything else [including psychology]. God’s claim is infinite and inexorable. You can refuse it, or you can begin to try to grant it. There is no middle way. (Insertion added.)

**Human agency.** The scriptures are clear that human beings are fundamentally and incontrovertibly moral agents. I believe there is little room for debate among Latter-day Saints on this issue. We have moral accountability, and it is God’s plan that we be put in positions to exercise our agency. This, according to modern scripture, was something worth fighting for in our premortal life. Anything that was important enough to result in many of our brothers and sisters being consigned to outer darkness is an important issue—one worth fighting for in mortality. And yet, the teachings, traditions, theories, and philosophies of contemporary social science have almost no place for agency. Some may disagree with this, but this disagreement should serve as the foundation of lively and penetrating scholarly discourse among the community of LDS social scientists. There are some “marginal” perspectives that respect human agency; however, the overwhelming majority of positions either ignore it, dismiss it, or define it out of existence. I often ask students to consider as evidence of this the number of social science textbooks that have chapters on human agency and its importance, or the number of lectures they hear in either their undergraduate curriculum or their graduate training about the fundamental importance of human agency in understanding human behavior. It is more often argued that agency must be left out of psychology because it cannot be sustained as a social science if human beings are agents. Any enterprise that can only be maintained at the expense of human agency does not deserve to survive.

It must be clear that there is much work to be done among us regarding the topic of agency and that various understandings are pos-
sible; all that do not result in the mutilation or annihilation of genuine moral agency are worthy of consideration. Latter-day Saints should be among the leaders in the world in the investigation and defense of human agency. Nothing will frustrate Heavenly Father’s plan more quickly and easily than for people to cease to see themselves as agents, or—having started on that path—to genuinely cease to be such. On earth, as in the premortal world, there can be no compromise on the question on human agency. If contemporary social science theory does not honor it, embrace it, and defend it, then such theory must be rejected, and something true must be put in its place.

There is a war on. I believe it is necessary for any LDS perspective on human being and behavior to understanding that there is a war going on. This is a war for the souls of the children of God. We are told in the Doctrine and Covenants that “Satan maketh war on the saints of God and he encompasseth them round about” (D&C 76:29). The mortal condition is that we are born into a war that predates us, a war that will be around after most of us are gone. For psychology and the helping professions, this means that good and evil are fundamental categories by which the things of the world and our own lives are to be understood and judged. Furthermore, there are sources as well as forces of evil. Any life not lived enlightened by a knowledge of the reality of good and evil and the consummate importance of eschewing the latter and embracing the former is not only dangerous, but unfulfilling.

This is war time. C. S. Lewis (1980) in his essay entitled “Learning in War Time,” uses the metaphor of war time in a powerful way. For purposes on this essay, I have substituted “Latter-day Saint” where Lewis used the broader term “Christian.”

If all the world were [Latter-day Saint], it might not matter if all the world were uneducated. But, as it is, a cultural life will exist outside the Church whether it exists inside or not. To be ignorant and simple now—not to be able to meet the enemies on their own ground—would be to throw down our weapons and to betray our uneducated brethren who have under God no defence but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen. Good philosophy
must exist if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered. The cool intellect must work not only against cool intellect on the other side, but against the muddy heathen mysticisms which deny intellect altogether (p. 28).

The LDS scholar has a special role to play in defense of his brothers and sisters in this time of war. He or she can be and should be, to use Lewis’ phrasing “... immune from the great cataract of nonsense ...” that we encounter in the culture and scholarship of our day (p. 29).

In a time of war we cannot conduct business as usual with a world so influenced by the adversary of our souls. Neither can we legitimately conclude an individual peace with the scholarly world. To fail to see the human condition in terms of the darkness and nihilism that are the spoils as well as the cause of the war waged by the adversary is to fail to understand it all together. To bring this insight to the world is a formidable challenge, but war time calls for deeds of heroic proportion.

Human life and human action are fundamentally and essentially moral. Human beings are constitutively moral agents. We have been sent here to accomplish what are fundamentally moral purposes. We find ourselves engaged in a war that has morality at its core. Any perspective on human life and behavior, or any approach to psychological scholarship and practice that fails to recognize the fundamental moral nature of human beings and their behaviors cannot hope to yield truth or genuine healing. Any perspective that attempts assiduously to keep moral issues and considerations out of its theories and practices is, in my judgment, inconsistent with any LDS perspective. Certainly the dominant perspectives in contemporary social sciences do not take up the question of morality, in any fundamental way, relegating it to philosophy or to theology because it is not a properly scientific question. “The moral” has been replaced by “the political,” in a monotonous parade of discourses on rights, diversity, and tolerance, promulgated by the political agenda of any number of movements.

The lack of concern with the moral is also evidenced by the short shrift given to morality in texts, curricula, and training in the social
sciences. In spite of the presumptively unscientific character of moral issues morality, because it is at the heart of human nature and human action, cannot be left out of theory and practice. Certainly any psychology enlightened by the Restoration must shoulder the obligation to legitimate moral questions within the domain of the social sciences and to develop theories and practices with the power to persuade right thinking people of the truth and value of the resulting new perspective. To do otherwise is to poorly serve not only the Restoration, but our clientele.

For good reason, contemporary theories and cultural practices have avoided moral issues. The metaphysical intellectual tradition and its postmodern alternatives have spawned any number of theories, each of which end in relativism and nihilism. Such perspectives thus have nothing important nor cogent to say about morality. To the extent that contemporary scholars sense, even at a tacit level, that their tradition ends in such relativism and nihilism, they will be unprepared and therefore reluctant to contribute to any moral discourse. This, of course, has not stopped many of our contemporaries from elevating amorality and facile moral neutrality to the level of moral theory. This, however, is at best resignation born of ennui, and at worst, pretension, hubris, or self-justification.

If human beings are from the beginning moral agents and if we live in a fundamentally moral world such that all important human activities are essentially moral, then any social scientific theory and any therapeutic practice that does not recognize the incontrovertibly moral character of human behaviors and seek to understand life from a moral foundation is entirely irrelevant to the human condition, and need not concern us as Latter-day Saints. More than this, we should not waste our time pursuing psychological understandings devoid of moral groundings or engaging in a professional practice in which morality plays no important role.

Our brothers and sisters are increasingly turning to the social sciences and the healing arts for help. If they are truly moral beings engaged inevitably in moral actions, and we fail to meet them on moral
grounds, we have nothing to offer them. This is not to say that all LDS scholars and practitioners will immediately agree as to the nature of morality; however, the intellectual and moral discourse on this very issue is of supreme importance. We must undertake it in earnest.

We need to do all within our power to persuade our disciplines and our governing accrediting bodies to let go of the ill-fated, and in my mind, incoherent doctrine that moral issues have no place in scholarship or in psychotherapy. We must, I believe, prosecute this struggle individually and as a group. In those places and programs where we as Latter-day Saints have control of our training programs, we must lead out in the dissolution of the incoherent separation of the psychological and the moral. Accrediting bodies whose depth of moral insight runs only so deep as to codify periods of time required between termination of therapy and illicit sexual relations between therapists and clients, have nothing to teach us about moral issues. In regard to the excluding of morality from psychological scholarship and practice, I am convinced that the emperor really has no clothes; furthermore (the dangers of mixed metaphors aside), he has feet of clay. He will topple with very little effort. When we work with the children of God, moral agents in a moral world besieged by clear and present moral dangers, we are working on sacred ground. This must be the perspective of an LDS psychologist.

Once Again We Come to the Restoration

I come again to the central question of this essay. The great intellectual movements of our day, traditional metaphysical positions and their postmodern alternatives are playing themselves out. In the social sciences (or, having spawned the social sciences), they lead inexorably to relativism and to nihilism. These are the intellectual choices offered by our tradition. These traditions are sophisticated enough that they have cogently shown that there are, within the traditions themselves, no other alternatives. The restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the latter days provides the alternative that not only reestablishes the true church upon the earth and offers salvation once again to the chil-
dren of God; it also affords us the opportunity and provides the intellectual perspectives required to remake the entire intellectual tradition. It is the only alternative with the promise of light and truth. The only question that remains is whether we have the courage and rigor to pursue this “radical” course. The alternative is to remain intellectually and culturally ensconced in the Apostasy, and to fail the Restoration and those who gave so much to give it life and nourishment.

I submit that the choice is clear. In my judgment, and from my study of the foundations of social science and culture, there is no position of compromise. No integration is possible between a perspective true to the restored gospel and the prevailing perspectives rooted in apostate understandings. We find ourselves, I believe in a position not unlike that of Joshua when speaking to his people:

Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord.

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. (Joshua 24:14-15)

The intellectual predicament of our day requires that we ask ourselves the question put to the people by Elijah when confronted by the priests of Baal:

... How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God follow him; but if Baal, then follow him. And the people were silent. (1 Kings 18:21)

The western intellectual tradition, born in periods of apostasy, malnourished for lack of truth, and pallid from lack of light is our legacy from that part of our culture that has its origins in the period of the great Apostasy. This dispensation will witness the culmination of the tradition. We can redeem it, we can let it play itself out and try to hold
ourselves apart and remain unscathed, or we can even adopt it as our own philosophy of life and promulgate it among our brothers and sisters. Or, we can be true to the Restoration, that part of our legacy not rooted in apostasy. In the Restoration lies the remedy for the malaise of meaning and morality that afflicts our contemporary culture.

The Restoration is the pivotal event of modernity. Apostle Orson Hyde expressed his vision of the Restoration and its potential in the preface to a book he wrote and published in Germany (*History of the Church*, Vol. 4, pp. 373-374):

> When in the course of divine Providence it becomes our duty to record one of those remarkable events which gives birth to a new era and lays the foundation for the renovation of the moral world, it fills the mind with wonder, astonishment, and admiration. How welcome are the rays of the morning light after the shades of darkness have clothed the earth in gloom! So after a long and tedious night of moral darkness under which the earth has rolled and her inhabitants groaned for the last fourteen hundred years, an angel commissioned from the Almighty descended and rolled back the curtains of night from the minds of some and caused the sunbeams of truth to enlighten, cheer, and warm the hearts of many. Welcome, welcome to our earth thou messenger of the Most High! and thrice welcome the tidings which thou hast borne!

The challenge and duty of Latter-day Saints is to bring this message to the world in our scholarship and in our practice. Turning the world upside down will require our best thinking, our most rigorous scholarship, and our most faithful courage.

**References**

