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Introduction and Overview

Begin with the assumption that any scholarly study of history must exclude all forms of supernatural phenomena. Only facts established by scientific inquiry may be accepted as evidence for or against any historical interpretation, and claims of the supernatural must be interpreted in strictly naturalistic terms. By extension, historical sources that imply the acceptance of supernatural phenomena must be rejected. Now examine the origin of the Book of Mormon.

This rigid positivism, the acceptance only of that which natural sciences can demonstrate, is the starting point of Robert Anderson’s psychoanalytic interpretation of the Book of Mormon and its relationship to the life of Joseph Smith. In contrast to the supernatural claims of the book’s adherents, he offers the “science” of “applied psychoanalysis” (pp. xxix–xxx), the use of psychoanalytic principles to study groups, individuals, and “creative works” (p. xi). He explains at the outset that his own perspective in writing this work is “explicitly naturalistic” (p. xiii). “This book,” he tells us, “is not about ‘Did Joseph

I thank Marilyn A. Roubidoux, M.D., and Kathleen A. Diehl, M.S.W., for their helpful and insightful comments in reviewing this manuscript.

Smith create the Book of Mormon?' but 'How did Joseph Smith create the Book of Mormon'” (p. xxvi). That is not quite true; much of Anderson's book is focused on why we should accept a naturalistic, nonspiritual origin for the Book of Mormon or, rather, on why we should reject Joseph Smith as a legitimate spiritual guide. Interestingly, in his discussion of the psychoanalytic method to be used, he shifts to a less extreme position than earlier in his introduction, claiming only that the psychoanalyst is not equipped to address issues of the supernatural and therefore must focus elsewhere while maintaining neutrality on theological and spiritual issues.

I will summarize my critique of the book initially, then follow with detailed reviews, first of the book, then of the methodology. Briefly stated, I found the book seriously flawed. First, the methodology is weak; applied psychoanalysis is not science by any reasonable definition of the term and enjoys no currency as such in contemporary academic psychiatry. Furthermore, the method Anderson applied in his study fell short of even minimal standards of objectivity. Second, the selection bias of source material was significant, with a decided preference for writers antagonistic to Joseph Smith, even when they were of questionable reliability and when better sources were available. Third, the data were not sufficient to support the conclusions, which were based instead on extensive supposition and speculation. Finally, the author failed to maintain the theological neutrality he espoused in his introductory remarks and instead assumed a position of hostility to religious faith in general and Mormonism in particular. Readers predisposed to think ill of Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, or the religious faith of Latter-day Saints will undoubtedly like this work. It will be of less interest to anyone else and will be particularly disappointing to dispassionate readers seeking genuine insight into the life and work of Joseph Smith.

Review of the Study

Introduction: Methods and Assumptions

Anderson introduces himself as having once been “a sincere and earnest young missionary” who at some point “no longer partici-
pated in Mormon worship” (p. xi). Yet he remains fascinated by the
history and social impact of the church and acknowledges the life-
changing consequences of its teachings. His purpose in undertaking
this study is evolutionist, based in the hope that the church, like any
enlightened society, will naturally advance from its primitive theo-
logical stance to a final secular humanist attitude:

I would like to assist in the continued evolution of the
Mormon church. . . .

Our pluralistic society, awash in social problems of drugs,
family disintegration, illegitimacy, violence, and destructive
sexual behavior, can use the stabilizing influence of such an
institution in promoting family and health values. If this
work nudges the Mormon church toward its potential as a
world caregiver in a nondoctrinal sense, then I will consider
the undertaking worthwhile. (p. xiii)

In describing his study, Anderson explains that he approaches
the Book of Mormon as psychoanalytic source material, comparable
to free associations or dream images. He interprets these images in
light of psychoanalytic concepts and in the context of Joseph Smith’s
life. In this sense, “the Book of Mormon can be understood as Smith’s
autobiography” and can be used to “develop a reasonably complete
psychoanalytic profile of Joseph Smith” (pp. xxvii–xxviii).

As is to be expected for any psychoanalytic study, much of the
book is devoted to a review of specific incidents in the Smith family
and in the life of “the child Joseph” (p. 1). Lucy Mack Smith’s 1845
dictation of Joseph’s history is the primary source for family informa-
tion.¹ Beyond Lucy Mack Smith, he grants little credibility to his-
torians from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and
Brigham Young University, “who must follow the directions from the
Mormon hierarchy,” with consequent “documentary unreliability,”

¹. Dan Vogel, ed., Early Mormon Documents (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996),
1:227–450. Anderson refers to all quotations from Vogel’s work under the heading “Lucy
Smith History.” This includes some documents not attributed to Lucy Mack Smith, a
practice I found somewhat misleading.
and instead gives preference to "others, including antagonists" (p. xxvi). In what follows, this proves to be something of an understatement, as he gives virtually unmodulated credence to antagonistic writers and critics and conspicuously omits other sources.

Anderson concludes his introduction with a review of psychoanalysis and its application to history and biography. He correctly notes the difference between psychiatry and psychoanalysis. Psychiatry is a medical specialty focused on "the diagnosis and treatment of mental dysfunction" (p. xxviii). I would add to Anderson's description that psychiatric treatments include medications, cognitive and behavioral therapies, psychodynamic psychotherapies, and other modalities. Psychodynamic therapies focus on the putative drives, defenses, intrapsychic conflicts, and other unconscious processes postulated to underlie thought, feeling, and behavior. Psychoanalysis is one form of psychodynamic psychotherapy based on a particular set of assumptions about childhood development and the workings of the adult mind. Psychoanalysis is neither the most common nor the most effective form of therapy, and it is among the weakest in its scientific foundations. Despite a dearth of validating data to support the practice, psychoanalytic theory is sometimes applied outside the clinical situation, hence the term "applied psychoanalysis."

Although Anderson is careful in his rather idealized description of the field to point out the limitations of its application to the writing of biographical history, his work shows little of the caution and reserve suggested in his introductory comments. Most of the study consists of his attributing specific qualities of character to Joseph Smith, then searching for psychoanalytic evidence of those qualities in the Book of Mormon. Given the rich variety and complexity of characters in the Book of Mormon, it is possible to find in that text just about anything. This study has more of the quality of a psychoanalytic fishing expedition than rigorous research, and Anderson fails to demonstrate that his conclusions are more credible than any of the innumerable other possibilities that could have been presented. Even within psychoanalysis, it is almost inconceivable that another analyst, reading this same material, would necessarily reach the same conclu-
sions. In fact, numerous psychiatrists, including psychoanalysts, have examined the Book of Mormon and the life of Joseph Smith and have expressed an enormous divergence of views, helpfully noted by Anderson himself (pp. xiii, 125–26). The significance of this disagreement should not be overlooked; there is nothing approaching consensus among mental health professionals regarding Joseph Smith or any aspect of his work. As a consequence, the invocation of professional authority for any specific view is premature and unjustified.

Anderson also considerably overstates the position of psychoanalysis in contemporary psychiatry, implying that it constitutes the pinnacle of psychiatric achievement, limited in practice to those few who are willing to undergo its demanding training. In fact, psychoanalysis has been in decline for nearly half a century, left behind by the broader and deeper currents of empirically based psychiatric thought. Psychoanalysis has not kept pace with the rigorous neurological and behavioral research of the past few decades and is now considered by most psychiatrists to be "scientifically bankrupt" and passé. Because the theory of psychoanalysis and its place in modern psychiatry may be unfamiliar to some readers, I present the psychoanalytic method in greater detail in a later section.

Despite my disagreement with many of the points laid out in Anderson’s introduction, I was impressed by the quality of writing, depth of background information, and academic demeanor of this section. So sober and scholarly is this introductory material that it is easy to be swept along in the current of his narrative without a critical look at his stated assumptions and the narrow confines of his method. I found those assumptions both extreme and indefensible, and it was clear at the outset that they would determine the final shape of the study: No serious consideration of supernatural (i.e., spiritual) phenomena can be entertained. All Latter-day Saint scholarship is tainted. What does that leave?

My concerns proved to be well founded. Far from the stance of theological and spiritual neutrality championed in Anderson’s

introduction, his writing assumes a clear tone of advocacy for the supremacy of a narrow understanding of reason so prominent in the Enlightenment and for the essentially positivist perspective that followed. Neither is there neutrality in his choice of historical material. Even from writers whose independence of the Mormon hierarchy is beyond question, Anderson’s selections betray a decidedly antagonistic bias that severely curtails the credibility of his work.

Equally troubling is his failure to stay within other guidelines he initially outlined. Despite repeated acknowledgment of the questionable credibility of much of his source material, he accepts it wholeheartedly when developing his thesis. At other points, after acknowledging the lack of evidence for certain critical historical claims, he proceeds as though his assumptions regarding them are certain. He acknowledges the limitations of his methodology, then grossly overinterprets his data. His tendency to slip suddenly from his scholarly narrative to editorial comments when critiquing the flawed faith of “devout Mormons” becomes more frequent and pointed as the work progresses. Most of these comments are both condescending and inappropriate in the context in which they appear, a disappointing lapse in a purportedly academic study (and one of D. Michael Quinn’s “seven deadly sins of traditional Mormon history”).

Joseph Smith’s Personal and Family Background

The body of the work opens with a review of the Smith family history found in official sources, followed by an overview of the Book of Mormon. Anderson takes pains to refute the 1820 date for the Palmyra revival, arguing that the events Joseph described seem more

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3. D. Michael Quinn, The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), viii. The seven deadly sins are (1) to “shrink from analyzing a controversial topic,” (2) to “conceal sensitive or contradictory evidence,” (3) to fail to “follow the evidence to ‘revisionist’ interpretations that [run] counter to ‘traditional’ assumptions,” (4) to use historical “evidence to insult the religious beliefs of Mormons,” (5) to “disappoint the scholarly expectations of academics,” (6) to “cater to public relations preferences,” and (7) to “use an ‘academic’ work to proselytize for religious conversion or defection.” I refer specifically to #4 in this case, but Anderson also ran afoul of #5 and #7 here and elsewhere.
appropriate to 1824. He cites this as evidence that the account of the first vision is "not internally consistent" (p. 9), a theme further developed as the book progresses, leading finally to the conclusion that the story was made up years after the fact.

Anderson draws three major conclusions from his examination of the Smith family. The first is that the family was grossly dysfunctional and racked by avoidable poverty, frequent dislocations, conflicts over religion, and Joseph Smith Sr.'s emotional immaturity, recurrent alcoholism, and obsessive treasure hunting. Lucy was emotionally unavailable because of two possible episodes of depression. Her own character may have been deficient, as circumstantial evidence could be consistent with premarital pregnancy. Joseph Sr.'s immaturity is evidenced by his belief in magic and Lucy's description that at one point during young Joseph's leg surgery he "burst into tears and 'sobbed like a child!'" (p. 26). His alcoholism may have been referred to by a suggestive line in a blessing given to Hyrum. Anderson characterized Joseph Sr. as "a picture of fragility" (p. 177).

The second point is that the defining event in young Joseph's life was his leg surgery. This event is described in terms of a helpless young child facing the powerful doctor, Nathan Smith, who wielded a large amputation knife and inflicted horrible pain. During this ordeal, his parents, who should have been giving him comfort and support, instead broke down and required him to bolster them. The Book of Mormon is posited as his fantasy attempt to deal with this traumatic event.

The third point is that Joseph's personality is consistent with a clinical diagnosis of narcissistic personality disorder with additional antisocial tendencies. (The technical term antisocial is correctly used here, not referring to the popular meaning of a lack of interest in social interaction but to a severe personality disorder characterized by a "pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others.") As such, he was exquisitely sensitive to public humiliation, maintained a false and superficial public persona, felt little genuine

affection or empathy for other people (including Emma), had no qualms about acting deceitfully to protect his public or self-image, and was motivated by a desire to manipulate and control the people around him. Other features of narcissism include “splitting”—the casting of people and issues in polar, black-and-white terms, with no sense of ambiguity or nuance. Anderson is brutal in his assessment of Joseph Smith’s character: he describes him as a deceitful and dishonest youth and adult, the primary evidence for which is his youthful involvement in folk magic and his alleged sexual indiscretions as an adult. This critique of character is repeatedly relentlessly, with little acknowledgment of any redeeming characteristics.

I found this assessment curious. Lucy Mack Smith’s history describes the family in much more functional and affectionate terms than those assumed by Anderson. He actually quotes one such passage from her history (p. 233) and then inexplicably disregards it. Her description of Joseph’s leg surgery includes a more balanced account of the support offered by his parents and was clearly intended to illustrate Joseph’s fortitude and consideration for his mother’s welfare. The assumption that Joseph saw this procedure exclusively in threatening terms is far from certain; it is equally likely that he saw the surgery (and the surgeon) as the only hope to save his leg. This was clearly his mother’s view of the incident. Regarding antisocial traits, Joseph seems to fall somewhat short of the mark. Typical behaviors associated with antisocial personality disorder include fights, use of weapons, physical cruelty to persons and animals, vandalism, arson, assault, theft with and without confrontation of the victim, and burglary in a well-established pattern before age fifteen. Anderson offers only one youthful issue: involvement in folk magic. His major source of information on this topic is Quinn’s Early Mormonism and the Magic World View, but he does not follow Quinn’s

6. Ibid., 1:262–68.
7. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 90, 650.
thesis that folk magic was part of the cultural milieu in which Joseph grew up and from which both he and Mormonism emerged. Anderson cites Joseph Sr.'s attachment to folk magic as evidence of immaturity. In the case of Joseph Jr., he cites it as evidence of self-deception and intentional fraud.

Anderson's blithe dismissal of the numerous accounts (which he acknowledges) of Joseph's care for Emma was especially striking. Rather than attempting to incorporate the abundant evidence of Joseph's genuine love and concern for his wife into a more complex and balanced view of his subject, Anderson simply disregards it. It was a puzzle to me that anyone, especially a psychiatrist, could see another human being as so utterly unidimensional. I would have preferred to see some attempt to include a broader view of Joseph's personal history in a psychiatric study.

In the context of Joseph Smith's supposed narcissistic vulnerability, three specific instances of traumatic public humiliation are cited. The first is his 1826 trial in South Bainbridge, New York, in connection with money digging for Josiah Stowell. Two versions of the story are mentioned. The first, by Oliver Cowdery in an 1835 issue of the Messenger and Advocate, describes Joseph's arrest as a disorderly person and his honorable acquittal. The second version, which Anderson strongly endorses, is taken from H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters's Inventing Mormonism; W. D. Purple's 1877 "Historical Reminiscences"; Wesley P. Walters's Utah Lighthouse Ministry articles


“From Occult to Cult with Joseph Smith, Jr.” and “Joseph Smith’s Bainbridge, N.Y., Court Trials”; an 1883 encyclopedia article on “Mormonism”; John Phillip Walker’s Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism; and Jerald and Sandra Tanner’s Joseph Smith and Money Digging. In Anderson’s opinion, Joseph’s character was demonstrated to be grossly deficient, and he was in fact bound over for trial but was allowed to escape to spare Josiah Stowell embarrassment. This interpretation has been strongly criticized as fitting poorly with available records, which tend to support Oliver Cowdery’s story. Furthermore, Anderson admits the lack of direct evidence that Joseph experienced this event as particularly humiliating but postulates that Joseph’s narcissism would make it so. Anderson believes that this was a crucial event in persuading Joseph to abandon his practice of magic and move toward the Christian mainstream.

The second public humiliation was the death in 1828 of Joseph and Emma’s first child, born with severe congenital malformations. According to Eber Howe’s 1834 Mormonism Unveiled, Joseph had predicted that his son “would be able when two years old to translate the Gold Bible” (p. 91). Although Anderson acknowledges Howe’s antagonism, his frequent quotations from this work (nine in this chapter alone) and his use of Howe’s descriptions as evidence of Joseph’s

compensatory Book of Mormon fantasies suggest confidence in Howe's accuracy. Anderson also lauds Howe's work as "the first major attempt to understand Joseph Smith" (p. 125). Anderson again acknowledges lack of direct evidence that Joseph suffered humiliation as a result of this event, but he surmises it based on his assessment of Joseph's narcissistically enriched character.

The third humiliation was the loss of the 116-page manuscript entrusted to Martin Harris. This posed the threat that Joseph would be publicly exposed as a fraud if he were unable to reproduce the work. Ironically, Anderson suggests that the several months following this incident, during which no work was done on the Book of Mormon, were the healthiest of Joseph's life.

The Composition of the Book of Mormon

The mechanism by which Joseph composed the Book of Mormon, in Anderson's view, was akin to the process of free association in psychoanalytic therapy. The speed with which he dictated left little room for reflection, Anderson opines, and so was a relatively pure manifestation of unconscious processes. The theological aspects of the book, of secondary interest in this analysis, were simply the product of Joseph's "religious genius" applied to the current issues of the day, lifted liberally from sermons he heard during the Palmyra revival. Additional structure was added by Oliver Cowdery, who was familiar with Ethan Smith's View of the Hebrews. 19

A major lapse in the book is Anderson's handling of contemporary witnesses. Oliver Cowdery is discussed only in the context of his possible contribution to the composition of the Book of Mormon and his enabling of Joseph's narcissism, a result of his falling under Joseph's charismatic spell. His account of the translation and his role as a witness of the work are disregarded. Emma is similarly characterized as a victim of Joseph's charisma, and her account of the translation

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19. Ethan Smith, View of the Hebrews; or The Tribes of Israel in America, 2nd ed. (Poultney, Vt.: Smith and Shute, 1825, 1st ed. 1823).
is accordingly discarded. Martin Harris is dismissed as an unstable "religious addict" (p. 88), whose stories are without credibility. David Whitmer's accounts of these events, though internally consistent over many years and free of the taint of the "Mormon hierarchy," are almost completely ignored. These accounts inconveniently portray a radically different picture than does Anderson's story.

The Sword of Laban

Anderson is primarily interested in the correlation of the Book of Mormon's characters and plot line to the life of Joseph Smith. His first psychoanalytic interpretation deals with the sword of Laban, which he finds symbolic of Nathan Smith's scalpel. This story is described as a compensatory fantasy in which Joseph gains mastery over the frightening and powerful surgeon, killing him, and even taking his identity, as Nephi dresses in Laban's clothes. The powerful Laban is, of course, Nathan Smith, the similarity in names providing further evidence of the parallel. The characters in Lehi's family represent Joseph's own. Both he and Nephi are the fourth child. Laman and Lemuel are representative of Alvin and Hyrum, whom Joseph symbolically demeans in order to take precedence over them. Sam represents Sophronia (p. 51), and Zoram "the first person the child Joseph could control...his next younger sibling, Samuel Harrison" (p. 47). The story continues with the Liahona, evidence of the family's involvement with folk magic. Finally, the journey through the wilderness and to the promised land represents the family's many relocations and eventual arrival in Palmyra.

Some of the specific psychoanalytic processes invoked here and later in the study include symbolic representation, compensatory fantasy, splitting, regression, and projection. Symbolic representation is the expression of a thought, feeling, or relationship as a disguised image (circumstance, character, etc.) of a story. Thus, a threatening...

figure in the real or fantasy life of an author would be represented as an equally threatening character but with an altered identity. Compensatory fantasy is the reworking of a personal experience to change it, usually to the opposite of its reality. In Joseph Smith’s case, a humiliating defeat might be reworked to become a brilliant conquest. Splitting is the dissection of an individual or situation into polar extremes, usually of all good and all bad components, only one of which appears at any moment, but which may be juxtaposed dramatically without any acknowledgment of ambiguity or inconsistency. Regression is the assumption of a more childlike view of the world, with concomitant emotional immaturity and interpersonal dependence. Projection is the attribution of personal thoughts and feelings to other people. Armed with this range of operations, it is possible to fit nearly any story to any personal history. If the images are similar, it is symbolic representation; if they are diametrically opposed, it must be compensatory fantasy. If no obvious relationship one way or the other appears, it must be especially important material to be so thoroughly disguised. In the absence of a live patient to verify the interpretations, this approach is fraught with difficulty.

In his discussion of 1 and 2 Nephi, Anderson also offers a number of criticisms of the Book of Mormon narrative in order to bolster his case that many Book of Mormon events are improbable. One of the first of these involves the incident in which Nephi’s steel bow breaks and is replaced “with a child’s bow made of a straight stick” (p. 49). Anderson sees this as a childish fantasy arising from the Smith family’s very real experience with hunger. Other inconsistencies or lapses in credibility that he finds in these chapters include the allegedly exaggerated population estimates, size of wars, and description of the temple, criticisms repeated later in the book.

This section, even with its conspicuous inconsistencies, such as Laman and Lemuel representing Alvin and Hyrum, with whom Joseph by all accounts enjoyed a warm and even admiring relationship, is somewhat stronger than what follows. I found the steady stream of trivial criticisms of the Book of Mormon more annoying and tiresome
than persuasive. The characterization of a wooden bow in ancient times as a child’s toy, for example, makes no sense.

A favorite theme throughout the book is sexual promiscuity, either through polygamy or extramarital affairs, which Anderson tends to merge into one category. Referring to Jacob 1:15–3:7, he finds within Jacob’s sermon on chastity (in which polygamy is proscribed) psychoanalytic evidence of marital discord. In this context he points out the “coercion and emotional pressure” (p. 129) brought to bear by Joseph on at least two women, including the thirty-eight-year-old Eliza R. Snow.

Third Nephi as Compensatory Fantasy

Citing the similarities in the names of 2 Nephi and 3 Nephi, Anderson places his discussion of the ministry of the Savior immediately after 2 Nephi, even though he acknowledges that this does not correspond to the writing of the book. Later it becomes clear why he did so: the psychological case he builds for Joseph in the writing of Helaman and the earlier chapters of 3 Nephi fits poorly with the message of Christ’s visit. His primary observation regarding the later chapters is that the highly idealized description of the Lord’s ministry juxtaposed against the destruction that preceded it is an example of the black-and-white thinking typical of narcissistic personality disorder. He suggests that the death of Joseph’s deformed infant son emerges as the “compensatory exaggerated fantasy” (pp. 108–9) of Christ blessing the children, followed by their communion with heavenly messengers.

I found this concept of compensatory fantasy for the death of a deformed child more plausible than many of the other interpretations offered to this point. The problem with this interpretation, however, is the similarity of this narrative to the New Testament. It is interesting to speculate, while reading the Gospels, about the direction Christ’s ministry might have taken in a less hostile environment. From that perspective, Anderson’s brush here tars all Christianity, not just that taught in the Book of Mormon. A conspicuous example
of that is his gratuitous criticism of the destruction preceding Christ’s appearance as unjust. “Thousands died, presumably including children, infants, and pregnant mothers” (p. 107). Matthew 24 contains the same images, though seen through the lens of apocalyptic prophecy. I was left with the impression that this and other similar criticisms were aimed broadly at biblical, as well as Book of Mormon, Christianity.

King Benjamin’s “Camp Meeting”

Moving into Mosiah and Alma, Anderson acknowledges the complexity of the narrative and the richness of the theological content. The former he cites as evidence against the several psychiatric diagnoses previously ascribed to Joseph Smith by other writers, including schizophrenia, paranoia, auditory hallucinations, and dissociation. The latter he attributes to the Protestant debates that had gone on since the opening of the Reformation. His failure to give serious treatment to the theological content of the Book of Mormon is one of this book’s greatest and most consistent omissions.

Specific images are again ascribed to events and persons in Joseph’s life. King Benjamin’s sermon is a reworking of an American camp meeting. Benjamin is equated with Benjamin Stockton, who reportedly told the Smiths that Alvin was in hell because he had not joined a church. The sermon, which Anderson describes as “despair-producing . . . for salvation requires perfection in behavior and even thought” (p. 134), reflects Benjamin Stockton’s “condemnatory tone” (p. 132).

I find it unlikely that this interpretation of the sermon will ring true to most readers. Perhaps it is my own long-standing opposition to the late ascendancy of “self-esteem” as a primary focus of character that leads me to see King Benjamin’s sermon as a powerful counterpoint to that perspective, focused on the need for well-established Christian principles such as humility, faith, love, service, and salvation through the atonement of Christ—salvation immediately available, even to those not perfect in behavior and thought.
Anderson asserts that the various travelogues in Mosiah reflect the travels in Joseph's early life. Alvin is represented as Abinadi, a good man who dies at the hands of the wicked (or incompetent). Joseph appears in the heroic characters Alma, Alma the Younger, and Ammon. In an interesting twist, Anderson cites the characterization of Alma the Younger as Joseph Smith's "striking portrait, in psychological terms, of himself before his conversion" (p. 139). He then quotes the passage describing Alma as wicked, idolatrous, flattering the people, hindering the church, stealing hearts, and causing dissen­sion. He also points out that one early account of Joseph's initial vision mentioned an angel, not the Father and Son. Although Anderson denies that either type of vision took place, he considers this evidence that the story was later changed. I was curious that he did not continue the parallel of Alma and Joseph, since it would lead to the conclusion that Joseph, like Alma, experienced a dramatic and authentically life-changing conversion.

He describes the incident with Ammon as "phallic narcissism" (p. 145): a daring, "counterphobic," and omnipotent image of oneself (p. 146). Characters in the story include Isaac Hale as King Lamoni, Emma as Abish, Emma's brothers as the thieves, and Joseph's deceased son as the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. Other incidents from Alma include the encounter with Nehor (the death of Alvin at the hands of an incompetent physician), Ammon's boasting ("exaggerated, bizarre euphoria" [p. 154], perhaps representing hypomania), Alma's longing to be an angel ("Smith's confession that his grandiose view is genuinely shaken" [p. 155]), the sermon to Corianton on adultery (the condemnation of adultery means that he committed it), the Ram­ceumtom (his rejection by Protestants), Alma's sermon on faith (the death of Joseph's son), quotations from Zenock (whose frequent references to "son" suggest the death of Joseph's firstborn), and many wars (Joseph's "retaliatory rage" [p. 155] at the humiliation of the death of his son), with the number and violence of the wars reflecting "a shocking level of retaliatory bitterness" (p. 162). I did not find these interpretations to be particularly persuasive, although I thought
some of Anderson’s discussion of Joseph’s relationship with the Hale family was rather interesting.

**Korihor Reprieved**

The story of Korihor deserves special attention because it parallels so closely the argument offered throughout Anderson’s book. He suggests that the Korihor incident is an attempt by Joseph to divert himself from his anguish and represents his “continued struggle with fate or the existence of God” (p. 156). He paraphrases Korihor at length:

> You people are unnecessarily tied down by your religious beliefs. Why are you waiting for Christ? No one can foretell the future. The prophecies you believe in are foolish traditions only. What assurance do you have of their truth? You can’t know that Christ will come. The idea of a remission of sins is the effect of a mental illness brought on by the traditions of your fathers. These traditions are not true. Further the idea of an atonement is unreasonable, for each man is responsible for himself and the results of his life are his own doing. If a man becomes prosperous, it is because of his self-discipline, intellect, and strength. Whatever a man does is no crime... I don’t teach tradition as fact and don’t like seeing people tied down unnecessarily by illusion. You do these ancient ordinances and rituals to gain control over the people, keep them in ignorance, and keep them suppressed. This is not emotional freedom but bondage. You don’t know those ancient prophecies are true, and it is unreasonable to blame these people for the sin committed by a parent in the Garden of Eden. No child should be blamed for what a parent does. You say Christ shall come to make this right. But you don’t know Christ will come. You say he will be slain for the sins of the world, and thereby you lead this people after foolish traditions for your own ends. You keep them in bondage so you
can glut yourselves with their work, and they dare not be assertive or enjoy their rights or enjoy their own possessions lest they offend you, your traditions, whims, dreams, visions, and pretended mysteries, and your unknown God—a being they have never seen or known, which never was nor ever will be. (p. 156)

Anderson’s response to this passage is threefold. First, he posits that this represents Joseph’s own questions about the existence of God, especially as he grapples yet again with the death of his son. Second, he gives it whole-hearted personal endorsement, declaring Korihor’s arguments “almost unanswerably strong” (p. 157). Indeed, this message parallels the core attitude of the Enlightenment, a philosophical stream in which Anderson unambiguously places himself. Although Anderson fails to mention this, it is also the standard line of traditional psychoanalysis, which has a long history of open hostility to religion as antithetical to personal growth and fully independent functioning. He notes that the resolution of the episode in Alma is God’s “punishing violence” (p. 158), rather than a more philosophically satisfying counterargument. Finally, he comments on the casual violation of Korihor’s freedom of speech, a pattern that Joseph repeated, of which the “destruction of the Nauvoo Expositor in 1844 is only the most conspicuous, and most deadly, example” (pp. 157–58).

In his endorsement of Korihor’s position, Anderson misses two crucial points in the story. The first is that the most appropriate response to a reasoned argument against the existence of spiritual experience as a valid determinant of personal values and world view is not rhetorical, but experiential. Those attacked by such argument will never be convinced, because for all the eloquent contentions made against their position, they have personal experience to the contrary. They can respond by sharing their personal knowledge, or, more convincingly, they can invite their opponent to gain the same experience. Neither of these would work with Korihor because he had already witnessed the reality of the spiritual world and still de-
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nied it. There is not much that can be done by discussion or experimentation with an opponent who looks at the sun and denies that it shines.

### Alma and Nineteenth-Century Politics

The latter chapters of Alma and most of Helaman, Anderson suggests, represent Joseph's narcissistic black-and-white thinking, personal immaturity, and inability to "handle complex feelings" (p. 174). These chapters describe his regression to a child's view of the world (hence the invincible sons of Helaman, whose confidence in their mothers' faith "is, theologically, nonsensical" [p. 184]) and probably represents Lucy's intervention with the doctors to save Joseph's leg.

I found these associations particularly weak. Anderson recognizes this and lamely responds "that a theory has only to be better than the alternative(s) it seeks to replace, not completely satisfactory in all respects" (p. 138). In this case, apparently any theory that excludes the supernatural is superior to any theory that includes it.

In a dramatic shift of perspective, Anderson speculates that the conflict between Moroni and the king-men represents the national election of 1824, in which the aristocratic John Quincy Adams conspired with Henry Clay to steal the election from the populist Andrew Jackson. Jackson's hickory poles were the image co-opted as Moroni's title of liberty. The basis for this jump from intrapsychic to national issues was the appearance in the narrative of the Lamanite queen: "I find the queen's presence to be strong circumstantial evidence that Smith was writing out sectional rivalries and national dissensions as part of his darkest conflicts" (p. 178)—a breathtaking leap. The queen is purported to represent Rachel Jackson, who died four years later, following Andrew Jackson's election.

Inevitably, the Gadianton robbers are ascribed to Freemasons and the national anti-Masonic hysteria following the 1826 disappearance of William Morgan and the publication of his exposé of Masonic rites the following year. Interestingly, although Anderson's review of national politics at this time correctly points out that Andrew Jackson...
was the high-ranking Mason and John Quincy Adams aligned himself with the anti-Masons, he offers no resolution of the previous image of Jackson as the champion of liberty and Adams as the conspirator.

Regarding Joseph Smith (and by extension, his followers), however, Anderson's opinion is clear:

As a psychiatrist, I am most struck by what this narrative of secret combinations and compensatory power suggests about Smith's psyche. Any patient who talks so incessantly about an evil hidden brotherhood is revealing an unending conflict. What the patient opposes is the underside of the conflict, in this case recognizing the advantages of such secret oaths and contracts in binding people together, even illicitly. Tellingly, in the Nephite narrative, the evil powers are steadily gaining, corroding from within. And the compensatory fantasy of "good" within this context of extreme evil is absolute power.

As I read this scenario, Smith feels intensely envious of others and their possessions; he declared that the desire for possessions is evil, yet repeatedly and secretly tries to obtain "gain," even by illicit means. Ultimately he attempts to deal with his envy, not by acceptance and humility, but by asserting absolute God-given omnipotence. Psychologically speaking, this story of moral conflict and the eventual ascendency of secret evil is a troubling prediction that sadly is borne out by Smith's future. Within a few years, he declares all marriages void except those performed by the Mormon priesthood; he not only stepped outside the religious and legal bounds of monogamy, but also took other men's wives as his own. Within ten years Mormonism gave rise to the Danites, a secret organization that began with self-protection and loyalty to Mormon priesthood leaders, whether "right or wrong," and ended with vigilantism. Lying, control of judges, and bloc voting contributed to violent expulsion from Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. The Mormons demonstrated repeatedly that they could not live with anyone, including those who originally welcomed them with Christian kindness. The
Mormon temple ceremony of the early 1840s eventually included secret oaths and covenants of obedience that had their counterpart in Masonic oaths, including covenants to kill or be killed if secrets were divulged, and an oath of vengeance that remained part of the ceremony for almost 100 years. Smith's secret political Council of Fifty, which crowned him president, high priest, and king, was resolved to make him president of the United States or, failing that, to establish a new Mormon empire in the West. These secret oaths re-emerged as an element at Mountain Meadows in 1857 where over 100 non-Mormon men, women, and children were murdered. Then, united by oaths and fear of retaliation from within the church, the Mormons delivered up a single scapegoat and successfully blocked U.S. territorial courts from delivering justice. Mormonism became America's most despised religion. (pp. 193–94)

Although this passage is lengthier than most others on this subject, it is representative of Anderson's view not only of Joseph Smith, but of the faith he founded. Mention of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, irrelevant to a study of the origin of the Book of Mormon, alerts us to the possibility that the author's motives may be other than academic. Anderson's initial scholarly, detached demeanor slips into this type of invective with increasing frequency through the course of the book, eventually leaving the impression that it was more facade than fact.

The juxtaposition of Anderson's idealized and devalued views of Mormons is especially striking. On the one hand, he denounces them as having "demonstrated repeatedly that they could not live with anyone" and as "America's most despised religion" (p. 194). Yet only a few pages later, he characterizes their lives as "exemplary" (p. 212). I was puzzled by his apparent lack of awareness of the discrepancy between these dichotomous views and his inability to accept the inevitable ambiguity of any biographical history.

Regarding the similarity between the Gadianton robbers and Freemasons, there is unquestionably a parallel. On the other hand,
the last century has demonstrated the destructive potential of secret combinations in a remarkable variety of contexts, including organized crime, Third World kleptocracies, inner-city street gangs, drug cabals, and, most recently, international terrorists. The remarkable prescience of these passages contrasts sharply with the small and parochial view that this was merely a response to local fear of Freemasons.  

Progressive Deterioration

In the early chapters of 3 Nephi, Anderson describes Joseph as moving toward total personality disintegration. Only now does it become clear why the ministry of Christ was discussed earlier: it is not reflective of such chaotic disintegration. I found this section of the work particularly unconvincing, and several interesting connections made earlier seemed to unravel with these increasingly random associations.

Anderson suggests that the book of Ether is the story of the dictation of the Book of Mormon itself, beginning with the use of magic and filled with unending conflict and final destruction. This he takes as evidence of profound dysfunction in the Smith family. The account of the final battle, because it mentions wine and swords, "signals yet another battle between Smith and his surgeon" (p. 210).

Final Chaos

The similarity in the ages of Mormon and Joseph Smith during pivotal events in their lives suggests that Mormon "is yet another surrogate for Smith" (p. 201). Anderson sees the graphic description of the final battle (Mormon 4:10–12) in personal terms: "To a psychiatrist, this passage communicates that Smith's internal morality and personal ethics, battered by fury ever since the death of his son, are giving way, as represented by the Nephite capitulation to evil and their inability to withstand the Lamanites" (pp. 202–3).

Finally, the Book of Moroni, with its intermingled chapters of faith and destruction, is described in extreme terms. In Mormon’s last letter,

Smith directly expresses the oral rage of a child raised in deprivation, deception, and trauma. . . . As I read this passage [Moroni 9:8–10], I hear oral rage behind narcissism, mixed with the fever, thirst, and torture of childhood surgery. It is as though, even as his “grandiose self” forms into a prophet and church president, the dangerous underside of his psychological world erupts to the surface one final time. (pp. 213–14)

The theological passages of Moroni, in contrast, are totally dismissed: “It is a conundrum that Smith erects a message of goodness on top of coercion, deceit, destruction, and hatred. I, no doubt like many readers, see the goodness as superficial” (p. 213). This is indeed a conundrum. For those readers who see these closing theological teachings as both genuine and good, the assertion that a description of “coercion, deceit, destruction, and hatred” (p. 213) must represent Joseph Smith’s personal projection falls rather flat.

The Narcissistic Mirror

In his final chapter, Anderson reiterates many of the themes that appear repeatedly through the book, mostly those regarding Joseph’s narcissism and deceitfulness. He introduces a more interesting topic, however, with a nice discussion of the role of the Book of Mormon in the common people’s reaction to the Enlightenment: the Great Awakening. Although I do not agree with the assertion that this explains the origin of the book, I think it does help account for the large number of people who embraced both the book and its associated faith.

He follows this with a discussion of the consequences of narcissistic personality disorder for interpersonal relationships, in this case between a leader and his followers. He also makes observations on the role of “mirroring.” Though once heretical in psychoanalytic theory, this interpersonal dynamic has since gained acceptance. Simply stated,
the leader sees his importance in the role granted him by his followers and strives to either become, or appear to be, what they believe him to be. In this case, Anderson sees Joseph Smith as trapped by his followers' expectations of him and by a growing web of deceit to maintain the image that he actually was what they desperately wanted him to be.

Although Anderson does not mention it, mirroring need not be a pathological process. It was originally proposed as the route to a healthy self-image when the child saw his or her importance in the eyes of a parent. It is only considered pathological when it involves deception and exploitation. Anderson clearly sees Joseph Smith in the latter category. Despite that, he cannot overlook yet another obvious point, that the Book of Mormon is "a permanent touchstone to the infinite" (p. 242). The inconsistency of a disturbed and depraved impostor writing a memoir of dream images from his oedipal narcissistic conflicts and composing a work that speaks broadly to a large population of competent adults is never addressed. I find that inconsistency insurmountable.

The Method of Applied Psychoanalysis

Professional Apologetics

I suspect that my pointed critique of this book will be written off by its proponents as Mormon apologetics (p. xx). Although I do not find that term particularly offensive, it is not the "Mormon" faith I feel the need to defend. It has always stood, and continues to stand, on its own merits. It is instead the field of psychiatry and its relationship to psychoanalysis that require explanation. For the past forty years the field has worked steadily to regain the scientific footing it shared with the rest of medicine until the early part of the twentieth century. Psychoanalysis is now widely seen in the profession as a diversion from that pursuit, rather than the acme of psychiatric development.22 Works based entirely on psychoanalytic principles and as-

sumptions lend little credibility to the scientific foundations of the field and do much to perpetuate unfortunate stereotypes.

Popular resistance to psychiatric diagnosis and care has been based on a number of issues, including the stigma associated with psychotic behavior, the sense of personal failure sometimes attached to mood disorders, and the fear that personal values and beliefs would be questioned or criticized by the therapist. Although this is much less of a problem now than in past decades, my experience as a Latter-day Saint psychiatrist suggests that those concerns continue and are at least as common in the LDS community as in society at large. I spent much of my early career attempting to reassure my religious compatriots that they had no need for such concerns, that the field was focused on the identification and treatment of specific psychopathology and harbored no fixed preconceptions about the nature or value of faith or religious practice. But this is not always the case, and a purely psychoanalytic perspective too often assumes the antiquated stance of psychiatry as fundamentally hostile to faith. The arbitrary designation within psychoanalysis of rational experience as superior to religious experience is unjustified. Are not the members of a community of faith more attentive to one another than those of a social club? Are there any books with as much impact on moral behavior as scripture? Is there any educational program, political policy, or social philosophy with as much power to transform lives as a single authentic religious experience?

Classical psychoanalysis is the last vestige of psychiatry to accept such narrow and outmoded notions. Mainstream contemporary psychiatry seeks to understand the role of religious belief and practice in the life of the individual, in parallel with other personal and cultural values. More recently, solid evidence has emerged in favor of religion as beneficial to physical and mental health.23 Interestingly, the benefits are most pronounced for those with high “intrinsic religiosity,” that

is, those who really believe and for whom that belief is important. In contrast, those who approach religion as a social and philosophical exercise enjoy limited benefits. In the face of these developments, a brief consideration of the history and perspective of psychoanalysis is in order.

The Theory and Practice of Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis refers to both a psychological theory and a psychotherapeutic technique first comprehensively published by Sigmund Freud in his 1899 work, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (the year 1900 was attached to the book for marketing reasons). The theory of psychoanalysis was born of the idealized late nineteenth-century view of natural science as the route to all truth and described the unconscious mind in terms of drives, objects, and forces analogous to those of classical mechanics. These drives, it was postulated, seek expression, but when they run afoul of external constraints (e.g., social norms, parental disapproval, physical or emotional threats) or internal conflict (e.g., desecration of self-image, violation of values, competing drives), they must be modified or diverted. Failure to do so appropriately leads to predictable forms of psychopathology. Defenses were postulated as unconscious mechanisms to prevent unacceptable drives or impulses from reaching consciousness or behavioral expression.

Psychoanalytic therapy preceded and gave rise to the theory. Freud and others noted that certain patients with neurological and other complaints improved when given the opportunity to express themselves (initially through hypnosis and later through free association—the uninhibited thought stream of a conscious patient). Freud was an exceptional observer and described specific patterns of thought,

feeling, and experience expressed through free association. Among the patterns he noted were a preponderance of sexual themes and a variety of childhood traumas, often related to the same events. Freud concluded that many of these traumatic sexual experiences were actually childhood fantasies, leading to his conceptualization of a complex theory of psychosexual development, including discrete stages (oral, anal, genital, etc.), each with a characteristic conflict to be resolved and characteristic problems associated with developmental failures.

By far the most important of these, in Freud's view, was the oedipal conflict, beginning with attachment to the mother, then recognition of the father as a threat to that relationship, and finally a reconciliation of these competing issues. Resolution of the oedipal conflict was seen as essential to emotional maturation, and its failure was a prescription for psychological dysfunction.

Freud recognized that these descriptions were metaphorical but believed that they had independently verifiable counterparts within the brain that would one day be identified. In that sense, he believed that he had "discovered," not merely described, the workings of the unconscious mind. Such findings still await neurobiological confirmation. Freud was nevertheless rigid in his adherence to his theory and tolerated no deviation from psychoanalytic orthodoxy.

It should be noted here that the problem with psychoanalysis was not its attempt to observe and characterize purely subjective experience. In fact, this is done routinely. Depression is both debilitating and treatable, so it is not surprising that mental health professionals have gained great skill in recognizing and even quantifying this experience. In addition, researchers in the field have accumulated a vast body of highly reproducible data on the subject. Although some of this is based on observable correlates, such as sleep disturbance or loss of appetite, it is primarily the subjective experience that is of interest and has been studied. Other subjective experiences, such as being in love, have not been studied with the same scrutiny, largely because the utility of doing so is limited (being in love may occasionally be debilitating, but it is rarely treatable, in my experience).
Instead, psychoanalysts saw rationality as an antidote to the primitive and potentially destructive drives that, left unmodulated by internal defense or external constraint, would make savages of us all. The assumption that all drives are primitive and utterly self-serving leads to the unfortunate conclusion that all “true” motives are negative and shameful. Anderson gives a wonderful example of exactly this assumption in action. “Every therapist with psychodynamic experience has had the experience of proposing a painful interpretation, only to have the patient exclaim, ‘No!,’ break into sobs, and correct the therapist with even a more painful truth” (p. xxxi). This unfortunate paradigm was finally countered by the humanist school, which saw at least some innate drives as pointing toward mature adulthood.

Psychoanalysis and Religion

In this context, one of Freud’s primary goals with psychoanalytic theory was the rejection of religion as a legitimate expression of human experience. His anointed successor, Carl G. Jung, who vehemently disagreed on this point, cited this issue as the basis for his contentious split with Freud. He related a particularly striking example of Freud’s attitude in this regard:

I can still recall vividly how Freud said to me, “My dear Jung, promise me never to abandon the sexual theory. That is the most essential thing of all. You see, we must make a dogma of it, an unshakable bulwark.” He said that to me with great emotion, in the tone of a father saying, “And promise me this one thing, my dear son: that you will go to church every Sunday.” In some astonishment I asked him, “A bulwark—against what?” To which he replied, “Against the black tide of mud”—and here he hesitated for a moment, then added—“of occultism.” First of all, it was the words “bulwark” and “dogma” that alarmed me; for a dogma, that is to say, an undisputable confession of faith, is set up only when the aim is to suppress doubts once and for all. But that no
longer has anything to do with scientific judgment; only with a personal power drive.

This was the thing that struck at the heart of our friendship. I knew that I would never be able to accept such an attitude. What Freud seemed to mean by "occultism" was virtually everything that philosophy and religion, including the rising contemporary science of parapsychology, had learned about the psyche. To me the sexual theory was just as occult, that is to say, just as unproven an hypothesis, as many other speculative views. As I saw it, a scientific truth was a hypothesis which might be adequate for the moment but was not to be preserved as an article of faith for all time.27

In addition to the counter-evolutionary social implications of surrender to the occult, Freud believed that religion harmed the individual by blocking personal growth and fully independent functioning. This position continues to be championed by many current psychoanalysts.

Freud's opposition to religion is curious. There is nothing in psychoanalytic theory to preclude religious phenomena, either as purely intrapsychic or authentic perceptual experience. Other entirely subjective phenomena were acceptable to the theory, which did not reject cognitive, emotional, esthetic, or interpersonal experience as illegitimate or necessarily pathological. Freud's painful experience of European anti-Semitism has often been cited as the basis for this attitude and may well be a sufficient explanation.

Psychoanalysis as Science

Freud had a second blind spot, at the other end of the positivist spectrum. Although he touted psychoanalysis as science, he limited his scientific inquiry to observation, categorization, and hypothesis

generation. These are important first steps in the acquisition of empirically derived knowledge but must be supplemented with hypothesis testing and modification.

The origin of a hypothesis is observation, followed by categorization and measurement. The face validity of a hypothesis is its ability to describe (and occasionally explain) existing observations. The true validity of the hypothesis, however, is its power to predict new observations. Psychoanalytic theory is very strong in its ability to describe observations but lacks the capacity to accurately predict what intrapsychic conflicts will emerge, how they will be manifested, what defenses will be brought to bear, what resolution will be sought, and what pathology will erupt if the conflicts fail of resolution.

Both Freud and his modern adherents have been remarkably resistant to the testing of psychoanalytic hypotheses. Anderson echoes the response of psychoanalytic apologists and dismisses this dearth of essential studies, saying that they would be difficult and unethical (p. 29). This is clearly not true; excellent data have been gathered on other theories of development despite methodological difficulties and without ethical compromise. Even today, the gold standard of psychoanalytic validation is the vigor with which heads nod in professional meetings where theoretical papers are read.

The imprimatur of science requires more, and contemporary psychiatry has long since moved on. Taking elements of widely varied perspectives on individual development and psychopathology, the field readily incorporates neurobiological, behavioral, humanist, and other approaches that prove themselves to be theoretically or clinically valid. Psychoanalysis is among these contributors but has no unique capacity to explain, predict, or modify development or psychopathology.28

Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Psychiatry

Psychoanalysis has consequently slipped from its ascendancy in the American psychiatry of the 1950s. Specific landmarks are telling.

28. An excellent, comprehensive critique of psychoanalysis as science is found in Frederick Crews, Skeptical Engagements (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).
Among these was the decision in the 1980 edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III) to exclude all psychoanalytic terminology and assumptions in favor of a symptomatic approach to mental disorders. This move had the desired consequence of strengthening the reliability of diagnoses, that is, the probability that different observers would categorize the same phenomenon in the same way. This greatly facilitated empirical studies and accelerated the pace of research in the field.

Of note in Anderson’s study is his juxtaposition of the validated definitions of the current edition of the manual, DSM-IV, with speculative psychoanalytic descriptions of the same phenomena, particularly narcissism. Readers unfamiliar with the workings of mental health research may not recognize that DSM-IV is the standard of the profession, while the psychoanalytic writing is supported by little validating evidence and enjoys limited acceptance.

Psychoanalysts, threatened with extinction by irrelevance, made a number of desirable adaptations. First, they made peace with the formerly heretical schools of object relations, self-psychology, and others. Second, they abandoned their long-standing refusal to admit psychologists, social workers, and other mental health professionals to psychoanalytic training. Third, they began to acknowledge that psychoanalysis is applicable to a fairly limited range of psychopathology and has no special capacity to bring about therapeutic benefit. Finally, they acknowledged the efficacy of biological and behavioral approaches in the treatment of psychopathology. In so doing, they allowed their long-standing position that only psychoanalysis truly addressed the underlying conflicts at the heart of most psychiatric disorders to take its rightful place among the relics of history.

In modern psychiatric training, psychoanalysis serves two major functions, both practical. First, psychoanalysts remain masterful observers, and their skill in this regard is an essential tool to be passed on to psychiatrists of all perspectives. Second, many psychoanalytic concepts have value in psychiatry because they provide useful categories in which to organize observations, even in the absence of widespread acceptance of their theoretical underpinnings. Psychiatrists casually speak of ego strength, defenses, transference, superego,
and so forth, not because they accept the theory that lies behind these concepts, but because of their utility in organizing specific observations.

**Applied Psychoanalysis**

Psychoanalysis has a unique perspective to offer the writing of biography and the analysis of history, but that perspective is philosophical, not scientific. In the absence of validated studies of this method and its findings, it should be considered in the same category as literary criticism, philosophical debate, or political analysis. These are all useful pursuits, but they are recognized as highly subjective and not bolstered by verifiable empirical data.

Applied psychoanalysis is particularly weak in this regard. In working with individual patients, the psychoanalyst can at least test a specific interpretation by presenting it to the patient and observing the response. Not so in applied psychoanalysis. A subject’s behavior may be interpreted from the psychoanalytic perspective in light of known life experiences, and in some cases useful insights may result. Similarly, it may occasionally be possible to “read back” from existing biographical accounts or creative works to understand something of the subject’s early experience. But the limitations on these techniques must be strictly observed. This approach is not based on empirical data, and its hypotheses cannot be empirically tested.

For applied psychoanalysis to make a legitimate contribution to the writing of history or biography, three major problems must be avoided. First, the internal consistency of psychoanalytic interpretations may not be cited as evidence for the validity of this point of view. They may lead to specific insights, but those insights must stand on their own, subject to the same critical analysis as insights from any other historical or biographical model. The fact that a coherent story can be told does not mean that the story is accurate.

Second, care must be taken to avoid circular arguments. It is easy to postulate a particular event in the subject’s life, find something consistent with it in the subject’s later work, and then cite that as evi-
dence that the original event actually took place. There is no basis for acceptance of such arguments.

Third, it is impossible to avoid the projection of the analyst’s preconceptions and prejudices into these interpretations. It is partially for this reason that psychoanalytic trainees are required to undergo personal analysis to bring to light their own intrapsychic conflicts. In practice, this training analysis serves more the function of acculturation than intrapsychic peacemaking, and significant personal issues invariably remain or arise during the continued course of life.

Despite his clear acknowledgment of the first two dangers, Anderson is prone to both faults. He repeatedly suggests that his “scientific” approach has face validity because he is able to make internally consistent interpretations. Further, he cites problems in Joseph Smith’s early life, many of them questionable (e.g., Joseph’s humiliation at the death of his firstborn, Lucy’s possible premarital pregnancy), as evidence that he would fraudulently create a religious text. He then interprets elements of the Book of Mormon as products of those early problems and cites passages of the Book of Mormon as evidence that the family dysfunction actually occurred. Note this confessional passage in his discussion of the final chapters of Ether:

This very dark view of Joseph Smith’s early infancy and childhood is admittedly extreme speculation, and there is no historical documentation of such emotional deprivation from his mother’s history that would justify such furious hatred in the story. (Reports of the family’s economic and social inferiority and dysfunction do come from later outside antagonistic testimonies which are rejected by devout Mormonism.) But with our present state of naturalistic (psychological) knowledge, this reading from the Book of Mormon back into Joseph’s life may be the closest we can get to what happened. (p. 212)

I would suggest that “the closest we can get to what happened” is to read what Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith said happened. Their accounts
are remarkably similar and describe the family in very different and more positive terms than does Anderson's. This more objective view of Joseph's life shows only passing similarity to the overall message of the Book of Mormon, suggesting against a contemporary origin for the book.

The third problem was not even acknowledged in the work. Anderson repeatedly makes interpretations based on his preconceptions and personal perspective, not the available evidence. He attempts to cover many of these interpretations with professional authority, using phrases such as "Psychiatrists agree that . . ." and "Speaking as a psychiatrist . . ." I tallied more than two dozen such references before I grew bored with the exercise; I agreed with only a handful of them.

**Alternative Views**

The bankruptcy of the notion that a story's plausibility is evidence of its validity is easily demonstrated. As I read Anderson's account of the "Sword of Laban" incident, I allowed myself to associate freely on the subject of Laman and Lemuel. My thoughts quickly turned to my own childhood and the relationships within my family. Like Nephi at the time of the story, I was one of four children, but as I allowed the emotional content of the story to carry my associations forward, I immediately thought of a particularly toxic dyad that periodically invaded my home. There was in the neighborhood a young bully, whose name bears striking phonetic and anagramic similarity to both Laman and Laban, who, though a year his senior, frequently played with my older brother. My relationship with that brother (who went on to live a life more akin to that of Nephi than Laman or Lemuel) was only occasionally marred by the usual "sibling rivalries" when the neighbor was not present, but when they were together, I was completely at their mercy (as Nephi was with Laman and Lemuel). On one occasion when I was somewhere between five and seven years old, this "Laman/Laban" had me so frightened that I fled from
him through the house and into the darkened garage. Rounding a
turn, I suddenly slipped and fell against the sharp corner of the fur­
nace, cutting my forehead to the bone and causing a terrifying foun­
tain of blood that covered nearly my entire field of vision. Over the
next few hours, as I received maternal and professional ministrations,
I imagined myself dying of this injury, but I also imagined growing
large and powerful enough to defend myself and inflict the same type
of injury on him. In fact, I knew that there was a large hunting knife
in the garage, not far from the furnace, with which I could maim or
even behead him. I had no trouble, as I reflected on this incident,
imagining it giving rise to the sword of Laban story. From a psycho­
analytic standpoint, the advantage of my splitting this malefactor
into two characters was obvious; I could kill him as Laban, then re­
turn home with a healthy, but humbled, Laman in tow. I thought of
similar personal incidents that could relate to the broken bow (bows
had special significance in my family), frequent wanderings in the
wilderness, the storm at sea, Alma’s conversion, and other Book of
Mormon stories.

To the best of my knowledge, I have never been accused of writ­
ing the Book of Mormon, so what are these stories doing there? In
contrast to the suggestion that these stories are reworkings of Joseph
Smith’s early life, they seem to represent more universal types. Cer­
tainly the heroes of the Book of Mormon invite readers to imagine
themselves as such grand and noble characters. These are powerful
and useful images, not only for young people in need of ideals as
they mature, but for everyone seeking to find within themselves the
seeds of nobility and heroism. The idealized way the characters are
portrayed is tacit recognition that the authors intended them to be
seen exactly this way. Similarly, the clarity with which the villains are
portrayed, rather than reflecting the black-and-white thinking of the
narcissist, may be the authors’ desire to highlight the contrasting ele­
ments of good and evil, the existence of which is fundamental to reli­
gious literature. We may occasionally turn to Ecclesiastes to assure
ourselves that the ambiguities of life are common, but when faced
with moral choices, we find the Ten Commandments and Beatitudes far more helpful.

I would raise a similar argument regarding the detailed and graphic description of war. I did not see these as evidence of “narcissistic rage” (p. 141) but as an unusually candid guide for the faithful in times of war. In fact, most of the wars in the Book of Mormon are glossed over, with only passing mention that they occurred and a few statistics on each. A few, however, are described in detail. The first of these, in Alma 46–62, deals with the complex issues of citizens’ and soldiers’ responsibilities in time of war, critical information for those many generations who have had to face some form of warfare during the course of life. Interestingly, these passages do not contain many black-and-white answers. Some good citizens were pacifists and enjoyed the blessings of God. Their children went to war and vigorously took the lives of their enemies but also enjoyed the blessings of God. One group of soldiers was miraculously preserved. Another equally righteous and faithful group was called upon to give up their lives. To the religiously attuned citizen facing a spectrum of societal demands and moral issues in deadly conflicts ranging from World War II to Vietnam, these passages provide essential material. The second detailed account of warfare, in Mormon 2–6 and Moroni 9, is more graphic in its description of the atrocities of war, while simultaneously highlighting the endpoint of a society that willfully rejects all things religious, themes also addressed in Ether 13–15.

Faith and Its Proofs

Because Anderson so frequently brings this up, I would like to comment on the assertion that the Book of Mormon suffers from a lack of archaeological evidence to bolster its standing. Anderson repeatedly states that there is an absolute paucity of physical evidence for the Book of Mormon and that it should be rejected on that basis. I will leave it to the folks at FARMS to address the issue of the existence of such data, and focus instead on the assumption that such evidence is necessary to the development of faith and testimony.
Some years ago, while interviewing for entry into a graduate program in biochemistry, I was challenged by the chairman of the department with the following situation. A Latter-day Saint colleague of his had declared moot the study of genetic types (such studies were in a very primitive state back then) of native American peoples to determine if they were of Semitic origin, because the outcome was a foregone conclusion. He asked my opinion on the matter. Anxious for admission to the program, I mumbled something about how exciting it would be to do just such an experiment. As I have reflected on that issue, I have concluded that from one perspective his colleague was right—the results are moot, not because the answer is known, but because it is irrelevant. Imagine that I had done the experiment—and found no relationship. Would my faith in the Book of Mormon be shattered? No, my faith was not based on that type of evidence and would not have been seriously affected (and rightfully so; the technology in use twenty-five years ago is no longer considered valid). On the other hand, if the results had shown a clear connection between those peoples, would that chairman have presented himself for baptism?

What type of evidence does exist for the Book of Mormon? Anderson answers this question quite satisfactorily. "It is his [Joseph Smith's] followers' exemplary lives that counterbalance his miraculous story and make it believable. In my professional judgment, their lives are the sole 'objective' evidence for the validity of the Book of Mormon" (p. 212). Even in the absence of any other evidence, this would be compelling. The power to deeply and permanently change lives is the Holy Grail of psychotherapy, yet here is a single volume able to do just that. As it happens, the story is also bolstered by the subjective experience of millions of adherents. These two considerations remain untouched by Anderson's critique.

Regarding acceptance of the Book of Mormon, Anderson again comes to our aid with a pertinent observation. "My position is that belief in the Book of Mormon is an act of faith, not the result of scientific or academic inquiry" (p. 138). Was there some question about
this? This is precisely the function of the Book of Mormon. It is the starting point for a religious journey that will include both conceptual and experiential elements. The journey requires the acquisition of authentic, personal spiritual experience. For many people, the first such experience comes in response to a sincere inquiry regarding the Book of Mormon. Its reliability is confirmed by the comparable experiences of others and by periodic renewal. Its validity is attested by the qualitative changes wrought in the life of the individual. It is highly reproducible among different observers, hence the specific instructions and promise in Moroni 10:4–5 and the constant encouragement from church leaders to seek such experience. It is noteworthy that it is those leaders, not Mormonism’s detractors, who recommend that the experiment be tried.

**Conclusion**

The method of psychoanalysis—long on concept, short on data—provides but one perspective on history and has no special validity in the interpretation of biographical data. This study is severely flawed in its initial assumptions that spiritual phenomena cannot be studied, that applied psychoanalysis has scientific credibility, and that devout Mormon historical perspectives lack veracity. These assumptions lead to a decided and unjustified bias in the selection and interpretation of historical sources. The resulting black-and-white appraisal of Joseph Smith is inconsistent with the complexity of his character and his history. This book is little more than a repetitious compilation of the same antagonistic histories we have already seen, dressed in grand new trappings. But on close inspection, the emperor has no clothes. I found this book disappointing in every regard, all the more so because of the inappropriate implication of professional authority attached to it. As I noted at the outset, those whose view of Mormonism tends to the negative, sensational, and critical will undoubtedly be attracted to this work. More objective readers will find little here of interest.