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Editor's Introduction, The Witchcraft Paradigm: On Claims to “Second Sight” by People Who Say It Doesn't Exist

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<td><strong>Abstract</strong></td>
<td>Peterson argues that despite what some critics claim, the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) is not confined to publishing only apologetic texts and is able to claim academic legitimacy for itself.</td>
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Certain critics of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), which is now a division of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at Brigham Young University, deny its intellectual or academic legitimacy on the basis of the “fact,” as they see it, that it is nothing more than an “apologetic” organization.

This denial, as I shall demonstrate, is misguided. But even the perception upon which they claim to justify their denial is only partially accurate. A great deal of what the Maxwell Institute does (for example, its Middle Eastern Text Initiative, its production of the Dead Sea Scrolls on CD-Rom, and its digitizing efforts in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana in Rome, as well as at Petra, Naples, Bonampak, and elsewhere) is not apologetic under even the loosest definition of the term. But even much of what FARMS proper undertakes cannot reasonably be described as “apologetic.” To choose one very obvious example, Royal Skousen’s fifteen-year Book of Mormon Critical Text project, supported (very substantially) by FARMS since its inception,

1. For information on these projects, see the Web sites for the Middle Eastern Texts Initiative and the Center for the Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts, two of the constituent units of the Maxwell Institute along with FARMS, at, respectively, meti.byu.edu and cpart.byu.edu (accessed 7 December 2006). At the present time, unfortunately, the sites are not entirely current. Still, they will give some idea of the scope and nature of Maxwell Institute efforts in these areas.
is not at all apologetic in character. The spirit of much of the work done by FARMS, or by the Maxwell Institute as a whole, is in keeping with the famous slogan coined by St. Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109): *Fides quaerens intellectum*, “faith seeking understanding.” This sets FARMS apart, obviously, from the approach of the secular academy as a whole, but it does not, in and of itself, delegitimize FARMS scholarship—any more than it has marginalized St. Anselm himself, who remains an important figure in the history of Western thought. “Believe that you may understand,” wrote St. Augustine (d. 430), an even more central figure in the intellectual history of the West.

It seems likely that the FARMS/Maxwell Institute Web site, without intending to do so, yields a somewhat unrepresentative picture of the overall activity of FARMS and the Maxwell Institute for the simple reason that, while everything published in the periodicals is up on the site and pretty much fully accessible even to nonsubscribers, the books and, now, the film (*Journey of Faith*) that FARMS and the Institute have produced are only partially present (if even that) on the Web site to this point. This causes the periodicals—and notably the *FARMS Review*, far and away the Institute’s most overtly “apologetic”

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4. To choose just one example, his famous “ontological argument” for the existence of God (for which, I confess, I have no sympathy whatever) remains a subject of vigorous debate among contemporary philosophers.

5. St. Augustine, *Sermo* 43.7.9, in PL 38:258.

6. We plan, so far as it is practicable, eventually to put all or most of the contents of our books up on the Web site, too—for subscribers. But that will take considerable time and effort.
publication—to seem relatively more prominent among our overall efforts than they actually are.

A number of vocal critics claim to have read FARMS materials and to have been deeply disappointed (or actually, as some maintain, driven by what they found into leaving the church). I suspect, though, that they have sampled only a relatively small portion of what FARMS produces and that they entertain a skewed view of what FARMS does. Typically, they are, at least marginally, aware of the FARMS Review, which devotes substantial attention (though by no means all of its attention) to responding to critics and so-called “difficult issues.” But they mistakenly conclude that the FARMS Review is representative of, or actually is, the totality of FARMS.

However, both FARMS and the Maxwell Institute publish many, many things that are neither principally nor even secondarily devoted to responding to “difficult issues” but are, rather, entirely positive and affirmative in character. There are literally scores of these, including such books as Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon, edited by John Welch and Melvin Thorne; Book of Mormon Authorship and Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited, edited by Noel Reynolds; Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon, edited by Donald Parry, Daniel Peterson, and John Welch; the new volume Oliver Cowdery: Scribe, Elder, Witness, edited by John Welch and Larry Morris; and the collected works of Hugh Nibley; as well as the film Journey of Faith and its accompanying book about the Lehite party’s experiences in Arabia.

The garden of faith, like most gardens, requires both weeding and watering. While the FARMS Review does most of the weeding for the organization, FARMS as a whole expends considerably more effort on nourishing. Or, to employ a metaphor from American football, FARMS plays both offense and defense. Those who watch only the defensive portions of a football game will typically have a rather inaccurate sense of how the overall game is going.

An Apology for Apologetics

From time to time, the question is asked why we “apologize” for Mormonism. Some members of the church even express discomfort
at the thought of “apologetics.” But such discomfort, I think, reflects a misunderstanding of the word. Apologetics is simply “systematic argumentative tactics or discourse in defense (as of a doctrine, a historical character, or particular actions).”

In a very real sense, anyone arguing in a more or less sustained way for or against any position—whether it be the truth of Mormonism or the superiority of atheism, the legitimacy of the United States’ intervention in Iraq or the immorality of American foreign policy, the virtues of embryonic stem-cell research or the abhorrent character of euthanasia, the historicity of the Book of Mormon or the authorship of Solomon Spalding, inflationary or noninflationary models of the Big Bang—is engaged in apologetics. And that is particularly and most obviously so when such a person is defending an already-advanced thesis against criticisms.

Thus, it makes little sense to claim, as some of its critics do, that the FARMS Review is not a “scholarly journal” because it tends to argue for a certain position. (“Defending a belief,” one Internet detractor oddly declares, “has nothing to do with truth.”) With the exception of such specialized enterprises as editing texts, producing catalogs and bibliographies, and creating lexicons, scholarship typically entails setting out and arguing for positions. Moreover, anybody who seriously holds an opinion must necessarily, when the circumstances require it, defend that position. Evolutionists defend their theories against creationists; liberals defend their positions against conservatives; vegetarians defend their views against carnivores; atheists defend their atheism against the arguments of theists. Whether or not arguments are scholarly depends upon the quality and character of the evidence and analysis that they adduce.

There is also little merit to the allegation that, since it is expressly dedicated, on the whole, to publishing essays from essentially believing Latter-day Saints, the FARMS Review cannot be considered truly “scholarly.” By this standard, an evangelical journal of biblical studies

7. See the appropriate entry in Webster’s Third New International Dictionary (Unabridged).
8. I cannot deny, of course, that he’s probably right about his beliefs.
could not be considered scholarly, no matter how superb its contributors and how high its standards, unless it abandoned its raison d’être and failed to prefer evangelical perspectives over atheistic and other nonevangelical perspectives—or perhaps, indeed, unless it banished faithful perspectives from its pages altogether. A market-oriented journal of economics would somehow be violating academic freedom (as one critic has somewhat incoherently accused the FARMS Review of doing) unless it featured a roughly equal number of articles from a socialist point of view; a journal dedicated to Freudian perspectives in psychoanalytic theory would have to surrender its mission charter and be equally open to non- and anti-Freudian viewpoints; and journals of evolutionary theory would need to be completely and genuinely open, at least in principle, to submissions from young-earth creationists. This is clearly not the way the academic world works, nor is it the way it ought to work.

Journals dedicated to particular points of view, explicitly or implicitly, broadly or narrowly conceived, are practically omnipresent in the world of scholarship. Consider, for instance, the highly regarded Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers. While it expressly welcomes articles from various points of view, Faith and Philosophy gives pride of place, according to the statement found inside the front cover of every issue, to “articles which address philosophical issues from a Christian perspective.” And membership in its sponsoring society, which includes some of the leading philosophers in North America, is explicitly limited to professing Christians.

Nobody who picks up the American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly, or Studia Theologica: Nordic Journal of Theology, or Ephemerides Theologicae Lovaniensis: Louvain Journal of Theology and Canon Law, or Kerygma und Dogma: Zeitschrift für Theologische Forschung und Kirchliche Lehre, or the Evangelical Quarterly: An International Review of Bible and Theology, or the Calvin Theological Journal, or Dallas Theological Seminary’s Bibliotheca Sacra, or the Anglican Theological Review, or Evangelische Theologie, or the Japan Christian Review, or Gregorianum (published by the Pontificia Università Gregoriana in Rome), or the Greek Orthodox Theological Review, or New Blackfriars:
A Review (“edited by the Dominicans of the English Province”), or the American Baptist Quarterly, or the Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie, or the American Benedictine Review, or the Revue Bénédictine, or the Mennonite Quarterly Review will be surprised to discover that the journal in question favors a certain general perspective. Nobody will be shocked to learn that it doesn’t open its pages equally and indiscriminately to all positions. And only a narrow-minded dogmatist would declare, in advance of actually examining these publications, that they do not and cannot possibly publish “real scholarship” or maintain that their publication somehow violates “academic freedom.” Quite the contrary: The luxurious profusion of such varied voices is a wonderful expression of academic freedom.

And, to forestall any secularist’s response that such overtly partisan journals are just what one would expect from irrationalist religious pseudoscholars, I must point out that partisan advocacy and particular “party lines” aren’t limited to journals edited by churchmen or theologians. Nobody familiar with its founders Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, with its past editor Fernand Braudel, and with current members of its editorial committee like Jacques Le Goff and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, could possibly expect Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales not to manifest a particular historical approach. Nor could anybody who knows Les Temps Modernes (founded by Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir) be in any possible doubt about what its ideological leanings are likely to be.⁹

The Psychoanalytic Review is a publication of the National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis—an avowedly partisan group of Freudians.¹⁰ By contrast, the Journal of Humanistic Psychology features a strikingly un-Freudian creed, entitled “Five Basic Postulates of Humanistic Psychology,” on its opening page¹¹—containing very much the sort of ideas that one would expect after reviewing the list of deceased members of its board of editors (for example, Viktor Frankl,

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⁹. As if to underline my point, Les Temps Modernes 61 (November–December 2005/January 2006), the most recent issue I’ve seen, is largely given over to a special section entitled “Pour Frantz Fanon” (pp. 58–189).

¹⁰. As is explained on the inside back cover of the October 2006 issue (93/5).

Aldous Huxley, Abraham Kaplan, Arthur Koestler, Abraham Maslow, Rollo May, Lewis Mumford, and Carl Rogers) that appears on that same page.

The Harvard Business Review and International Labor and Working-Class History tend to view things rather differently. Does this simple fact, as such, automatically disqualify either one of them, or both of them, as representing serious scholarship? The Journal of Post Keynesian Economics, which lists the late John Kenneth Galbraith as its “founding chairman” and recently eulogized him as “our friend and our hero,” is unlikely to be confused, ideologically, with the Journal of Austrian Economics (founded by the late libertarian economist Murray Rothbard [with whom I once spent an amusing evening in St. Andrews, Scotland] and dedicated to continuing the tradition established by Carl Menger and Ludwig von Mises) or the “Chicago school’s” Journal of Law and Economics.12 Finally, no sentient person has ever mistaken the Radical History Review for the Journal of Banking and Finance or the Journal of Monetary Economics. These journals all have discernible points of view.

But the term apologetics is most often reserved particularly for religious issues, where it is defined as “that branch of theology devoted to the defense of a religious faith and addressed primarily to criticism originating from outside the religious faith; esp: such defense of the Christian faith”13 or as “that branch of theology in which a body of doctrine is defended against criticism.”14

According to the standard dictionary of classical Greek, the term apologia (ἀπολογία) denoted a “defence,” or “a speech in defence.” In a Greek courtroom, the plea entered on behalf of a defendant (an apologoumenos [ἀπολογούμενος]) was known as an apologema (ἀπολόγημα). All of these nouns are derived from the verb apologeomai

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13. See the appropriate entry in Webster’s Third New International Dictionary (Unabridged).
(ἀπολογέομαι), “to speak in defence.”

Probably the most notable ancient occurrence of the word is to be found in the title of Plato’s *Apology*, a famous account of Socrates’ defense of his behavior as a philosopher before a jury of 501 Athenian men in the spring of 399 BC. A related use occurs in the Latin title of John Henry Newman’s—later, *Cardinal* Newman’s—classic 1864 autobiography and “defense of his life,” the *Apologia pro Vita Sua*.

In modern Greek, *apologia* retains the meanings of “defense,” “plea,” and “pleading,” but has also come to include “apology” and “excuse” in much the same way that the term *apology* includes those senses in English. But the primary and original sense of *apologia* remains. In German, for instance, an *Apologet* is the “defender of a creed, a viewpoint, or doctrine (especially of the Christian faith).” An *Apologie* is “(particularly in religious discussions) a speech or writing in defense or justification, a defense or justification.”

Saying “I’m sorry” is done in German by means of completely unrelated words and falls under totally distinct dictionary entries.

Under its entry for *apology*, the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* lists as the first definition: “The pleading off from a charge or imputation, whether expressed, implied, or only conceived as possible; defense of a person, or vindication of an institution, etc., from accusation or aspersion.” The *OED*’s first sample sentence for this sense of the term *apology* dates to 1533. The earliest specimen for the second sense—a passage from Shakespeare—comes from the year 1588 and attests to the following definition: “Less formally: Justification, explanation, or excuse, of an incident or course of action.”

It is only with the third definition that we come to the sense of the word *apology* that is familiar to most English-speakers today: “An explanation offered to a person affected by one’s action that no offence was intended, coupled with the expression of regret for any that may have been given; or, a frank acknowledgement of the offence with expression of regret for it, by way of reparation.” This third definition is illustrated at its earliest by a sentence from the year 1594, also culled from Shakespeare. It is not, however, illustrated by anything published by FARMS or in the *FARMS Review*. We feel absolutely no need to “apologize,” in that sense, for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Rather, we see ourselves as, however ineptly, endeavoring to continue an honorable tradition among the Latter-day Saints that extends back far beyond B. H. Roberts’s aptly named 1907 apologetic work *Defense of the Faith and the Saints* to such nineteenth-century stalwarts as John Taylor and the Pratt brothers.

Furthermore, those of us who edit the *FARMS Review* take very seriously the counsel given by Joseph Smith in the jail at Liberty, Missouri, in March 1839,

to gather up the libelous publications that are afloat;

And all that are in the magazines, and in the encyclopedias, and all the libelous histories that are published, and are writing, and by whom, and present the whole concatenation of diabolical rascality and nefarious and murderous impositions that have been practised upon this people— . . .

And also it is an imperative duty that we owe to all the rising generation, and to all the pure in heart—

For there are many yet on the earth among all sects, parties, and denominations, who are blinded by the subtle craftiness of men, whereby they lie in wait to deceive, and who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it—

Therefore, that we should waste and wear out our lives in bringing to light all the hidden things of darkness, wherein we know them; and they are truly manifest from heaven—

These should then be attended to with great earnestness.
Let no man count them as small things; for there is much which lieth in futurity, pertaining to the saints, which depends upon these things.

You know, brethren, that a very large ship is benefited very much by a very small helm in the time of a storm, by being kept workways with the wind and the waves.

Therefore, dearly beloved brethren, let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed. (D&C 123:4–5, 11–17)

We believe it our duty to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3) and to “be ready always to give an answer [apologist] to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15 KJV).\(^\text{18}\)

The English theologian Austin Farrer, reflecting upon C. S. Lewis, put it unimprovably well in what has long functioned as a kind of informal and unofficial mission statement for some of us, in at least certain of our efforts:

Though argument does not create conviction, lack of it destroys belief. What seems to be proved may not be embraced; but what no one shows the ability to defend is quickly abandoned. Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains a climate in which belief may flourish.\(^\text{19}\)

That this comment was a favorite of Elder Neal A. Maxwell’s, too, is completely appropriate in every regard.

Questions about the FARMS Review

One critic recently indicated, in a posting to an Internet message board, that

\(^{18}\) The crucial language reads “To make a [or your] defense” (NASB or NRSB).

the FARMS Review is unique because it spends most of its time trying to shoot down points made by anyone and everyone who says something critical of the LDS Church, and less time trying to “establish new research and scholarship,” as is the case with most academic journals.

While his claim that the Review “spends most of its time trying to shoot down points made by anyone and everyone who says something critical of the LDS Church” is considerably exaggerated, he is correct in perceiving the Review to be unique—it was designed to be such—and in sensing that its principal function, unlike that of most academic journals, is not to “establish new research and scholarship,” although it has rather consistently done so. It is, as its title has always indicated, even throughout its various permutations over the years, a review. One doesn’t primarily turn to the New York Times Book Review or the London Review of Books or the many other periodicals that carry the name Review for cutting-edge new research. But these are often very much worth reading. Moreover, it is a review that very deliberately and quite consciously exists to provide a publication venue for a certain broadly homogenous perspective—one that, while it allows for considerable disagreement over details, is fundamentally united by its belief in the claims of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and that is not well represented (and cannot, by its nature, be well represented) in mainstream secular academic publications. It is sui generis. Had something like it already existed, we would have felt no need to launch it.

Since the FARMS Review in particular, and FARMS in general, continue to be controversial in certain circles, I think it worthwhile to take up several questions about them that tend to recur over and over again.

1. Are FARMS materials peer reviewed?

Yes. FARMS materials are peer reviewed. We at the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship strive to publish academically solid scholarship, and we’re willing to take, and to see that the
Institute takes, the steps that are necessary to do that. That’s why we have a sound peer-review process that facilitates quality control.

Here’s the basic process for the FARMS Review, which mirrors but is not precisely the process for FARMS as a whole: Every manuscript that is submitted is carefully read and commented upon (and either approved or rejected) by me (a PhD in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, UCLA), my two associate editors (PhD in political philosophy, Brown; doctoral work in political science, Columbia), the Review’s production editor (PhD in family sciences, BYU), and the FARMS/Maxwell Institute publication director (MA in ancient Near Eastern studies, BYU). Manuscripts are always offered for reading (and comment and possible rejection) to other members of the FARMS/Maxwell Institute leadership as well, which includes people trained in religious studies at UC Santa Barbara, in Hebrew Bible and history at Harvard and the University of Denver, and the like. Not uncommonly, when special expertise is required (for example, on matters of genetics), we send manuscripts out to people possessing the required expertise. In addition, every manuscript is subjected to meticulous source checking.

This, I freely grant, is not peer review as it is practiced for, say, the main articles section of the Journal of the American Oriental Society or Analysis. (The rest of FARMS, along with the Maxwell Institute as a whole, follows conventional peer review.) But the FARMS Review is, first and foremost and by design, a collection of review essays—something of an opinion journal—and so its review procedures are properly compared to those involved with book reviews elsewhere, including, yes, the book review sections of Analysis and the Journal of the American Oriental Society. To put it in perspective: I’ve written several academic book reviews for non-LDS journals. To the best of my knowledge, none of them has been subjected to peer evaluation (or even to readings by multiple editors) at all. My only contact in these cases has been with the relevant book review editor and not even with the overall editor of the journal. So far as I’m aware, book notes and book reviews submitted to academic journals normally receive only copy editing, not peer review. Essays published in the FARMS Review undergo a much more
rigorous evaluation process than I’ve personally experienced with book reviews appearing, for instance, in such mainstream academic outlets as *Al-Masaq, the Religious Studies Review, Al-ʿArabiyya, the Review of Religious Research, The Medieval Review, the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, The Muslim World,* and *The International Journal of Middle East Studies.* The article review process for the FARMS Review is considerably more complex, demanding, and multilayered than the analogous process for academic book reviews (the relevant comparison) and opinion pieces generally.

In saying that the FARMS Review is “something of an opinion journal,” I do not, incidentally, mean to suggest that it is not fundamentally an academic one, as well. The expression of opinions is scarcely incompatible with scholarly credibility. The two are not mutually exclusive. Book reviews are nothing if they are not expressions of opinions; academic book reviewers are invited to express their opinions of books precisely because they have scholarly credibility.20

The general FARMS peer-review process, for publications other than the FARMS Review, is roughly as follows:

1. A manuscript is submitted.
2. The manuscript is forwarded to the appropriate editor.
3. That editor, probably with other members of the staff, gives the manuscript a preliminary read, to determine whether or not it is worth taking further.
4. If the manuscript passes that initial review, the editor then identifies minimally two or three people with relevant expertise and asks them for their evaluation of the manuscript. Typically, this is done blind (that is, the person who submitted the manuscript does not know who the reviewers are, and the reviewers don’t necessarily know who the author of the manuscript is).
5. If the manuscript passes peer review, it moves to the next stage (very likely with feedback included from the reviewers). If it fails peer

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20. Of course, because of the very nature of our subject focus, not all of the books that we review are, properly speaking, academic, and we’ve occasionally felt quite at liberty to invite people who are not members of the academic club to review such books. They have, however, been held to the same general standards of writing, evidence, and logic.
review, it is rejected (or sent back for suggested revisions). If the peer reviewers disagree, further peer review is sought.

6. If it has survived, the manuscript then enters the editorial process, where it is carefully read by professional editors, who go over it not only for style but for cogency of reasoning and adequacy of documentation.

7. Next, it is subjected to source checking. Its quotations and references are examined for accuracy. If any questions or doubts arise, it goes back to the author for revision.

8. Finally, it is read again by the principal editor and by one or more people on the staff or in the leadership of the Maxwell Institute. Even at this stage, the piece may well be rejected. And anyone, at any stage, can suggest (or demand) revisions.

9. If it has made it thus far, the manuscript goes back to the original author for final alterations and final approval—he or she may well have seen it at least once or twice already during the process—and then it goes to press.

This is essentially the standard procedure for peer review in contemporary academia. And it is no coincidence that this is so, because the academics who founded and established FARMS consciously followed the model of peer review with which they were familiar.

Let me be very clear, however, about what I am not saying: Like other academic publishers, FARMS certifies to its readership that what it publishes has been checked for basic accuracy—my comment regarding the Review, that we do far more rigorous source checking, so far as I am aware, than any other academic press or periodical does, holds for the Foundation as a whole—and that the conclusions appear to follow reasonably from the data presented. We do not, however, certify that what we publish will ultimately prove entirely correct, and we do not expect that every reader (nor, even, everybody affiliated with the Maxwell Institute) will agree with the content of any given article or book. But neither does the Journal of Vertebrate Paleontology nor Speculum nor Oxford University Press. Peer review ensures, simply, that minimum standards have been met. That’s all. Peer review is not performed in order to lull readers of a journal or a book into a
false sense of security. It is performed for the sake of editors, so that they can feel confident that what they are publishing is not obviously flawed in a way that they, fallible mortals, may have inadvertently failed to notice. It should not be fetishized or made into something that it is not and was never intended to be.

As a matter of fact, the standard contemporary model of academic peer review is not without its critics. When it functions as it should, it is a helpful but limited tool for editors. When it does not, it can result in, among other things, the silencing of new ideas, the maintenance of an ossified status quo, or the conferral of an undeserved imprimatur upon poorly conceived and sloppily executed—and, not rarely enough, even dishonest—academic work.

Peer review does not guarantee that a work is good, and absence of peer review does not demonstrate that a work is poor. Many of the greatest works of scholarship, philosophy, and science in human history (such as the Republic of Plato, John Locke’s Essay concerning Human Understanding, Aristotle’s De anima and Poetics and Politics, Kepler’s Harmony of the World, Thucydides’ History of the Peloponnesian Wars, Antoine Lavoisier’s Elements of Chemistry, the Analects of Confucius, Michael Faraday’s Experimental Researches in Electricity, Euclid’s Elements, Alexis de Tocqueville’s Democracy in America, Ptolemy’s Almagest, the Annals of Tacitus, the Enneads of Plotinus, Edward Gibbon’s Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, St. Augustine’s Civitas Dei, the Chronicle of the Prophets and Kings of al-Tabari, Moses Maimonides’s Guide of the Perplexed, the Metaphysics of Ibn Sina, David Hume’s Enquiry concerning Human Understanding, the Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas, Fourier’s Analytical Theory of Heat, the Muqaddima of Ibn Khaldun, Galileo’s Dialogues

concerning the Two New Sciences, Sir Francis Bacon’s Novum Organum and New Atlantis, William Harvey’s On the Circulation of the Blood, the Discourse on Method of Descartes, Sir Isaac Newton’s Principia, Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason, the De Revolutionibus of Copernicus, Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations, Charles Darwin’s Origin of Species, and hundreds of other crucially important works) were produced long before, and therefore without, modern academic peer review.

The great English poet Alexander Pope (d. 1744), whom devotees of Dan Brown’s Da Vinci Code will remember, if they know nothing else about him, as the pope who interred a knight (Sir Isaac), wrote an epitaph for his friend that said,

Nature and nature’s laws lay hid in night;
God said “Let Newton be” and all was light.

But long afterwards, the British writer and editor Sir John Collings Squire (d. 1958) responded with the couplet

It did not last: the devil, shouting “Ho.
Let Einstein be” restored the status quo.

Sir Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein are united in one thing, though: Neither one of them went through peer review.

Although they are generally considered, now, to have laid the foundations of modern physics, not a single one of the four so-called Annus mirabilis (“year of miracles”) papers that Einstein published in the Annalen der Physik in 1905—neither “Über einen die Erzeugung und Verwandlung des Lichtes betreffenden heuristischen Gesichtspunkt” (On a Heuristic Viewpoint concerning the Production and Transformation of Light), for which he later received the Nobel Prize; nor “Über die von der molekularkinetischen Theorie der Wärme geforderte Bewegung von in ruhenden Flüssigkeiten suspendierten Teilchen” (On the Motion—Required by the Molecular Kinetic Theory of Heat—of Small Particles Suspended in a Stationary Liquid); nor “Zur Elektrodynamik bewegter Körper” (On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies), which introduced the Special Theory of Relativity; nor “Ist die
Trägheit eines Körpers von seinem Energieinhalt abhängig?" (Does the Inertia of a Body Depend Upon Its Energy Content?), in which he suggested that $E=mc^2$—received anything even remotely resembling modern academic peer review. They were all simply approved by the journal’s editor. Yet some folks think they were pretty good, nonetheless.

If FARMS publications were produced with or without any peer review, they would still have to be judged on the basis of the quality of the evidence they adduce and the rigor of the logic they employ, just as all works of science, medicine, philosophy, and scholarship were judged until solidly into the twentieth century. Just as, frankly, such works still have to be judged today. But FARMS publications undergo peer review.

2. Are FARMS reviews always done “in-house,” within FARMS or Brigham Young University?

No. We have never restricted ourselves to FARMS or BYU as a pool of potential reviewers. It must be kept in mind, by the way, that FARMS employs only minimal staff, and most of those are administrative, secretarial, or editorial workers. By far the majority of the academic work of FARMS is done by people who work for neither FARMS nor its parent organization, the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, nor at BYU.

We’re always looking for ways to benefit and improve our work. If we can think of a non-BYU or even non-LDS scholar who is competent to evaluate a manuscript submitted to us, we have absolutely no objection to soliciting peer review from him or her. If we think it advisable, we will do so. We’ve done it in the past. I have no reason to doubt that we’ll do it in the future.

3. Are FARMS reviewers always Latter-day Saints?

No. One objection that is commonly (but misguidedly) leveled against the FARMS review process as outlined above is that that process typically, if not inevitably, involves only scholars who are believing
Latter-day Saints. Why, it is demanded, do the benighted pseudo-scholars affiliated with FARMS not send their materials out to non-LDS archaeologists, geneticists, Semitists, historians, and the like? As one Internet critic who seems never to have been even remotely involved in the private FARMS peer-review process in any way has revealed, “they want to stack the deck entirely in their favor.” (For reasons that remain unclear, this individual appears to imagine that positive reports submitted privately in a confidential peer-review process would score public points in some sort of game.)

FARMS will continue, as it has done in the past, to use non-Mormon peer reviewers whenever it deems that advisable. Still, it is true that FARMS peer reviewers are most often Latter-day Saints.

Apart from resting on a factual error, however, this complaint also appears to me to arise out of a fundamental misconception of what FARMS is doing. FARMS is not generally engaged, as such, in cutting-edge archaeology, genetics, Semitics, ancient history, or similar enterprises—although those who write for FARMS very often are, in their other work. (And, in such cases, their archaeological, genetic, Semitist, historiographical, or other scholarly work is published in mainstream non-LDS venues and is subjected to whatever peer review those venues require. John Clark, Donald Parry, Stephen Ricks, William Hamblin, John Butler, and others who have had essays published in the *FARMS Review* have substantial records of publication in non-LDS journals and books.) Rather, FARMS is engaged

in the application of already-existing perspectives in fields such as archaeology, genetics, Semitics, and ancient history, to the Book of Mormon and related Mormon-specific topics. Those already-existing perspectives have previously received and passed standard peer review. The question for FARMS is whether they are being competently and cogently applied to Latter-day Saint topics. And, to answer that question, FARMS turns to peer reviewers competent both on LDS topics and on the subject matter being applied to those topics. Unsurprisingly, the pool of such reviewers is overwhelmingly LDS.

Although some of the claims made in FARMS publications could certainly be termed “cutting-edge,” in the sense that they present new insights into Latter-day Saint scriptures and beliefs, they rarely involve new discoveries in the fields of biblical studies, archaeology, and the like, as such. For example, my articles on Psalm 82, Moses 7, and 1 Nephi 11 draw upon essentially mainstream work by non-Mormon scholars on, respectively, the “divine council” in the Bible and ancient Ugarit, ancient Mesopotamian city laments, and the subject of Asherah and ancient Israelite goddess veneration. Non-Mormon scholars would find little new in any of them, excepting my application of such ideas to a Mormon context. But non-Mormon scholars would not be particularly well-equipped to judge the cogency of my application (and might not be even remotely interested in doing so).

George Lyman Kittredge (d. 1941), the legendary mandarin of the Harvard English Department in the early twentieth century, when

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once asked why he had never bothered to earn a doctorate, is said
to have responded without any irony by posing the counterquestion
“But who would examine me?” His erudition was so remarkably deep
that, although cheeky, his reply was a legitimate one. It’s also rele-
vant, for analogous reasons, to this question of FARMS peer review.
Regrettably, non–Latter-day Saints, by and large, know and care little
about the details of Latter-day Saint claims. (My youngest son is cur-
rently in Japan, attempting to change that.)

If we were aware of a substantial pool of non-LDS geneticists who
had close familiarity with the Book of Mormon and the literature
and scholarship pertaining to it, or of non-LDS biblical scholars or
patrologists who had devoted serious study to Mormon claims and
doctrines, we would be delighted to hear of them and would be more
than willing to use them from time to time to referee essays submit-
ted to us. We have, in fact, occasionally used non-LDS peer reviewers
in the past, but my own sense is that the pool of such people (with the
appropriate qualifications) is quite small.

To illustrate, consider a group of hypothetical articles about the
works of Shakespeare. One article argues that certain poetic forms
appear in some of Shakespeare’s earlier plays, but not in other, later
ones, and suggests biographical reasons for this. Another argues that
the description of a geographical feature alluded to in Macbeth seems
to have been modeled on a landscape that would have been particularly
familiar to Edward de Vere (1550–1604), seventeenth Earl of Oxford
(and probably the leading candidate proposed by those who question
William Shakespeare’s authorship of the plays of “Shakespeare”). Yet
another argues that As You Like It is actually a political satire mocking
an important member of Parliament during Shakespeare’s lifetime.

The editor of the journal to whom these hypothetical articles
have been submitted, could, in order to assure that they are treated
fairly and with no bias, submit them for peer review to people who are
unfamiliar with the life and works of Shakespeare, who may, in fact,
know him only by vague reputation or not at all. But would this be
wise, or productive, or prudent? In my judgment, absolutely not. The
first article should be submitted to someone who is familiar with the
poetic form in question and with the life and works of Shakespeare. The second should be sent to someone who is familiar with the vicinity of Oxford, as well as with the geography claimed in the play itself and with other alternatives and, probably also, with literary conventions in topographical depictions—which should certainly include solid knowledge of the works of Shakespeare and the debate between “Stratfordians” and “Oxfordians” as to their authorship. And the last one should, ideally, be evaluated by someone well acquainted with the relevant period of British parliamentary history and, yes, the life and works of Shakespeare.24

The hypothetical examples above are all, designedly, analogous to articles that FARMS has published. The analogy raises a basic question: Why, if it is important that a peer reviewer be familiar with Shakespeare’s life and writings when it comes to articles about Shakespeare, is it somehow unreasonable to prefer that a reviewer of FARMS articles be familiar with the relevant facets of Mormon scripture, history, and doctrine?

This seems self-evident to me. For someone to be able to judge the validity of a comparison, it is necessary to know both of the things being compared. Anybody asked to judge the accuracy of a translation should know at least both the original language and the target language into which the translation has been made.

In order to evaluate a manuscript on genetics and the Book of Mormon, I will prefer someone with expertise on both genetics and the Book of Mormon over someone who knows only genetics or only the Book of Mormon. In order to review a manuscript submitted on the relationship between the Book of Mormon and pre-Classic Mesoamerica, my preference will go to someone well versed in both pre-Classic Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon, as opposed to someone who knows only one of the two subjects. And, for purposes of evaluating a proposed publication on Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon, I will, without hesitation, favor somebody who knows both Hebrew philology and the Book of Mormon over somebody who

24. The Shakespeare-studies analogy was suggested to me by Nathan Barrett, of Tucson, Arizona, during an Internet discussion of FARMS peer review. My thanks to him for it.
knows only the Book of Mormon or only Hebrew philology. Fairness and relevant competence are the principal requirements. The peer in peer review refers to someone who actually knows the relevant topic.

But there is another consideration that should not be minimized. Not only do most non-Mormon scholars lack the relevant expertise, but most lack the relevant interest. Few of them would recognize the Book of Mormon's River Sidon, and very few of them would care whether it should be correlated with the Rio Grijalva, the Rio Usumacinta, or Rio de Janeiro. And since, in keeping with standard academic review practice, we don’t typically compensate peer reviewers (except with a copy of the book or article that they’re reviewing when it appears), and since, as Christians, we generally eschew violence and compulsion, we have to rely on peer reviewers who are not only competent in the subjects for which we require competence, but who are most likely to care about them.

Nevertheless, FARMS has not only used non-Mormon peer reviewers, but has published non-Mormon scholars. Israeli scholar Ze’ev W. Falk’s Hebrew Law in Biblical Times: An Introduction (2001), the two volumes of Terry Stocker’s New World Figurine Project (1991, 2000), and Stephen D. Houston’s Thematic Bibliography of Ancient Maya Writing (2001, done with Zachary Nelson) are examples of this, as are the articles by Aziz S. Atiya, James H. Charlesworth, Cyrus H. Gordon, Sharon R. Keller, Jacob Milgrom, Jacob Neusner, and Raphael Patai that appeared in the two-volume 1990 FARMS Festschrift for Hugh Nibley, By Study and Also by Faith. The FARMS Review itself has published articles by such non-Mormons as the Roman Catholic David Waltz, the evangelicals Carl Mosser and Paul Owen, the German Lutheran Ernst Benz, the Methodist Jan Shipps, and the Israeli Jew Raphael Jospe.

4. Aren’t FARMS referees hand picked by FARMS Review editors?

Yes. They are chosen neither via random telephone calls nor a lottery. We editors choose them because we think them qualified and

likely to be helpful in our work. We didn’t invent this procedure. We borrowed it from mainstream academia.

5. Why doesn’t FARMS reveal the names of its peer reviewers and publish what they say?

A peer review is not intended to be seen by the outside world. It comes to the FARMS editor who requested it in the form of a confidential memo. (Just for the record, incidentally, the writing of book-jacket endorsements does not constitute peer review, although they may sometimes be derived from peer-review documents. Jacket blurbs are sought by publications marketers in order to promote their products. They are advertisements.) Some critics—a few of them perhaps even sincerely wishing to help—have suggested that it would bolster the credibility of the claims made in FARMS publications, as well as enhance the image of FARMS, if their peer reviewers were, to some greater or lesser degree, non-LDS. As I’ve noted, we have in fact used non-LDS peer reviewers . . . though I’m not aware that this has significantly bolstered our credibility (with our critics or with anybody else) or enhanced our image. Peer review is primarily a way of assisting an editor in deciding which essays and books should be published.

So why don’t we just publish the names of our reviewers and share what they have to say? Wouldn’t that be an easy way to improve our image? When I referred to the confidentiality of the FARMS peer-review process during a recent Internet discussion, my comment provoked the following fascinating response from a vocal critic of FARMS and of the church (who, ironically, posts under a pseudonym):

I take this . . . as tacit admission on DCP’s part that FARMS peer review consists of a bunch of Church “yes men” giving the rubber stamp of approval. Here is also further confirmation of DCP’s desire to keep the FARMS peer review process a big secret, probably because he knows that “exposure” would reveal the small, cabal-like group that does the reviewing.

Like other vocal critics of the FARMS peer-review process, this person, so far as I can tell, has absolutely no personal experience with or
knowledge of the workings of FARMS and appears to lack any personal experience with or knowledge of academic peer reviewing of essays and books.

Academic peer reviews, typically anonymous, are sent as confidential memos to the editor who requested them. If they are sufficiently negative, the editor will probably reject the manuscript that they treat. If, however (presumably because the reviews are acceptably and sufficiently positive and they contain helpful suggestions), the editor decides to go forward with publication, he or she will almost certainly forward those suggestions (usually with no indication of the name of the reviewer) to the author of the manuscript, to aid the author in making indicated revisions. In either case, the peer review documents will, with very, very few exceptions (if any), eventually be discarded. Unless, perhaps, a passage can be saved from one or more of them for a jacket endorsement, they will never be published. Nobody outside of the editorial office and, perhaps, the author’s office, will ever read them.

This is not because they come from a “cabal” or from a group of slavish “yes-men,” but because peer-review anonymity and confidentiality are essential to the integrity of the process. If a reviewer is, for example, invited to evaluate a manuscript whose author he knows (whether because he’s told the author’s name or because, despite a double-blind arrangement, he is able to deduce who wrote it), he needs to be able to respond honestly, without fear of damaging a friendship, endangering his relationship with a colleague, or provoking the wrath of an offended or powerful figure in his field.

This is simply standard practice. FARMS didn’t invent it. Curiously, the same people who falsely claim that FARMS doesn’t follow standard peer-review practices commonly claim to see sneaky deception in the fact that it does. Damned if you don’t; damned if you do.

The criticisms are actually quite comic, if one is in the proper mood:

Polyklazo: You wanna know why FARMS is a joke? Two words:
No peer review.
Alethinos: But they do use peer review.
Polyklazo: Yeah? Well it’s not real peer review.
Alethinos: What’s not “real” about it? It follows the protocols that are standard in academia today.
Polyklazo: So what? FARMS is still a joke, because their peer-review process is confidential and private.
Alethinos: That’s standard practice for academic peer review.
Polyklazo: Well, they’re a joke because they don’t use non-Mormon peer reviewers.
Alethinos: FARMS has no policy against using non-Mormon peer reviewers, and FARMS has, in fact, used non-LDS peer reviewers. No doubt it will use them in the future.
Polyklazo: But they don’t use enough non-Mormon peer reviewers.
Alethinos: How can you possibly know that, since the identity of peer reviewers is confidential? And what percentage of non-Mormon peer reviewers would be “enough”? Who sets that standard?
Polyklazo: The identity of FARMS peer reviewers is confidential? That’s just another reason why FARMS is a joke. Besides, their peer reviews aren’t rigorous.
Alethinos: How can you possibly know that?
Polyklazo: Because they don’t use objective non-LDS peer reviewers.
Alethinos: Who says they don’t use non-LDS reviewers? We’ve been over this before. And, anyway, what makes you think that non-LDS peer reviewers, and only non-LDS peer reviewers, are “objective”? What do you even mean by “objective”? Have you ever read Peter Novick’s important 1988 Cambridge University Press book entitled That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession? Novick argues that the concept of “objectivity” is incoherent and that it would be an undesirable quality in a historian in any case. He . . .
Polyklazo: FARMS is a joke.
Alethinos: Why?
Polyklazo: Because they don’t use peer review.
6. Doesn’t limiting participation in the FARMS peer-review process to Latter-day Saints deprive non-Mormon scholars of a chance to examine FARMS arguments?

Some critics seem to imagine that, unless one or two anonymous non-Mormons are recruited to provide a few lines of confidential feedback to a FARMS editor about a manuscript prior to its publication, FARMS is hiding from real engagement with non-Mormon scholars out of fear that its arguments can’t pass muster. They also seem to believe that no distribution of the published product, no matter how wide, will ever count because it can never overcome that initial flaw. I confess that I cannot understand why anyone would believe that sending an article out for a brief, anonymous, and confidential prepublication review from some non-Mormon reader is more important for overall academic dialogue than seeking to distribute our arguments and evidence to large audiences of non-Mormons.

There is no requirement that FARMS must first have anonymous and confidential reports from a couple of non-LDS peer reviewers in order to have a dialogue with the broader scholarly community in any case. Peer review is no more than a relatively effective quality-control method for ensuring that minimum standards are met prior to publication. The real test of validity occurs after an article or book is published, in the course of ongoing academic dialogue and debate.²⁶

²⁶. The conversation might need to be just a bit more vigorous than that represented in the most recent issue of the John Whitmer Historical Association Journal, where Tom Murphy, one of the two most vocal critics of the Book of Mormon with regard to Amerindian DNA, reviews the book by his fellow Signature Books author Simon Southerton, the other most vocal critic of the Book of Mormon with regard to Amerindian DNA. In the course of his three-page hymn of tribute, Murphy repeatedly praises the “honesty” that “ultimately cost [Southerton] his membership in the LDS Church,” whose “intolerance” Murphy scolds. At the same time, Murphy thunderously denounces “the poorly argued, intellectually dishonest, ahistorical, and scientifically unsound apologetics” published on the subject by FARMS. See Thomas W. Murphy, review of Losing a Lost Tribe: Native Americans, DNA, and the Mormon Church, by Simon Southerton, John Whitmer Historical Association Journal 26 (2006): 325–27. (For links to those vile, pathetic, and incompetent FARMS essays, go to farms.byu.edu/publications/dna.php?selection=dn&cat=dn, accessed 7 December 2006. One wonders, by the way, what manner of peer review Southerton’s book and other Signature publications undergo.) Book reviews can be skewed—and not merely, or even particularly, in the pages of the FARMS Review. For an example of
In fact, the most important “peer review” that a work can receive comes when it enters the marketplace of ideas—and the FARMS Review, though maligned by some who appear to want to poison the well of discourse by directing attention to purported gaps in its editorial process (and alleged character flaws in its authors) while ignoring (and encouraging others to ignore) the substance of what FARMS publishes, deliberately plays a vigorous role in that. The continued and enhanced conversation that a book (even a bad one) may have started represents the academic world at its best. It is the proper way to move the discussion forward.

In any event, as I’ve already said, participation in the FARMS peer-review process is not limited solely to Latter-day Saints. We have used non-LDS peer reviewers in the past, and we will presumably use non-LDS peer reviewers in the future. However, since it is true that FARMS uses mostly Latter-day Saint peer reviewers, I think that a modified form of this question is worth answering.

an analogous maneuver, see the Signature Books Web page, which currently features an attack—entitled “FARMS Is At It Again”—on David G. Stewart Jr.’s “DNA and the Book of Mormon,” FARMS Review 18/1 (2006): 109–38, while apparently pretending that John M. Butler’s essay on pages 101–8 of the same number of the Review, “Addressing Questions surrounding the Book of Mormon and DNA Research,” doesn’t even exist. The Signature Web page is a parade example of ideological spin. Less than a year ago, it still featured an admission from Simon Southerton that “In 600 BC there were probably several million American Indians living in the Americas. If a small group of Israelites, say less than thirty, entered such a massive native population, it would be very hard to detect their genes today.” (Blake Ostler called attention to Southerton’s admission in a superb and substantive letter published in Sunstone. See Blake T. Ostler, “Simon Says, But That Doesn’t Make It So,” Sunstone, November 2005, 4–8.) This admission effectively concedes a major portion of what several FARMS authors have argued with regard to Amerindian DNA and the Book of Mormon—so it has now, as far as I can determine, utterly disappeared from the Signature Web page. In his discussion of the work of Fawn M. Brodie in the FARMS Review of Books 8/2 (1996): 147–230, Louis Midgley demonstrates how Fawn Brodie and her publisher sought to influence and to steer the reviews of her biography of Thomas Jefferson and sometimes manipulated the use of those that had appeared. This is not uncommon and, given the stakes for a publisher, quite understandable. Usually it’s done fairly subtly. Sometimes it’s not. Tom Kimball, the marketing director for Signature Books (a committed publisher of revisionist books on Mormonism and especially on Mormon history), who has no background as a scholar and no discernible record as a historian, currently serves as book review editor for the Journal of Mormon History. Intriguingly, too, the John Whitmer Historical Association Journal has suddenly taken on a very much more prosperous look than it has ever enjoyed before. Cui bono?
We make our books and journals as widely available as we can. Anyone is free to read them and to comment upon them—as, for example, Dr. Michael Heiser recently did, with regard to my essay on Psalm 82, at the annual national meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, in Washington DC. (The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement, a hefty volume edited by Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser, and Paul Owen, represents another recent example of a substantive attempt by legitimate scholars—also evangelicals in this instance—to rebut arguments put forward by mostly FARMS-affiliated authors.) They are available in the public market of ideas. We don't have to use our peer-review process in order for non-Mormons to read our publications—and, since peer review typically involves only a tiny number of scholars for any given piece (say, two or three to, at the very rare most, four or five), and, even then, generally involves only anonymous and private responses, peer review doesn't seem a particularly effective or efficient way of generating dialogue with the broader scholarly community. Obtaining confidential peer reviews from a pair of anonymous non-LDS readers (whose relevant qualifications may not even be particularly strong) would do comparatively little to generate an academic conversation. As it is, like other editors affiliated with FARMS, I seek peer review from the people I believe most competent to offer it. I'm not inclined to institute a quota system in which non-Mormonism would trump relevant qualifications for the selection of reviewers. If a choice has to be made—as I contend that it typically does—it seems to me that pref-

27. Peterson, “‘Ye Are Gods.’”

28. Michael S. Heiser, “You’ve Seen One elohim, You’ve Seen Them All? A Critique of Mormonism’s Apologetic Use of Psalm 82,” presented at the 58th annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Washington DC on 16 November 2006. (Nobody should be surprised when I say that his paper is unlikely to go without response.)

erence must be given to qualified reviewers over unqualified reviewers, even if the latter are non-Mormons.

The real battle for minds takes place, to repeat an important but insufficiently appreciated truism, not when two or three anonymous people are asked to provide a few confidential impressions and recommendations regarding a manuscript submitted for publication, but when and if that manuscript is actually published for the outside world.

7. Isn’t the FARMS Review’s formula a pretty predictable and stale one, of simply labeling everything it doesn’t like “anti-Mormon” and then dismissing it without real argument?

Critics of the Maxwell Institute and FARMS and of the FARMS Review in particular commonly make several claims. It is said that we offer neither evidence nor analysis in support of our beliefs but simply declare our faith or bear our testimonies. Honest readers of this number of the Review (or, for that matter, any other number) and of other FARMS publications will know how seriously to take that allegation. A related accusation commonly leveled against us is that we routinely call everybody who disagrees with us “anti-Mormon” and then let that epithet do the heavy lifting for us. Once we’ve branded an author “anti-Mormon,” rational argument is unnecessary. Our *ad hominem* label makes the author and her claims so radioactive that our work is done.

But this allegation can be quantitatively measured. And I’ve done it. I’ve examined every essay in every number of the Review that has been published thus far in the twenty-first century. Here are some of the results:

The high-water mark for occurrences of the term *anti-Mormon* (and derivatives like *anti-Mormons* and *anti-Mormonism*) in the FARMS Review during the current century to this point was reached with FARMS Review 16/1. The authors represented in its pages used *anti-Mormon* and cognate expressions 147 times over the course of 158,020 words. That’s a frequency of once every 1074.9 words—or, roughly, once every 3.5 typed pages. Even so, half of the essays in 16/1, ten of twenty, don’t contain any form of *anti-Mormon* whatever.
Yet, in FARMS Review 18/1 (2006), *anti-Mormon* and cognate terms appeared only 27 times in twenty-two articles totaling 177,789 words. That yields a rate of just one occurrence per 6584.7 words, which is approximately one occurrence for every 22–27 typical typed pages. Fully sixteen of twenty-two essays in FARMS Review 18/1 (72.7 percent of them) contain not even a single instance of *anti-Mormon* or any directly related expression.

Overall, to this point within the twenty-first century, *anti-Mormon*, *anti-Mormons*, and *anti-Mormonism* have appeared 599 times in the FARMS Review, scattered across 1,445,822 words. To put it another way, they have occurred once for every 2413.7 published words, which is equivalent to one incidence per 8–10 typewritten pages. Of the 164 articles surveyed, 102 (62 percent) never use any of the terms, not even a single time. Moreover, of those 164 articles, 117 (71 percent) use *anti-Mormon* or a related expression once or less.

Further analysis readily reveals that occurrences of such terms as *anti-Mormon*, *anti-Mormons*, and *anti-Mormonism* are concentrated in certain essays and are most common with certain authors. Only 17 of the 164 articles published in the FARMS Review thus far in this millennium—just slightly more than a tenth of them—use such terms more than 10 times each. Interestingly, over a third of the total occurrences (205 of 599) appear in the writing of one particular author, the inimitable Louis C. Midgley, who has singled anti-Mormonism and anti-Mormons out as particular objects of his curiosity and attention.30 If Professor Midgley’s essays are factored out, however, the volumes of the FARMS Review published in the twenty-first century feature only one occurrence of *anti-Mormon*, *anti-Mormons*, or *anti-Mormonism* every 3427.85 words or, approximately, one occurrence every 12–14 pages.

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30. It’s probably relevant to note here that the name *Louis* is derived from an Old German name, *Hlutwig*, that was created by combining *hlut* (famous) and *wig* (battle). *Hlutwig* denoted someone who had been made famous in battle. The etymology of the name *Louis* is still clearly evident in its modern German equivalent, *Ludwig*. My thanks to Mike Parker for bringing this significant fact to my attention.
One very vocal critic, claiming to describe the FARMS Review, recently told readers on a message board that “unlike the typical academic journal . . . it provides a voice to any common Mormon Joe who wants to spout his disdain for whatever anti-Mormon book he just read.” The Review, he revealed, publishes “amateurs” and is unfailingly hospitable to any “[irritated] member who read a book and wants to vent his frustrations about it.” Really? I invite readers to leaf through this number of the Review and judge for themselves whether his claim is plausible. Or the prior number. Or the number before that. Or, for that matter, the number before that. Or before that. Or before that. Or . . . well, you get the picture.

The phrase “any common Mormon Joe” doesn’t seem to accurately describe such Review contributors as James Allen, Lavina Fielding Anderson, Richard Lloyd Anderson, Marilyn Arnold, Mark Ashurst-McGee, Kevin Barney, Davis Bitton, David Bokovoy, Richard Bushman, Allen Buskirk, John Butler, John Clark, Todd Compton, Karen Lynn Davidson, James Faulconer, Brant Gardner, John Gee, Daniel Graham, William Hamblin, Ralph Hancock, Klaus Hansen, Steven Harper, Joel Janetski, Raphael Jospe, Michael Jibson, Larry Morris, Hugh Nibley, Gary Novak, Charles Nuckolls, David Paulsen, Dilworth Parkinson, Nathan Oman, Blake Ostler, Noel Reynolds, Stephen Ricks, Matthew Roper, Frank Salisbury, Richard Sherlock, Jan Shipps, Gaye Strathearn, John Tvedtnes, Ted Vaggalis, Walter van Beek, John Welch, Camille Williams, Diane Wirth, David Wright, and many others. And how many “common Mormon Joes” have really simply walked through the doors of FARMS and, merely because they had a gripe about someone’s book, been given carte blanche to publish in the Review? Answer: None.

It seems unlikely, in fact, given the relative rarity of the term anti-Mormon (and derivatives) in its pages, that the approach taken by the FARMS Review can be accurately summarized as “Simply dismiss the author as anti-Mormon and then dispense with arguments.” To put it plainly, that formula does not appear to represent empirical reality at the FARMS Review. (As the saying has it, “There goes another marvelous theory, cruelly murdered by facts.”)
8. Aren’t Latter-day Saint peer reviewers predisposed by their bias to be uncritical of pro-Mormon manuscripts?

“All articles submitted for publication by FARMS or FAIR are indeed peer-reviewed,” one Internet critic with no known experience with or connection to the private FARMS editorial review process has confidently written, “but there’s only one criterion for passing peer-review: If the material supports the authenticity and validity of Mormonism, regardless of how unbelievable or illogical, the article is suitable for publication.”

But it is a fundamental misconception to assume that Latter-day Saint peer reviewers, merely by virtue of their being believing Latter-day Saints, will always be predisposed to vote “Yea” on a manuscript submitted to FARMS simply because such manuscripts generally argue, simpliciter, for the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon and of Mormonism. The misconception flows from a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of what FARMS does. Critics commonly assume that FARMS and all of its writers set out with a predetermined conclusion and then simply build up cherry-picked evidence to support it. People who know nothing whatsoever of the process and have utterly no contact with FARMS confidently assure us that FARMS has no peer-review procedure or—the law of noncontradiction often doesn’t seem to apply to the critics—that the FARMS peer-review process has absolutely no teeth or credibility because FARMS is nothing but an inbred group of apologists who automatically nod their heads in robotic approval of every manuscript submission that says “What you already believed is true!”

Manuscripts submitted to FARMS for consideration tend, however, to argue for conclusions much smaller and more specific than, flatly, “Mormonism is true!” or “The Book of Mormon is true!” Rather, they argue (to choose a few examples as illustrations) that Canaanite goddess imagery occurs in 1 Nephi 11, that the Book of Mormon’s River Sidon should be identified with the Rio Grijalva in Guatemala, that the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon contained conditional sentences reflecting Hebrew conditional constructions rather than acceptable English grammar, that Alma 36 is chiastic, and that
ancient Greco-Roman contracts are relevant to understanding the purpose of the sealed portion of the plates. But a believing Latter-day Saint is under absolutely no obligation to agree that ancient “doubled and sealed” documents shed light upon the Book of Mormon plates, or to see chiasmus in Alma 36, or to accept the claim that Hebraic conditionals appear in the original manuscript of Helaman 7 and Moroni 10, or to prefer the Grijalva to the Usumacinta or any other river, or to believe that Asherah is present in Nephi’s vision. A faithful scholarly member of the church could quite easily reject one or all of these claims. They are scarcely whispered into our ears at our baby blessings. And, in fact, submissions to FARMS (overwhelmingly submitted by believing members of the church) are quite commonly rejected.  

9. Does FARMS seek to keep its publications from outside scrutiny?  

Absolutely not. Some critics claim that, in the words of one “expert,” “Nothing written by FARMS circulates outside of BYU because it would be laughed at.” Or, as another very independent “thinker” soon responded, “Why aren’t the FARMS publications peer reviewed outside of BYU? Because they would get laughed out of the room.” Their judgment was almost immediately confirmed by yet another Internet “authority,” who pointed out that “The peer review process at FARMS is designed specifically to prevent non-LDS POVs [points of view] from dealing with the work.”  

But this is flatly untrue.  

FARMS circulates its materials as widely as it can and is happy to receive feedback wherever possible. Our series of publications on the Book of Abraham, for example, is distributed by the University of Chicago Press—arguably the foremost academic press in the United States. Chicago carries the series in its catalog and features and sells it in exhibits at relevant scholarly conferences throughout North America. In fact, for a number of years (until quite recently), FARMS

31. I myself have had at least one manuscript rejected by FARMS. And a prior version of this introduction, on a completely different topic, was rejected.
itself exhibited and sold the full range of its publications at such academic gatherings as the massive annual joint national meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature (AAR/SBL), which is probably the largest relevant academic gathering in the world. Furthermore, FARMS-affiliated scholars regularly present on FARMS-relevant topics at such gatherings (for example, in various sessions at the AAR/SBL meeting held in Washington DC in November 2006). On a smaller scale, I, for one, have been quite willing to cite FARMS publications as references in my secular work, thus inviting them to be read. Moreover, FARMS was very much a presence in Terryl Givens's path-breaking 2002 Oxford University Press book *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion*. We're scarcely hiding.

10. Why doesn’t FARMS publish its materials in mainstream periodicals and books?

There is probably no journal in mainstream academia that is interested in publishing works of explicit LDS advocacy, any more than mainstream scientific or scholarly journals are interested in publishing works of Catholic or evangelical apologetics. I can think of no instance where the *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, the *American Historical Review*, *Antiquity*, or any comparable academic journal has ever published any work of expressly sectarian religious advocacy. This isn’t because such advocacy is inevitably and by nature inferior or unscholarly. Religious apologetics is also very much beyond the pale at such gatherings as the annual joint meeting of the


American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature. Even the Society of Christian Philosophers wisely bars denominational apologetics and polemics from its meetings. Why? It’s part of the ethos of the modern academy. It facilitates calm, civil exchanges by providing a congenial atmosphere in which academic arguments can be exchanged with a minimum of overt party spirit. And I, for one, am quite content that it be so. Nonetheless, the principal reason that FARMS was founded was to publish a certain kind of scholarship, for which, otherwise, there was no venue. (In this sense, the FARMS Review’s theological commitment isn’t an offense against scholarly diversity; it’s an expression of scholarly diversity.)

Some critics seem to labor under a profound misapprehension of what FARMS is about and what those affiliated with it think they’re doing. Consider, for example, the liberal Community of Christ (formerly RLDS) historian Roger Launius. In his review of Richard Lyman Bushman’s *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* for the *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*, Launius takes issue with Bushman’s understanding of FARMS:

Bushman acknowledges that there is debate over the nature of the Book of Mormon, offering synopses of arguments over its historicity and divinity. He contends that “On point after point, the [modern] proponents answer the critics and assemble their own evidence.” He also contends: “Unlike the critics, they do not claim their case is conclusive, but they go on accumulating support.” He is most assuredly misinformed on this point. If there is one thing that Louis Midgley and the lords of FARMS are convinced of, it is that their “case is conclusive” and that all should agree with them.34

Evidently with the same curious notion in their heads, some critics have insisted that, if we’re really sitting on evidence that would totally rewrite the history of the Americas, proving conclusively that

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light- and dark-skinned peoples fought a cataclysmic series of battles for control of at least their portion of pre-Classic Mesoamerica, that a small group of Hebrews colonized the New World during the sixth century bce, and that Jesus visited the Americas shortly after his resurrection, mainstream scholars would be falling all over themselves to hear more about these amazing proofs. Accordingly, our failure to publish our stunning evidence in such outlets as the world-famous and immensely prestigious Internationale Zeitschrift für Zweifellose Sicherheiten demonstrates, in their eyes, that we have no such evidence.

They're right. We don't. In my capacity as (I suppose) one of the “lords of FARMS,” I hereby declare that it is Roger Launius, not Richard Bushman, who is “most assuredly misinformed” about FARMS. (And I have Louis Midgley’s permission to say so.) So far as I can tell, all of those affiliated with FARMS would sympathize with the words of evangelical Protestant philosopher James E. Taylor, in his introduction to a book surveying Christian apologetics for college students:

I have not discovered in these materials any proofs or demonstrations that would compel all rational people to believe that God exists or that Christianity is true. Instead, I have encountered arguments and evidences that have reassured me that it is at least not irrational to be a Christian and, even more, that the Christian worldview is more reasonable than its competitors.35

Although we think we’re doing quite well and that we’ve found some exceedingly interesting and even powerful evidences in support of Latter-day Saint claims, no one affiliated with FARMS thinks that we’ve got an evidentiary slam dunk, and we never talk about “proving” Mormonism or “proving” the Book of Mormon true. We certainly don’t imagine that we’ve done so. We don’t think it’s in the cards, or even part of the divine plan. The gospel is not to be “proven” by secular demonstrations from fallible mortal scholars. (“No man can come to me,” said Jesus, “except the Father which hath sent me draw him.”

“But the natural man,” explained the apostle Paul, “receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”; John 6:44; 1 Corinthians 2:14; see Moroni 10:4–5.) Rather, to the extent that they’re engaged in positive apologetics at all, FARMS authors are patiently accumulating facts and parallels to make a cumulative case for the credibility of Latter-day Saint claims, not purporting to have found the “mother lode,” scored a decisive overall knockout, or hit a single, game-ending grand-slam home run.

And the construction of that painstaking, piecemeal case requires more publication space than the mainstream secular academy is ever going to afford us. A closely related but generally nonapologetic example should make the situation clearer: Mainstream historical journals may well be interested in the occasional article on Joseph Smith or the westward migration, but, by and large, they’re not going to be particularly interested in the kinds of “small” studies (for example, about the genesis of the ecclesiastical ward in Nauvoo, early attempts to raise cotton in St. George, the settlement of Cache Valley, disagreements between Erastus Snow and George Q. Cannon, the formative years of Charles W. Penrose, or the memoirs of Jane Manning James) that are the warp and woof of Mormon and Utah history. They simply have too many other subjects that interest them more. That’s why outlets such as the Journal of the Mormon History Association, Mormon Historical Studies, the Utah Historical Quarterly, and the John Whitmer Historical Association Journal have been established. Analogously, that is also one of the reasons FARMS exists.

Having laid down the foregoing proviso, though, I must now point out that FARMS-affiliated authors have long been more than happy to publish their materials in mainstream venues. For instance, John W. Welch’s Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis was first published in 1981. It contains various essays, such as Jonah Fraenkel’s “Chiasmus in Talmudic-Aggadic Narrative,” Bezalel Porten’s “Structure and Chiasm in Aramaic Contracts and Letters,” and Yehudah Radday’s “Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative,” as well as an introduction by the eminent Hebrew biblical scholar David Noel Freedman
(then at the University of Michigan). But it also contains an essay, by John Welch himself, entitled “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon.” Had Professor Welch, the founder of FARMS, been as terror stricken at the thought of non-Mormon scholars examining his essay as some critics suggest that he must have been, it seems unlikely that he would have published his book with the academic press Gerstenberg Verlag, in Hildesheim, Germany.

Some other pieces with clear Mormon interest that have been published by FARMS-affiliated authors in mainstream non-LDS venues include (but are not limited to):


Another potentially relevant example is my own very recent paper on “The Tree of Life in the Qur’an,” which I presented at a FARMS/Maxwell Institute symposium at BYU at the end of September 2006. It features several Mormon-related aspects and will eventually be published by the Maxwell Institute. I delivered a somewhat different form of that paper on 18 November 2006 at the annual joint national meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature in Washington DC, and the chairman of the session has asked that I submit it to the journal that he edits. This sort of thing is scarcely unique to me and is far from uncommon.

11. Doesn’t the failure of FARMS arguments to attract interest or attention from non-Mormon scholars demonstrate that they have no merit?

First of all, that alleged “failure” is by no means absolute. As I’ve tried to illustrate here with a few examples (which could be multiplied),
non-Mormon scholars have begun to take notice of the materials published by FARMS, and FARMS-affiliated scholars have been participating in the broader scholarly conversation.

Second, a failure to attract interest or attention means that, by and large, FARMS arguments have not been seriously examined by non-LDS scholars. But, surely, someone who has not seriously examined a complex argument and its supporting evidence is in no position to pass judgment on its merits or lack thereof.

Why do so few non-Mormon scholars pay any attention to Latter-day Saint publications? On the whole, they fail to pay attention because they have other interests and because their time is limited. Most of them also don’t follow journals of Presbyterian history or debates about the reliability of the gospel of John. Moreover, serious, academically reputable Latter-day Saint historical, archaeological, and scriptural scholarship is a rather new phenomenon. Mormonism has, until relatively recently, been a marginal religious phenomenon, isolated in the remote Great Basin.

In the beginning, it wasn’t about the history of an elite class, the kind on which most historiography is focused, but the history of lower classes—fishermen, farmers, craftsmen—“little people” who normally have no chroniclers. . . . They formed a small, weak, much attacked, and “discredited” fringe group in the society of the period . . . scarcely noticed by the wider world and unremarked in its chronicles.36

But let us be frank. To most of those (particularly in the very secularized world of contemporary academia) who have even a nodding acquaintance with Mormonism, our claims simply don’t merit serious consideration or engagement.

Does this mean that Latter-day Saint beliefs are really, objectively, without intellectual merit? No. If I thought so, I would not be where I

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36. Hans Küng, Das Christentum: Die Religiöse Situation der Zeit (Munich: Piper Verlag, 2003), 95, 97–98. Actually, Küng is describing the formative first century or two of ancient Christianity, which went on, despite its initial obscurity, to become somewhat important in subsequent years. But his portrayal fits the first century or two of Mormonism quite nicely also.
am and doing what I do. Yet I recognize, as the apostle Paul did, that the claims of the gospel will seem to some a “stumblingblock” and mere “foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:22–23). It’s a matter of prior assumptions and worldviews (what the Germans call Weltanschauungen). From within a given worldview, other worldviews may look silly and completely implausible.

A little story created by John Stackhouse will perhaps serve to illustrate what I’m saying. The famous anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard conducted research among the Azande of the Sudan in the 1920s. He found that the Azande, along with other tribal peoples, believed that sickness and health were tightly bound up with “magic” and “witchcraft.” Illness, they were convinced, came as a result of having offended a spirit, or a shaman, or, at any rate, somebody who could employ a shaman in order to obtain revenge for the offense. Given this worldview, it made entirely rational sense to them for a sick person to make things right with the offended party through a consultation with a shaman or witch doctor (either the one responsible for the illness or another who might be able to overcome or dissuade the one who had caused the illness) by means of ritual, sacrifice, or compensation. Stackhouse uses the Azande to make an important point about incommensurable worldviews:

Well, we know better, don’t we? So, blessed with our superior knowledge, we fly over to Africa in our silver bird. We alight from the plane wearing our priestly garments (lab coats) and greet the assembled Azande.

“O Azande!” we say. “We hear that you understand sickness and health in terms of witchcraft.”

The Azande, a noble and patient people, respond, “That is true.”

“O Azande!” we say again. “Have you not heard of microbiology, of Louis Pasteur, of bacteria, viruses, and antibiotics?”

The Azande, a noble and patient people, respond, “No, we have not.”
“O Azande!” we repeat, thoroughly caught up in our role as saviors, “let us explain to you how wrong you are about illness and how our way of understanding is better.”

The Azande, a people whose nobility and patience is now being tried, continue to listen.

“You see,” we say animatedly, “there are these teeny weeny bugs all over the place. You can’t see them; you can’t smell them; you can’t hear them or feel them—*but they’re there!* And they crawl over your skin and into your body through your nose and ears and eyes and mouth and cuts in your skin. Once inside, they breed and breed and breed until there are thousands of them, then millions of them, then billions of them all over inside of your body.

“And that,” we conclude with a flourish, “is what makes you sick.”

The Azande, a noble and patient people, look at each other for a moment. Then the leader responds: “I think we’ll just stick with the witchcraft paradigm, thanks.”

Stackhouse then makes explicit the lesson that he wants his audience to learn from such a tale:

The amusement we might feel in reading such stories is exactly the point. The implausible explanations offered are not simply unlikely, or difficult to believe. They are laughable. They don’t count as even possible alternatives, worth a moment’s consideration. They do not fall within the range of theories that, given one’s worldview, one is disposed to entertain seriously. As Thomas Kuhn suggests in his influential analysis of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, when one paradigm, or overarching model, of science confronts over another, it doesn’t always denounce it as merely inferior or even bad science: It tends to treat it as *not science at all*. It is simply implausible, and thus not worth taking seriously.  


We know (or think we do) that the germ theory of disease is far superior to the Azande explanation. But the notion of billions of invisible “teeny weeny bugs” would have seemed so silly on the face of it and so completely implausible to the Azande, at least in the 1920s, that they would not have been inclined to sit around while we made our case. Thus, its merits would have remained unknown to them. (Support for this conclusion can be found in the fact that, as I’m told, very few Azande shamans performed peer review for the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in the twenties, and *JAMA* enjoyed little circulation among the witch doctors residing along the Uele River, in the districts of Rafaï, Zémio, and Obo, and in southwestern Sudan.)

**In This Number of the FARMS Review**

For this number of the *Review*, Kevin Barney examines what I regard as one of the most important books to have appeared regarding Mormon history in recent years, the 2005 anthology edited by John W. Welch with Erick B. Carlson and entitled *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*. I’m convinced that it will strengthen the faith of believing Latter-day Saint readers and even inspire them. On the other hand, it will (or, at least, should) challenge unbelievers who honestly confront the data it contains. It is, in my opinion, an indispensable book. Along with a very small shelf including such earlier volumes as Richard L. Anderson’s classic *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*—and, now, possibly including the new Maxwell Institute anthology *Oliver Cowdery: Scribe, Elder, Witness*—*Opening the Heavens* presents information that should be considered by anyone seriously concerned with the truth of the claims of Mormonism. Attempts to dismiss crucial elements of the Restoration as merely metaphorical, or as subjective to Joseph Smith, are blocked by powerful evidence that those events occurred in the real, material world—rather than in some mystical or metaphysical realm,

whatever *that* might be—and that they are attested to by abundant historical documentation.

Egyptologist Kerry Muhlestein reviews an anthology of papers from the ongoing Book of Abraham Project entitled *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*; Louis Midgley probes for signs that the Southern Baptist Convention has moderated the anti-Mormon stance officially set in place prior to and during its annual convention in Salt Lake City in 1998—his negative conclusions raise questions about the efficacy of continued conversations with those whose primary interest is in securing the submission of the Saints; and David Paulsen and Cory Walker examine a recent work on the Mormon view of salvation by Douglas J. Davies of Durham University in the United Kingdom, one of the most serious and well-informed outside commentators on Mormon faith and life.

Two substantial essays in this number consider the interface between Mormonism and science. First, physical chemist Robert R. Bennett responds to a work by a former Latter-day Saint written to demonstrate that Mormonism (often poorly understood, and just as often taken in the most boneheadedly literalistic way) and Latter-day Saint scripture (often sloppily misread) are incompatible with science (sometimes just as poorly understood). Bennett demonstrates that the book’s author has failed to interact with faithful Latter-day Saint scientists and with believing scientific theists generally (of whom there are many), who have been giving solid thought to the issues that the book raises for a very long time.

Second, Utah State University philosopher Richard Sherlock examines the subject of “intelligent design”—very controversial at the moment—from the perspective of a believing Latter-day Saint. I expect that he will receive considerable criticism for having written such a piece and that we will come under attack, from some quarters at least, for the sheer act of publishing it. That’s perfectly fine with me. Candidly, I’ve been astonished at the consistent inaccuracy with which ID theory, as it’s sometimes called, has been depicted in the press, and at the knee-jerk and caricaturizing negativism with which some believing Latter-day Saint scientists have responded to it. It
seems to me, whether ID is ever shown to be correct or not, or whether it can even be formulated as a truly scientific hypothesis or not, that Latter-day Saints, of all people, should not automatically dismiss it as a possibility. We have no obligation, whatever the surrounding culture may say, to accept the notion that naturalism is the default setting for scientific and scholarly discussion. Why hand such an advantage to critics of the gospel and the restoration without even seriously considering the question? Sometimes, it seems to me, we Latter-day Saints are so terrified of being thought provincial and backward that we are much too quick to signal our submission to reigning cultural and intellectual dogma. But such submission will never convince any of our cultured despisers that we’re not backward rubes . . . and a hasty and uncritical zeal to ape our “betters” may only serve to confirm that we are, indeed, insecure provincials.

“Again we search for the little birdie”

Finally, a brief comment on Dan Vogel’s review of Richard Bushman’s *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* in the most recent number of the *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*. “Richard,” writes Vogel, “is quick to state that ‘pure objectivity is impossible’ when dealing with ‘a character as controversial as [Joseph] Smith,’ but we all know that ‘pure objectivity is impossible.’ Period.”

We may all know that now, of course (although, frankly, I doubt it), but we didn’t always know it. That a realization of the incoherence of the concept of historiographical “objectivity” and even of its undesirability has gradually begun to percolate through the community of historians writing on Latter-day Saint topics is due, in large part, to the unremitting efforts of Louis Midgley—efforts that were greatly aided

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by a 1988 book entitled *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession*, written by the University of Chicago historian Peter Novick.42 (I was strongly tempted to title this section of my introduction “Time Vindicates Louis Midgley.”) When Novick, an agnostic Jew, was invited to address the Sunstone Symposium held the year after his book appeared, he surprised many in the audience by plainly siding not with his fellow historians but, instead, with the gadfly who had already, by that point, been vocally criticizing ideological assumptions endemic to the so-called “New Mormon History” for quite some time:

Louis Midgley, a BYU political scientist, though not himself an Old Mormon Historian, has been the most prolific, the most sophisticated, the most incisive critic of New Mormon History from what I think is fair to call the Old Historians’ perspective. I have been very impressed with Midgley’s work. I think he has a much more sophisticated notion of objectivity than most New Mormon Historians do. He is very familiar with recent literature on the subject. I think his criticisms of some of the New Mormon Historians’ statements about objectivity are very cogent. I think he has made merited criticisms of

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certain fudging on some issues by New Mormon Historians. He has repeatedly insisted (in a phrase that has been variously interpreted but has entered the language of historical argumentation among Mormon historians) that there is no middle ground—meaning there is no middle ground between Joseph Smith as prophet and Joseph Smith as not prophet. You have got to choose which side are you on. Your money or your life. “Under which king, Bezonian? Speak or die” [William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part 2*, 5.3.113].

But neither Professor Midgley nor Professor Novick had any intention of opening the floodgates to complete arbitrariness or whimsicality in the writing of any history, including Mormon history. Neither believes (though Professor Midgley has frequently been accused, by critics, of believing) that there is no real past, and neither is a relativist with regard to the writing of history.

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43. This remark is taken from a transcription of Peter Novick, “Why the Old Mormon Historians Are More Objective Than the New,” a talk delivered at the 1989 Sunstone Symposium held at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. The Maxwell Institute purchased a tape of this talk (SL89096), which is still available from the Sunstone Web site, www.sunstoneonline.com (accessed 26 June 2006). One can also download a free MP3 version from the same site. For background on the talk, see Midgley, “Knowing Brother Joseph Again,” xlv–lvi. Incidentally, Professor Novick’s laudatory remarks about Professor Midgley will no doubt come as a shock to certain critics, for whom contempt, hostility, and loathing toward Professor Midgley are bedrock elements of their anti-FARMS faith. Yet Professor Novick’s positive comments are by no means unparalleled among genuine scholars. I myself, with my very own ears (and in the presence of George Mitton and David Paulsen), heard the prominent Protestant theologian Clark Pinnock, in a conversation with Professor Midgley during a break in the first annual meeting of the Society for Mormon Theology and Philosophy, held at Utah Valley State College on 19–20 March 2004, expressly praise Professor Midgley for the “kindness” and “charity” of his writing, considering the offensive nature of the writings to which he had responded. Pinnock had read Midgley’s “Faulty Topography,” *FARMS Review* 14/1–2 (2002): 139–92; and “On Caliban Mischief,” *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): xi–xxxvii. Fortunately, no critics were present; paramedics were, at best, several minutes away, and my cardiopulmonary resuscitation skills are, to say the best of them, untested.

44. It would certainly be difficult to sustain such charges against Peter Novick, the author of such careful and highly regarded works as *The Resistance versus Vichy: The Purge of Collaborators in Liberated France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968) and *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999).
Arbitrariness, however, is what we seem to see in Dan Vogel’s own treatment of Joseph Smith. “I will confess,” he writes, “that I found Richard’s analysis most convincing when he was in agreement with mine, and somewhat less persuasive when he disagreed.”45 There’s nothing especially surprising about such a confession. After all, Ambrose Bierce has plausibly defined admiration as “Our polite recognition of another’s resemblance to ourselves.”46 But it’s difficult to repress a certain frisson of amazement when one begins to appreciate the pervasive significance of ideology in Vogel’s approach to Joseph Smith and the bold manner in which he seeks to reduce views of the founding events of the restoration that do not accord with his to the same level of theory-drivenness, by insinuating that all speculations are created equal. “Deciding to tell the story from the point of view of believers,” he says, “specifically the one currently enforced through threat of excommunication by the Utah-based LDS Church, is one thing, but presenting that point of view as less speculative than that held by skeptics is another.”47

Thus, telling the story as believers hold it to have occurred is, from Vogel’s perspective, merely one arbitrary decision among many other equally arbitrary choices—although, Vogel rather churlishly insinuates, the view allegedly held by supposed “believers” may actually be held insincerely in some undetermined number of cases, under duress—and simply rests on more or less unbridled speculation.

Whatever else can be said about him, Dan Vogel certainly knows speculation. In an essay published in 2002, for instance, after nearly thirty pages in which he attempts to demonstrate that the witnesses to the Book of Mormon were merely hallucinating, he casually tosses in the suggestion that, perhaps, maybe Joseph Smith possibly created some bogus tin plates in order to gull his dupes. As I’ve remarked before, this odd throwaway passage suggests the possibility that Vogel finds his hallucination thesis nearly as unpersuasive and unsatisfactory as I do.48 And yet he’s stuck with it, for theological (or, better,
atheological) reasons: “‘How often have I said to you,’ remarked Sherlock Holmes to Dr. Watson, ‘that when you have eliminated the impossible [which, in Vogel’s case, is theism and “the supernatural”], whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth?’”49 If you don’t think the Book of Mormon is history, Vogel has explained, “then you have to look for naturalistic explanations for the experiences of the witnesses no matter how difficult it seems.”50

The late atheistic historian Dale Morgan wrote a 1945 letter to Juanita Brooks, a believing Latter-day Saint historian, in which he bluntly noted that

With my point of view on God, I am incapable of accepting the claims of Joseph Smith and the Mormons, be they however so convincing. If God does not exist, how can Joseph Smith’s story have any possible validity? I will look everywhere for explanations except to the ONE explanation that is the position of the church.51

“Richard [Bushman] should have recognized,” Vogel complains, that my discussion of the plates did not begin with a wild speculation about how Joseph Smith could have made them

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49. Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four* (London: Blackett, 1890), 93. I realize that I’ve used this quotation, and the following one from Dale Morgan, on at least two previous occasions. They are, however, too perfectly suited for this discussion to be omitted here.


out of tin, but rather, as explained in my introduction, with the assumption that the Book of Mormon is not real history. Thus, to the extent that one believes the evidence points to a non-historical Book of Mormon, it also points to something other than real gold plates under the cloth. The two are inseparably connected.\textsuperscript{52}

And, indeed, they are. Since Dan Vogel believes that the Book of Mormon is “non-historical,” he \textit{needs} to have “something other than real gold plates under the cloth.” Hence, the tin. Or something. Whatever. Any ad hoc device that will do the trick.

So, \textit{voilà}, there were no gold plates under the cloth. And (keep your eye on the magician’s hands here) because Dan Vogel cannot allow real gold plates, nobody ever actually saw them. \textit{Ever}. Of the Book of Mormon, Vogel revealingly comments, “If the historian decides it has no historical basis, then Smith’s claims about the angel and gold plates cannot be taken at face value.”\textsuperscript{53} And, of course, neither can anybody else’s. Whatever the witnesses may have said, and no matter how insistently they may have said it, they really only saw something, perhaps tin plates, under a cloth, never the plates themselves.\textsuperscript{54} Accordingly, building upon that highly dubious claim, which tramples upon the explicit testimony of the witnesses, Vogel goes for his real point: “Because the plates were covered, the statements of Smith’s family and friends are only evidence of their trust. Nothing more. In short, their testimonies cannot be used to eliminate speculation altogether because they are themselves speculations.”\textsuperscript{55}

As Vogel ironically comments about Richard Bushman’s much less ideological approach, “This theory controls what is then quoted and what is left out.”\textsuperscript{56} All is whimsy. Everything is relative. For Vogel it’s just speculation.

\textsuperscript{52} Vogel, “Bushman’s \textit{Rough Stone Rolling},” 325.
\textsuperscript{53} Vogel, “Bushman’s \textit{Rough Stone Rolling},” 323.
\textsuperscript{55} Vogel, “Bushman’s \textit{Rough Stone Rolling},” 324.
\textsuperscript{56} Vogel, “Bushman’s \textit{Rough Stone Rolling},” 323.
“Secular historians are . . . more inclined than Mormons to suppress source material from Joseph’s closest associates,” remarked Richard Bushman himself in an eerily prophetic essay published in 1997. (He could have been writing about Dan Vogel.) Since, Bushman said, quoting extensively from the reminiscences of those closest to the events would tend to suffuse a modern narrative with their own faith and would turn readers’ attention to Joseph’s transparently sincere desire to obey God, “believing historians are more inclined to be true to the basic sources than unbelieving ones.”57

But historiography severed from primary sources and faithless to the texts that alone constitute its only real link to the past is most accurately described as “wild speculation,” or, even, as historical fiction.58 And that seems precisely the proper description for such flights of imaginative fancy as this one, from Vogel’s biography of Joseph Smith:

[Lucy] related that her family stayed up late into the evening “conversing upon the subject of the diversity of churches that had risen up in the world and the many thousand opinions in existence as to the truths contained in scripture.” Not an unlikely topic for a late Sunday night conversation, but Lucy probably minimized the intensity of this discussion since young Joseph’s reaction was more pronounced than usual.

Lucy noticed that seventeen-year-old Joseph seemed withdrawn as if in deep contemplation. He was quiet but not unaffected. . . . [U]ndoubtedly his parents’ religious turmoil . . . stirred him, in the words of his mother, “to reflect more deeply than common persons of his age upon everything of a religious nature.” Joseph more than any of his siblings well understood the religious quandary in which his parents found themselves. There was much that he could say, but in the swirl

of emotional debate, who would hear him? Besides, he was just a youth with little standing or authority in such matters. More than anything, Joseph’s silence likely resulted from his ambivalent feelings and the high emotional price of choosing sides. Very little was resolved when the Smiths finally retired for the night.

As Joseph lay in his bed, likely troubled by his family’s religious conflicts, he may have prayed for deliverance—perhaps asking God to soften his parents’ hearts. He may have asked that God would give him the words to convert his father, but he knew that words alone were not sufficient to persuade. Joseph Sr.’s intellectualized approach to the Bible and Universalistic beliefs seemed like impassible barriers to Joseph Jr. From his failed attempt to persuade him in 1820/21 [the first vision], Joseph knew that his father resisted visionary experiences. Joseph’s line of authority with his father was his gift of seeing [money-digging]. Perhaps for the good of the family and his father’s future welfare, Joseph might call upon that influence to bring his father to repentance and give his family the religious harmony they so badly needed. These were desperate thoughts, but in Joseph’s mind, the situation would have called for decisive action.

And thus, Vogel suggests to his readers, the tale of Moroni was born, and, with it, the Book of Mormon. “Shortly an ‘angel’ appeared at his bedside.” “He would later claim,” Vogel says of Joseph, to have been thinking about his own state before God. But Vogel knows better.59 “It is,” wrote Hugh Nibley in 1946, “simply another case of the facts stating one thing and Brodie stating another, basing her assertions on her own imponderable knowledge of Joseph’s inmost mental processes.”60

No. Wait a minute. That last quotation is about Fawn Brodie, not Dan Vogel. But it sounds uncannily familiar, because Dan Vogel is

59. Vogel, Joseph Smith, 43–44.
scarcely original in this sort of thing. *Plus ça change*, goes the French saying, *plus c’est la même chose*—the more something changes, the more it stays the same. Six decades ago, in his first publication on a Latter-day Saint topic, Hugh Nibley pointed to very much the same approach in Brodie’s 1945 biography of Joseph Smith, *No Man Knows My History*. “It will be seen that Brodie’s argument throughout the whole period rests ultimately on nothing but her own insight into the inner, nay the unconscious, mind of the Prophet.” 61 “The young woman who can tell us with perfect confidence just what must have happened and what would have happened is not one to be stopped by uncooperative documents and recalcitrant sources; and she is most at home when there are no documents at all.” 62

The culmination of Joseph’s megalomania finds him without courage, “empty of conviction when he needed it most.” *Again we search for the little birdie* that tells little Brodie these things. “He stood proudly before his men, betraying nothing of the tumult and anxiety racking him within.” Since he betrayed nothing by look, word, or gesture of his inner feelings, we take the liberty to report that he was really thinking of a fishing trip made on his seventh birthday; there is no evidence for this, but of course his thoughts were *perfectly* concealed, you know. Is this history? To present as facts what a man might have or could have or even possibly would have been thinking on an occasion when, far from revealing his thoughts, he covers them up, is a good game; but a book built up of alternate layers of psychological speculation and haphazard sources that only support them if accepted with a certain peculiar interpretation—such a book is not history. 63

62. Nibley, “No, Ma’am, That’s Not History,” 35. For someone deservedly well-known for his work on the primary sources in Mormon history, Vogel too adopts a surprisingly cavalier attitude toward them when his ideological approach requires it. See Larry E. Mor ris, “Joseph Smith and Interpretive Biography,” *FARMS Review* 18/1 (2006): 321–74.
63. Nibley, “No, Ma’am, That’s Not History,” 26–27, first emphasis added.
“My discussion of the plates did not begin with a wild speculation about how Joseph Smith could have made them out of tin,” recalls Dan Vogel, “but rather . . . with the assumption that the Book of Mormon is not real history.”64 “I was convinced before I ever began writing the book,” Fawn Brodie confided in a 1975 oral history interview, “that Joseph Smith was not a true prophet.”65 And thus the ideological pre-commitment dictates the historical method—and, so it is implied, justifies “wild speculation.”

When Joseph Smith faced Emma for the last time, “he knew that she thought him a coward.” So Brodie knows that Emma knew that Joseph knew what Emma thought! Is this history? There might be some merit in this sort of thing if, like the invented speeches of the Greek historian, it took some skill to produce. But, if anything, it is hard for the historian to avoid the pitfalls of such cheap and easy psychology. The business of the historian is to tell what happened, not what someone might have been thinking about what was happening.66

“Oh, I had always wanted to write fiction,” Fawn Brodie told her interviewer in 1975.67 But historical novels must be sharply distinguished from real biographies. Docudramas are not genuine documentaries. And “clairvogelance,” to use a term coined by historian Andrew Hedges and psychiatrist Dawson Hedges in their FARMS review of Dan Vogel’s Joseph Smith biography, is not a solid foundation for reliable history.68 The Midgley/Novick critique of objectivity

64. Vogel, “Bushman’s Rough Stone Rolling,” 325.
66. Nibley, “No, Ma’am, That’s Not History,” 34.
68. See Andrew H. Hedges and Dawson W. Hedges, “No, Dan, That’s Still Not History,” FARMS Review 17/1 (2005): 205–22 at 211. See also Alan Goff, “Dan Vogel’s Family Romance and the Book of Mormon as Smith Family Allegory,” FARMS Review 17/2 (2005): 321–400; and Morris, “Joseph Smith and ‘Interpretive Biography,’” 327–74. Several other useful essays in the FARMS Review have focused on other works by the prolific Dan Vogel. They may all be found online, via maxwellinstitute.byu.edu.
in Mormon historiography is no carte blanche for utter arbitrariness and “wild speculation.”

Editor’s Picks and Thanks

We do, however, feel the need to continue tradition by offering our “picks” from among the items reviewed in this number of the FARMS Review. As always, these ratings have been determined in consultation with the two associate editors and the production editor of the FARMS Review and after reading what our reviewers have had to say. But the final responsibility for them is entirely mine. Items that we review but that fail to appear in this list have been omitted because we could not recommend them (which, in certain cases, is putting it very mildly).

This is the scale, unavoidably subjective in character, that we use in our rating system:

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

From among the items considered, these are the books that we are willing to endorse:

**** John W. Welch and Erick B. Carlson, eds., Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844
*** John Gee and Brian M. Hauglid, eds., Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant
** Douglas J. Davies, The Mormon Culture of Salvation: Force, Grace and Glory

And I not only need to but am happy to thank those who have made this number of the FARMS Review possible. Clearly, I need to thank the reviewers, who receive no payment for their work beyond a free copy of the item they are reviewing—and, frequently, not even that—and, eventually, a free copy of the Review when it appears. Louis Midgley and George Mitton, the Review’s associate editors, share generously of their wisdom, knowledge, and experience, as well as of their
time and energy. Shirley Ricks, the Review’s unfailingly competent production editor, actually causes it to appear. Alison Coutts reads each review and article and offers useful suggestions and comments. Paula Hicken does an outstanding job of overseeing the source checking and proofreading and was aided in these tasks, this time, by Brette Jones and Sandra Thorne. Jacob Rawlins typesets the reviews. Without the efforts of these individuals, the Review would never appear.