

Positivism, objectivism, historicism, and environmentalism, with their interrelated vocabularies, cannot be used to establish the claim of secular histories to be "higher," "better," or "truer" than other histories. Gadamer shows why naturalistic explanation, locked in psychologism, introduces its own superstitions. The resulting histories do "violence" to the sacred language they seek to subsume, repressing its expression and silencing its claim.

THE LARGER ISSUE

By David Bohn

IN THE SPRING OF 1992, MALCOLM THORP, A respected professor of English history at Brigham Young University, published an article in defense of the "new Mormon history." I knew he had been working on it for some time. In the nearly seventeen years of our friendship, we had argued—occasionally heatedly—over the philosophical issues that frame the writing of Mormon history. He disagreed with the position that I had advanced in a number of published articles, a position that defended as legitimate and appropriate the way in which Latter-day Saints understand their common past within the context of faith and that opposed as unfounded the claims of revisionist historians that seemed to call for a wholesale reinterpretation of the Mormon past in secular terms.

Opposition to the secularization of the Mormon past began in the early 1980s. Critics pointed out that revisionist historians had never subjected their own works to careful scrutiny. They had implicitly claimed that their way of putting the Mormon past together stood higher and was more exact and truthful than believing histories, yet strangely, it was clear that revisionists had failed to expose to rigorous examination the underlying methodology that authorized such claims. Rather, they had accepted their own objectivist criteria as self-evident—as simply "natural" and for that reason not even a problem.¹ This blind spot made secular histories vulnerable on the very grounds revisionist historians had unjustifiably used to criticize believing accounts: the failure to question their fundamental assumptions.

In view of this, it was clear to me that to revitalize the claims of the "new Mormon history," Thorp had no alternative but to do what other apologists for revisionism had not done, to reground the objectivist methodology of the revisionist approach in a meticulous and thorough way, or if not, find some alternative method that could warrant certainty. I greatly doubted the possibility of this being done, not because of any personal brilliance on my part or on

the part of other critics of revisionism, but because Thorp was defending indefensible ground.²

Since Edmund Husserl's powerful phenomenological inspection of objectivist language in the human sciences, a tradition of criticism has developed that undermines the foundations of *naturalistic explanation*.³ It challenges the whole sense of history worked out unquestioningly within the assumptions of enlightenment rationalism; it exposes the metaphysics of modern historiography and erodes its claims to objective historical truth. To this point, no one has articulated even the vague outlines of a strategy for rehabilitating objectivist historiography or replacing it with an equivalent approach. In part, the problem derives from the complexity of the issue and the difficulty of gaining a clear understanding of the philosophical literature relevant to methodological questions, a literature that does not lend itself to quick study. Since most apologists for revisionist history have only a marginal knowledge of these theoretical matters, they have, out of necessity, sought to reestablish the revisionist position by using persuasive devices rather than by advancing an appropriately constituted set of philosophical arguments. Regrettably, in its place, *politics* has often been a preferred remedy to cover over weakness and conceal ungrounded assumptions.⁴

I stress that my intention for writing this essay is not to stir up or perpetuate discord. I realize and indeed have vigorously argued that there is no neutral ground or objective language for the writing of history. Consequently, all historical writing is in a sense *political*, if by political I mean that the framing language in which an account is written necessarily involves the presumably honestly held prejudices and interests of a given way of making sense of the world. But *political* also has a darker meaning in which, in order to prevail, genuine discourse is replaced by stratagem. Whatever the case, I am saddened that a meaningful dialogue has not developed, even in the most recent publications on the subject.⁵ I do realize that the philosophical literature that deals with these questions is difficult and demanding, but its mastery is the price for having an informed opinion on such matters.

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Histories of the Mormon past that seek to account for the sacred in secular terms have no privileged claim to truth and necessarily do violence to the past they are seeking to re-present.

In fairness, and in contrast to much of what has been written, Thorp's article begins in a generous tone and for the most part focuses on critical problems rather than personalities. In addition, it does make some claim to be informed on philosophical matters. In fact, the endnotes do involve relevant works. There are several references to Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* and a reference to one of Gadamer's essays in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. The text ostensibly draws from two of Dominick LaCapra's books, works by Hayden White, one secondary source on deconstruction, the editor's comments in the introduction to an anthology on Michel Foucault, and an anthology on deconstruction and theology. Still, these works hardly constitute an adequate exposure to the central texts that govern the discussion. What of Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur, Habermas, Derrida, Lecoue-Labarte, and Lyotard, to name but a few (see notes for more complete references)?⁶ Moreover, in critical places Thorp's interpretation of Gadamer seems to depend upon a secondary source,⁷ and, as I endeavor to show in this essay or have shown elsewhere,⁸ his occasional use of LaCapra's and Gadamer's works is wholly at odds with a careful reading of these texts. In any case, it is unfortunate that, despite references to philosophical texts and many disclaimers along the way, Thorp's essay continues to work out its conclusions within the unquestioned preconceptions and interests of orthodox history. It redresses old arguments in new clothing, but does nothing to repair the flawed logic on which they rely. As such, Thorp fails to ground the revisionist position and thereby reestablish the primacy of the revisionist claim to truth.

Since many of the difficulties in Thorp's article have already been dealt with elsewhere,⁹ in this essay I seek to redefine in a more general way the fundamental problems that Thorp and others writing in defense of revisionist history have failed to properly address. To begin with, I will reflect on the problem of ethics and how such a discussion should properly follow. I will also comment on the political elements of the question which are usually concealed by the revisionist claim to objectivity and neutrality. Then I will try to "clear the deck" of what I believe to be the non-issues that seem to distract revisionists from the real business at hand. Finally, I will attempt to focus on what I believe to be the critical questions by clarifying terms and exploring in significant detail why secular discourse in general and naturalistic explanation in particular are unable to properly frame accounts of the Mormon past. I will show that it is not merely an inadequacy in the application of naturalistic explanation and "enlightenment rationality" to the subject matter of history that is at the heart of the problem, but rather the very way these vocabularies constitute "reality." To do this I will involve the reader in a careful examination of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*. I will conclude that histories of the Mormon past that seek to account for the sacred in secular

terms have no privileged claim to truth and necessarily do violence to the past they are seeking to re-present.

THE ETHICS OF DISCUSSION

*We need to move beyond political discourse
toward a space of openness where questioning
leads all to a richer understanding.*

GIVEN the highly political and rhetorical character of this whole discussion, it is useful to begin by considering the question of ethics in intellectual exchanges of this sort. For some time I have been reflecting on the nature of the University in America and in particular Brigham Young University. I have long understood that in academic circles the pursuit of *truth* has often been but a cover for a most violent kind of intellectual gaming in which fame and reputation are achieved by triumphing over one's competitors or in which one's cause or interest is advanced by stratagem. Surely there must be another alternative, an ethical alternative, that can guide such exchanges.

What about the debate over the primacy of a believing Mormon history? Will it, too, be settled on the field of verbal jousts and politics, a field where true understanding is rarely achieved? Indeed, will it be settled at all, and on whose terms? And in the face of all of this, will a continued discussion of the issues have any value?¹⁰ Jacques Derrida discusses a similar problem in "Toward an Ethic of Discussion."¹¹

Derrida argues against the disguised violence inherent in the liberal university and in intellectual discussion in general. He wonders why the morality and politics of writing are not capable of being contained in the academic compound:

They take us well beyond the university and the intellectual field. They even render something else apparent: the delimitation of this field, were it to be interpreted naively in terms of a discussion held to be theoretical, disinterested, liberal, nonviolent, apolitical, would be the artifice of an untenable denial, the practical effect of scanty analysis and voracious interest. The violence, political or otherwise, at work in academic discussions or in intellectual discussions generally, must be acknowledged. In saying this I am not advocating that such violence be unleashed or simply accepted. I am above all asking that we try to recognize and analyze it as best we can in its various forms: obvious or disguised, institutional or individual, literal or metaphorical, candid or hypocritical, in good or guilty conscience.¹²

Clearly Derrida finds that in part the violence of intellectual discussion is veiled by the pretense that reason, theoretical and objective, is necessarily disinterested, liberal, nonviolent, and apolitical. Although he does not believe that intellectual vio-

lence can ever be fully superseded, Derrida does call on us to acknowledge it and expose all of its manifestations. In a sense, every claim to an ethic of "objectivist research" where only the pursuit of the "truth" itself is said to guide scholarship necessarily involves a concealing of the underlying interests and politics that motivate academic writing.

Hans Georg Gadamer seeks to reduce intellectual violence by recasting intellectual discourse as a dialogical and cooperative relationship in which the discussants are brought together in the openness of a common concern for a question.¹³ The questioning is not a cynical affair in which the interlocutors seek to violently undermine and destroy each other's position. "It is not the art of arguing (which can make a strong case out of a weak one) but the art of thinking."¹⁴ Indeed, the art of questioning must move beyond the political or there can be no openness. The proper use of questions is, therefore, at the heart of any dialogue.¹⁵ Proper questioning "foregrounds" assumptions and brings into the clearing of common agreement the discussant's understanding of a subject matter. What is called for, then, is an ethic of discussing philosophical matters that moves beyond the political toward a space of openness where questioning—appropriately conducted—leads all involved to a richer understanding of the subject matter.

Emmanuel Levinas advances a similar position, but one which moves beyond cooperation to an ethic of service. He shows that our very freedom as individuals is vested in our relationship to the Other, a relationship where in the face of the Other we are called to serve.¹⁶ Such a relationship is an opening onto a place of peace in which genuine discourse can occur, in which "I" am called to identify myself to the Other in my own "saying" as one bearing gifts without violence or malice. Authentic discussion, that is a space in which a true *hearing* and a true *saying* occurs, is a place of peace, a place in which we can all find room to stand. It is not a conversation in which I ignore the *saying* of the Other because I have already reduced her to a fixed set of categories (or stereotypes).¹⁷ Rather, it is a place in which my response to the Other is always a *gift*, not a servile response, but a true *hearing* of the Other's point of view followed by an honest and fair effort to respond by yielding to that which is true and bringing remedy to that which may be flawed. Certainly, such a teaching is not strange to a Latter-day Saint for it is the central teaching of the gospel. Is not our calling to be servants to our fellow beings on this earth? Such a relationship is not one of equality where "I demand an equal right to be heard," but an asymmetrical one where in the *hearing* of the Other's *saying* I return a gift of what is in my best judgment a remedy to that which is lacking.¹⁸

Such an ethic does not, however, obligate discussants to overlook poorly defined arguments or disregard dishonest and mendacious posturing. Arrogance, pretense, and even hypocrisy are, indeed, the fabric of a rhetoric that seeks to win at any cost. Derrida teaches us that the risk involved in writing is not only the danger of being misunderstood, but also being misled. Therefore, to respond straightforwardly and without malice to the deceptiveness of discourse is not uncharitable. It is rather the first step in furnishing remedy to that which is de-

ficient and repair to that which lies disjoined. *The danger, of course, is in reinscribing the violence by misusing the weakness of the Other as an opportunity to win, in which case one falls subject to the same defect one is claiming to repair.*

THE PRE-TEXT

*What are the issues in the margins of this exchange
that motivate the call for a revision
of understanding the Mormon past?*

AS Derrida has argued in general, and as I have pointed out in the history of this question, the possibility of an ethics of discussion is complicated by the politics, the violence, or even simply the interests that stand in the margins of any intellectual exchange. Derrida has demonstrated that the seeming autonomy of a book or article, with its clear-cut beginning and apparent conclusion, conceals the relationship of that book or article to the larger "textuality" or discussion of which it is a part. This isolation or detachment serves to privilege such texts, giving their conclusions the appearance of finality and truth. Still, the unsaid—the larger discussion—continues to operate along the boundary of what is said and must be engaged to liberate the text to fuller play. In this sense, it is important not to lose sight of what is going on in the margins of this exchange, indeed, of the very discussion over Mormon history.

The reason for this political danger is obvious. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is historical in its very "essence." The legitimacy of its claims to authority and to a correct understanding of the gospel depends upon concrete historical events in which power was conferred, keys were restored, scripture was given, and saving ordinances were revealed. For this reason, discussion about the Mormon past cannot be separated from the current discussion about the present and future of the Church. Any changes in Church procedures or beliefs must necessarily be justified against past revelation and practice. Consequently, efforts to bring about and legitimate fundamental changes in the Church outside of historically sanctioned channels will necessarily be paralleled by efforts to revise the Church's history in order to undermine the authority of its "original" claims.

This marginal discourse calling for change, this agenda, is in a sense a "pre-text" which structures in advance how the actual historical text will be composed. However, since politically motivated language is always suspect, it is, as Derrida has shown, everywhere concealed or dismissed by representing historical research as careful, detached, unbiased, and impartial scholarship, led only by the love of truth itself. But, of course, when we scratch the surface, the play of the political and its high stakes are not hard to locate. What then is this "pre-text," or better asked, what are the "pretexts"—the stakes—in the margins of this exchange that motivate the discussion? What issues are bound up with a call for revision in our understanding of the Mormon past and change in the Church's future? They are various and sundry, and I cannot deal with all of them here. Some, such as reputation and pro-

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professionalism, have been dealt with extensively elsewhere.¹⁹ Here I present other obvious concerns.²⁰

To begin with, the revisionist agenda includes criticism of past Mormon practices and beliefs, especially ones seen as embarrassing, such as polygamy, the United Order, temple work and the exclusion of women from the priesthood, or alternatively the belief in prophets, literal revelation, angels, golden books, and papyri. It also involves Church governance and supposed issues of individual freedom which are said to be endangered by a repressive conservative orthodoxy embedded in an authoritarian and dogmatic organization. Here, I believe, is a question of rank where "clear thinking intellectuals" endeavor to show that they cannot be duped. They chafe at the bit of a church led by general authorities whom they portray as misguided and "out of touch," a leadership sustained by what is derided as a "herdlike" membership. Although it may seem otherwise, this is *not* a call for the democratization of the Church, for there is a profound distrust of and even disgust for the everyday Church member who is alternatively characterized as naive, gullible, and sheeplike, or the victim of an organization that spreads darkness in order to exercise greater control. It is rather a call for an order in which an intellectual elite through the direct or indirect exercise of power would accommodate the Latter-day Saints to the "realities" of the times. Led by reason and scientific thinking, the Church would be emancipated from its primitive beliefs and parochial culture to the "progressive" mainstream of liberal America.

This necessarily involves the important side issue of ecumenicism that strains at the claim of the restored Church to be the exclusive agent authorized by God to carry out his work on earth, a claim clearly out of step with the "cosmopolitan" spirit of the times. Indeed, there is even sentiment in support of aligning the Church more closely with liberal Protestant movements by "naturalizing" (demythologizing) revelation and its products—the scriptural canon—or dismissing them altogether. Finally there are those whose program is driven by the more pressing concerns of the current political and social agenda, including the Word of Wisdom, Church policies on abortion, unauthorized forms of sexual behavior, or what is understood as the secondary status of women in the Church.

In advancing all of these issues, there is a clear political interest in blurring all distinctions in the Church, all claims to a core doctrine, to central tenets, or to authoritative governance and appropriate lifestyles, so as to leave it solely to each person to determine what it means to be Mormon. Making everything a matter of mere subjective judgment would, of course, reduce the Church to a social organization with no obligatory content and no power to make claims upon its members. In this way change is facilitated while the foundation of common belief is fragmented.

All these differences of opinion are advanced as justification

for the reappropriation of our Mormon past within the critical and reductive terms of a whole variety of competing ideological persuasions, which in turn are used to legitimate change by recasting the "meaning" of the Church and its past in new vocabularies. By discrediting the historical validity of the Church's claims and by diluting the content of Mormon self-understanding, the organization would then become exposed to the buffeting of every wind of change and subject to external pressure and manipulations through media campaigns and other political maneuvers.

In fairness, though, I *do not* want to assert that the foregoing "pre-texts" constitute anything more than a chaotic mix of overlapping concerns and issues that work in the margins of the revisionist text under the cover of disinterested scholarship. Yet they do share a common "interest" in transmuting the Mormon past in order to recast the future of the Church; thus, in one respect they walk in tandem.

In pointing to the political element—the "pre-text"—of revisionist historiography, I make no claim to an exhaustive description of such issues, nor do I wish to censure those who have different views from my own. The free discussion of the matter is indeed important, and only by bringing the political out from behind the pretense of only looking for the "objective" truth, by bringing what is concealed into the open, can we secure a larger measure of honesty to the advantage of all. Therefore, taking in earnest the ethical responsibilities involved in a fair exchange and not losing sight of the "pre-texts" that guide aspects of revisionist discourse, I should like to answer Thorp and other apologists for the revisionist position in a manner that takes seriously the language of their texts and responds in good faith to their concerns. To begin with, I believe that a fruitful dialogue can be best achieved by clearing away what seems to be the "deadwood" or non-issues that impede an open exchange, followed by an effort to restate the question more broadly.

CLEARING THE WAY FOR A PROPER QUESTIONING

*What believing historians are not trying to do,
and what revisionist historians cannot do.*

TO prevent misunderstanding, I need to point out what those of us who have sought to defend the possibility of a believing Mormon history are *not* trying to do. We do not deny to historians the right to compose historical accounts in whatever way they wish. Given our long personal conversations, I was genuinely surprised that Thorp's essay had me arguing that there must be only one kind of history about Mormons. After all, it is a free country, and revisionists are at liberty to use *objectivist*, *environmentalist*, *positivist*, *naturalistic*, or whatever other mix of vocabularies they wish to script their stories of the past. So I stress again that our only in-

terest is to examine the methodological claims to "truth" implicit in those vocabularies and define their limit, a point that in another context most historians would probably agree with enthusiastically.

Furthermore, we do *not* try to defend any and every attempt to write from within a standpoint of faith. Again, Thorp and others wish, inappropriately I believe, to portray revisionists as rigorous and demanding, while seeing their faithful counterparts as sloppy and without standards. It is at this point that revisionists introduce the specious argument of *professionalism*. Revisionists like to label believing histories as "sentimental" and "gullible" for not submitting to all of the orthodoxies currently popular in the American historical establishment, without ever feeling the need to justify the methods and criteria that make up these ever-changing professional standards. One need only consider recent publications by D. Michael Quinn in which Quinn uses professionalism as a defense. Unfortunately he does not seem to understand that these methodological claims of professional historiography are precisely what are in question.²¹ Unless they can be justified, the professional standards Quinn celebrates can be little more than a repetition of empty slogans or a call for a dull and bureaucratically regimented form of history. Clearly, the parallel assertion, that if one does not unequivocally embrace secular standards one has no standards at all, is simply false. To the contrary, we note significant differences of opinion and a whole range of qualitative distinctions among faithful histories. There will continue to be an ongoing discussion concerning criteria of adequacy, much of which will overlap a more general discussion of method (of which this debate is, I believe, a part) with many efforts to meet, exceed, or change those criteria. Clearly some attempts will fail while others succeed. In this and other essays, however, *the principal concern of critics of revisionism has been to defend the possibility and desirability—from the point of view of the believing community—of writing from a faithful perspective.*

I stress again that no effort is being made to question the "intentions" or integrity of historians. It has troubled me from the onset that Thorp and many others involved in this discussion have used this special form of pleading in which revisionist historians are represented as victims of calumny. They have misunderstood fundamental questioning of their position to be a form of persecution rather than an honest and necessary part of an open dialogue. The result is a distraction of the discussion away from its primary subject matter to an unnecessary exchange of accusations in which speculations about motives involving the worst kind of psychologizing come to replace clear thinking. It has led to the publication of personal testaments where historians have disclosed the most intimate details about their personal feelings and intentions in order to show that their motives are above reproach. All too often, and unwittingly I am sure, these biographical sketches end up portraying revisionist historians in heroic terms and those who identify problems in their work as villains. Unfortunately, in the process, the difficult questions that revisionist histories must answer if they are to reestablish the primacy of their po-

sition get pushed into the background and often go completely unaddressed. In every article I have written on Mormon historiography, going back to 1983, I have warned of this danger. On the other hand, critics of revisionism are obviously not perfect and in the measure that they might share responsibility in some way for this confusion, I should like to again reassure all involved that our questioning of revisionist histories has only to do with the way that language is used in historical accounts to constitute the past. *While historians' intentions may be properly considered a private matter, the language they employ in crafting their stories is in the public domain and ought to be subject to question.*²²

Although the critique of revisionist history is necessarily a methodological critique, we do *not* seek to mandate one or another kind of method as the appropriate way of doing history. Rather, such criticism seeks to clarify the assumptions and thus also define the limit within which every approach to historical composition works. In the process, the criticism seeks to qualify ungrounded claims and assure that the reader has some sense of how the theoretical and explanatory language of the historian operates to structure in advance the historical account. It seeks to audit the various vocabularies at work in the scripting of the Mormon past and expose how they belong to given traditions of understanding whose metaphysical foundations are generally hidden from view.

On the other hand, this discussion ought *not* be misunderstood as an exchange over how the flawed categories and language of objectivist historiography can be salvaged by using language more tentatively and avoiding the most embarrassing terms altogether. Rather it is a question of *finding a logical foundation that can justify their use at all*. For example, when historians try to retreat to safer ground by arguing that they are only trying to approximate neutrality and objectivity in their writings, they miss the point altogether; and in not seeing this, they betray a fundamental failure to understand the problem. This is because neutrality and objectivity cannot even be approximated.

If we reflect upon the matter even in a common sense way we realize that while we all continuously make approximations, few of us would claim that our approximations are objective, that they are working within some absolute universe or describing some deep structures of "reality." Rather, we see them as working within agreed-upon universes whose boundaries and standards of measure are a product of history, defined by conventions which for one reason or another we decide to use. If we define, for example, a uniform area and call it a "football field," and if we agree on a way of dividing it into sections, then we are in a position to approximate distances from various points on the field and invent games to be played within its boundaries. In all of this, we realize that our approximations only have validity within the framework of the conventions upon which they are based. Similarly, historians need to acknowledge that instead of approximating objectivity that would necessarily presuppose an absolute standard of measure rooted in a historically unconditioned universe, they are only struggling to satisfy the conventions of the tradition of

A reduction of the Mormon "experience" to secular categories denies in advance that such a Restoration could ever occur.

historical scholarship they have accepted or into which they have been socialized.

Defenders of faithful history do *not* argue that believing histories must reduce every aspect of historical understanding to an instance of the "sacred." As will be argued later, making the opposition *sacred/secular* an airtight dichotomy is wrong headed. However, believing historians do properly insist on the unique and sacred character of the subject matter of Mormon history and correctly oppose it being "totalized" or "normalized" by supposedly more "objective" and universal modes of secular discourse. For this reason all such modes of discourse will be subject to scrutiny in order to lay bare their assumptions and define their limit.

Similarly, faithful history *does not* seek to totalize "human reality" into a single or even a dialectical whole in which everything is accounted for in some absolute way. As will be shown later, Thorp's assertion that this is the case is not only unsubstantiated, but raises questions about his understanding of Gadamer, the very author he uses to legitimate his stance. Indeed, Mormons are suspicious of all such attempts because they are usually the means of reducing the "Mormon experience" to a mere instance in the explanatory life of some theory or ideology. Mormonism does not hold that God is the final cause of every historical act, although it affirms that God intervenes in human history to assure his higher purposes. The Mormon view of God, time, and agency is incompatible with traditional eschatologies and their metaphysical assumptions and resists every attempt to reduce Mormon understanding to some kind of theology. In the course of this paper, I hope to clarify what I believe to be the proper relationship of faith to history and why it does not deny, but actually insists upon the most rigorous kind of thinking.

Again faithful history *does not* involve the imposition of a self-righteous and dogmatic set of moral judgments on our past. Thorp's text tries to portray secular history as wisely refraining from ethical judgments in contrast to the supposedly narrow and hasty judgments worked out within the language of faith, judgments that cannot adequately deal with the mix and muddle of the past.²³ Such a position is untenable. The very authors that Thorp cites to support his position insist in other places that there is no ethically neutral ground from which to advance a value-free account of the past; and, frankly, the revisionist text is everywhere involved in opposing certain practices and advancing its own opinions.²⁴ It is precisely because historians are thrown into history—that is, cannot stand outside of time—that their every judgment and choice will *already* involve the ethical. We are born into a way of using language that is *already* normative and there exists no alternative language purged of ethical content with which to frame a non-judgmental, that is an objective, Mormon history. The historian must choose how the past is to be scripted, what will be

its theme, who will be its central characters, and how the plot will unfold these characters as either "good," "bad," or "in between." Clearly, such choices are not made randomly. They necessarily end up expressing the preferences and normative commitments of historians.²⁵

I much prefer research in which no effort is made to hide the guiding prejudice of the writer over that which feigns neutrality. For the believing historian, no such pretense is necessary. Christian discourse accords the writer a rich and nuanced vocabulary of ethically sensitive terms. At the same time, it admonishes anyone who would judge to be fair and honest, to show humility, restraint, and mercy, for we too are guilty and shall be judged, and "with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. 7:1-2). Certainly many revisionist historians are careful in judgment, and I applaud them. But it remains true that secular discourse left to its own resources has at best a weak and unsatisfactory "vocabulary" for the articulation of such judgments.

Finally, this discussion is *not* over the veracity of the central truth claims of the Church, as if secular historians had at their command a set of methodological criteria that could make objective determinations on these matters. Such is not the case, and, again, it is precisely the duty of this and other critiques of revisionist histories to deconstruct every attempt to "normalize" the Mormon past as a necessary part of some "natural" historical unity by exposing the ideological character of every such attempt and showing the limit of its truth claim. In the end, the hope of this and other critiques is to sustain and encourage the serious "re-presentation" of the Mormon past in a language of faith.

RETHINKING THE TERMS "NEW MORMON HISTORY"
AND "TRADITIONAL MORMON HISTORY"

*Every claim to reduce history to an objective understanding
is an instance of intellectual violence.*

IN ADDITION to clarifying what the attempts to defend faithful history are *not* trying to do, common understanding can be advanced by resolving problems of definition. Although coined by revisionist historians themselves, I share with Thorp and other historians an uneasiness about the term "new Mormon history" as a proper category for defining revisionist scholarship. Of course definitions are not true or false, only more or less adequate. The inadequacy of the term "new Mormon history" results from a number of problems.

In the first place, is the "new Mormon history" actually new? Is it not also an expression of a given *tradition* with a stipulated *orthodoxy*? Later in this paper I attempt to demonstrate that this is the case through an exploration of the genealogy of this tradition of historical writing and its naturalistic canon.

Similarly, the very use of the word "new" as opposed to "traditional" implies without justification that something "better" or more "progressive" is underway; it is precisely this kind of ungrounded claim that I question. For example, despite itself, Thorp's article uses the word "new" numerous times to imply, without justification, that important changes, advances, or progress have been made by the "new Mormon history."²⁶ Indeed, many historians seemed to be so fascinated with the "new" that their work risks bordering on the journalistic. They come to accept uncritically—because of recent origins—what is little more than speculation, fabrication, or outright forgery.²⁷

Second, in what way is this history a *Mormon* history? Only in that it is about a people who have identified themselves as Mormons, but not in the sense of a believing account of the Restoration and of the unique "experience" of its people. Rather it is a reduction of this "experience" to secular categories that deny in advance that such a Restoration could ever occur. What is authentically Mormon is held hostage by the vocabulary of a given theory or as merely a moment in a more global historical treatment, such as the story of *Western Americana*.

Again, the term "new Mormon history" cannot group together coherently all those historical accounts that in a certain sense belong together. Derrida has shown how dichotomous thinking (logocentrism) is unable to give play to middle terms, totalizing them violently into terse and fixed categories. Initially, the restrictive character of the term "new Mormon history" was justified by the claim that as an objective and neutral approach to the study of the Mormon past, it occupied a sort of middle ground between sectarian extremes.²⁸ I think all would agree that such a claim has been shown untenable. Objectivity and neutrality are not possibilities in historical writing, and it is obvious that secular vocabularies necessarily do violence to religious and sacred histories. Without a way to justify this neutral middle ground, there is no longer reason to exclude such writers as Fawn Brodie and Dale Morgan, whose works had been exiled to the "margins" of the "new Mormon history."²⁹

Finally, this term also marginalizes some believing historians who, while committed to rigorous and careful scholarship, feel trapped by the prejudice of the secular vocabulary in which revisionist accounts are framed. Having written accounts of the Mormon past in which the "sacred" and religious character of the textual record was not compromised, they nevertheless felt it significant to stress the importance of thorough research and prudent reflection. They, too, found themselves on the "margins" of the term "new Mormon history."

What then is a better rubric to encompass that activity that was at first the focus of criticism in the "new Mormon history" debate? What is it that is being questioned? What concerns lead the discussion? Clearly it is the revision of the way believing Mormons understand their past. It is the recasting of that past in different terms, ones that belong to a linguistic horizon or tradition that has no believing words for the "sacred." What is being questioned is a secular mode of discourse that trans-

mutes that past with the implicit and always unsubstantiated claim that it constitutes a "truer past." Although sectarian efforts to displace faithful history are also revisionist, they often move from a different tradition, from a different way of using language, to justify conclusions. For this reason, I have in earlier articles interspersed "secular" along with "revisionist" to clearly show the revisionist tradition to which I am referring. For all the above reasons, in this essay I use the term "revisionist history" instead of "new Mormon history."

In the same sense that the term "new Mormon history" is insufficient for a full questioning of negative changes in Mormon historical writing, so, too, is "traditional Mormon history" inadequate. First, the word "traditional" is misunderstood to mean inflexible and intractable, dogmatic and narrow, conservative and stagnant. I think that this misappropriation of the word "traditional" above all reveals the "progressivist prejudice" of revisionist writing rather than what is going on in faithful accounts. To the contrary, as this essay will show, a believing history, properly understood, is never finished; it always seeks to make "better" sense of the historical texts. In a certain way, it is more, not less, "open" to new possibilities than secular discourse.

Second, as has been noted, every way of doing history fits into a tradition, or is a part of a larger intertextuality of historical understanding. No discourse can lay claim to an unconditioned point of departure, that is, to an a-temporal or objective meaning. For this reason the use of "traditional" to distinguish one mode of historiography from another—where one is found progressive and the other obdurate—is not helpful. Every way of understanding has its genealogy or lineage. Appropriately understood, a faithful history will displace or change a "tradition" that is no longer convincing—in a different way, but just as readily as secular approaches to the past. Indeed, this is why it is problematic to refer to "the past" as a kind of fixed or hypostatized thing. As I have tried to show in all my essays and will also emphasize here, the past is not a fixed place. It is not like a picture or a puzzle in which all of the pieces can be fitted together once and for all. Historical understanding is rather an ongoing activity. It is the continuing re-appropriation or making present of the meaning of what went on before. Language itself is historical and always underway—it has no objective or a-temporal ground—and consequently it must continually re-present the meaning of the historical text as a constituent part of its own being. Although the past is constituent of the present, there is an alterity (an irreducible difference) that keeps the past from being absolutely accounted for. It is always more, less, or other than what our histories can define it to be. Indeed, every claim to reduce that history to an objective understanding is an instance of intellectual violence.

Still, as Richard Bushman argues in one of the earliest and best essays on Mormon historiography,³⁰ a believing history does have its mooring in faith whose claims and requirements will themselves change as each generation seeks to understand the meaning of the Restoration for itself. Its language will work within a scriptural and non-scriptural tradition which encoun-

A believing history does have its mooring in faith whose claims and requirements will themselves change as each generation seeks to understand the meaning of the Restoration for itself.

ters the sacred in its application to meet the challenges of an ever-unfolding but not random future. Its language is also anchored in the believing community and the possibility of affirming revelation manifest both to the Church and to individual members who sincerely seek it.

RESTATING THE QUESTION

Secular modes of discourse do violence to the sacred.

MUCH can be done to encourage a more generous and even-handed understanding of this subject matter by exploring in greater depth what is being questioned. In review, criticism of revisionist history does *not* seek to question the personal religious beliefs of historians or their right to compose histories in whatever way they please. It does not endeavor to impose a global framework or insist on a given language for the scripting of all historical events. It does not seek to exonerate the truth of the Restoration, which in any case needs no exoneration, since it stands beyond the power of secular discourse to authorize or annul. Above all it seeks to “avoid” a protracted polemic in which central questions get brushed aside as principals personalize the discussion in terms that portray them as mistreated victims.

Although expressed in many ways over the last decade, the focus of the question under discussion is precisely to define the limit of secular discourse and to question its truth claim for the understanding of sacred history. Revisionist histories have drawn on a variety of vocabularies to script or structure their stories about the Mormon past. Still, naturalistic, objectivist, positivist, environmentalist, and historicist modes of discourse and all of their sub-registers—and indeed all of the theories constructed within these registers—overlap greatly. It is the task of criticism to explore how they relate to each other and to question the implicit universal truth claims advanced in these vocabularies by exposing their underlying assumptions and identifying the metaphysical traditions within which they work. In the Heideggerian sense, it is the remembering, the re-collecting of that which has been forgotten; it is bringing back into clear view the ungrounded assumptions hidden in what has come to be understood as the “natural order of things.”

Similarly, criticism of revisionist history has from the beginning questioned the power of secular modes of discourse to frame religious history. The concern is that secular modes of discourse do violence to the sacred—that is, to sacred texts and to texts involving believing discourse—by reducing them to a moment in the life of a theory that claims universal validity. Generally speaking, psychological vocabularies are implemented to “normalize” believing discourse, thus making it subject to naturalistic “explanation.” Critiques of revisionist histories question this repressive and indeed violent way of framing the religious past, of totalizing the sacred such that its

being is lost and its voice can no longer be heard.

THE CENTRAL ISSUE

Do believing accounts deny “rational discussion”?

GIVEN the forgoing objection, it is easy to understand why the “motivation” of this and other criticism is to disengage faithful history from an undeserved and distracting burden, where it has been unduly called to respond to a secular interrogation of its own understanding. Revisionist history has often required answers to questions that inappropriately privilege secular over believing accounts with the implicit claim that its questions, methods, and conclusion—that is, the way in which it uses language to frame the past—is of universal significance, while the understanding worked out in believing history is only of parochial import. Believing historians end up responding to issues of importance to secular historians, defending their terrain with secular language, and trying to justify the beliefs of the Mormon community by satisfying the unfounded standards and criteria of enlightenment reason. In the end believing historians are asked to work out an account of their past within a hostile and repressive mode of discourse that not only cannot frame the sacred, but also inherently annuls its very possibility.

It is here that I believe we have come to the central differences between revisionist and faithful history. Thorp’s essay states straightforwardly an opinion felt by many revisionists: that to make space for a believing account or to frame the Mormon past in a language open to the sacred would be to reduce the discussion of the Mormon past to the irrational or, presumably, to the superstitious. He asserts more specifically that such a language would “den[y] all possibility of rational discussion.”³¹ I hope I do his essay justice in concluding that such a position would hold that secular discourse is the universal and valid mode of discourse which alone can broker rational discussion and thus alone constitutes the preferred register for the writing of all Mormon histories. For him and other revisionists, secular history occupies a *higher ground* and is the standard that can produce better accounts, ones that “image reality,” indeed the standard against which all other accounts ought to be judged.³² I realize that Thorp along with many revisionists might hedge a bit, preferring less direct language. But in the final analysis, I do not believe it matters; a more equivocal posture would end up, under pressure, at the same point.

To justify this position, Thorp’s essay relies on what seems to me to be an incomplete reading of Hans Georg Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*, a reading that has Gadamer defending positions he spent his life opposing. Although done with earnestness and candor, Thorp misconstrues Gadamer’s efforts to account for how we are able to arrive at historical “under-

standing" as a demonstration of the validity of an ecumenical understanding in which differences in historical interpretation are resolved in the higher and presumably universal claim of "reason," the very position *Truth and Method* was written to contest (and a position that Gadamer refuted in responding to Habermas³³). Due to this, and also to the fact that Gadamer has been widely used by all sides in this discussion, I believe that clarity can be brought to the question by a careful reading of the central elements of *Truth and Method*. Such a reading will demonstrate that revisionist claims cannot be sustained. Indeed, it will properly show why Thorp's and other revisionist characterizations of "reason" are untenable, and why naturalistic explanation³⁴ and objectivist methodologies cannot warrant claims to a better understanding of the past, and why far from negating the sacred, the secular and profane must necessarily presuppose its priority.³⁵ Finally, in relying mostly on Gadamer, I do not wish to conceal the fact that other post-modern philosophers such as Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida, and Levinas have undermined the pretense of enlightenment discourse in an even more radical way than Gadamer.

TRUTH AND METHOD:
GADAMER'S CRITIQUE OF ENLIGHTENMENT REASON
The deficiency of naturalistic explanation.

OBVIOUSLY we are dealing with a complex subject. However, as already noted, the price of a defensible opinion on these matters is a willingness to work through the arguments. Revisionist historians have often criticized faithful history as naive, as reluctant to raise questions about its own assumptions, indeed as unwilling to "heroically" deal with the complexities that characterize the past. If that is the case, then it is only just and equitable that revisionists be prepared to deal straightforwardly with the same questions and that they not expect that the language in which they frame their stories can be justified by simple appeal to self-evidence or naive reliance on the comforts of common sense discourse with all of its closures and blind spots.

In the original outline to *Truth and Method*, Gadamer clarifies candidly the central thesis of his work: a frontal assault against the superstitions of "enlightenment rationalism" and the "naturalism" it authorizes. He demonstrates why the many explanatory registers of naturalistic discourse, including *positivism*, *objectivism*, *historicism*, and *environmentalism* with their often interrelated vocabularies, cannot be used to establish the claim of secular histories to be "higher," "better," that is, "truer," than other histories.³⁶ In its place, he argues to justify an independent kind of understanding appropriate for the humanities,

whose reduction to the ideal of natural scientific knowledge is impossible, and where the idea of the greatest possible approximation to the methods and certainty of natural sciences is even recognized as absurd . . . it does not concern another, unique method, but rather a completely different idea of knowledge and truth.³⁷

In order to show that framing human history in the language of the natural sciences is inappropriate for the understanding of human activity, and has led to unjustified claims to objective knowledge, Gadamer authored one of the great philosophical works of our century, *Truth and Method*. He begins by arguing that, philosophically speaking, the historical understanding of the modern world moves within a language of "scientific rationalism" whose "schema is the conquest of mythos by logos. What gives this schema its apparent validity is the presupposition of the progressive retreat of magic in the world."³⁸ Here the thought of the enlightenment, and the science that it authorized, understood itself by means of a false dichotomy. Scientific reasoning (logos) would progressively expose and correct superstition and error (mythos) through naturalistic explanation. The methodology of science aspired not only to discover and master physical nature but "human nature"—and thus historical nature—as well. Its final ambition was nothing less than an objective knowledge of the principles that govern the world.

Central to this methodology is René Descartes's procedure of systematically doubting all "received opinion." Doubt, it is asserted, allows a clearing—a neutral perspective—to open up where "reality" is experienced directly, and reason, finally liberated from layers of accumulated falsehood, is said to gaze unencumbered upon the natural forces that drive history. In this way, moving from doubt to certainty, the "natural order" is identified by specifying the "natural causes" that are understood to impel human experience and structure human events. The totality of these relationships and the overarching principles that govern them are said to form a natural unity that can be known and manipulated.

With regard to history, enlightenment rationality not only seeks more than a mere *understanding* of historical texts, it seeks to understand them *better* than they were understood when they were written, *better* than their authors understood them. This is supposedly because empirical rationality, beginning with systematic doubt, allows the historian to escape historical prejudice—the authority of traditional historical understanding—and occupy a position exterior to the past, from which the past can be encountered and "explained" in rational, that is, natural terms. From here, a higher kind of knowledge is presumably achieved, because through *scientific explanation* the historian claims to be able to identify the underlying natural causes that actually motivated the writing of historical texts and thus account for their full content.

We should not be surprised that the reduction of human history and the humanities in general to a kind of calculus operating within an arena of natural law said to govern human relations elicited criticism of important writers from early on. Gadamer reviews this critique from Vico and Shaftsbury, through Hegel, Schleiermacher, Ranke, and Droysen, to Nietzsche, Dilthey, and Collingwood. In the process, he shows how each critique of enlightenment reason becomes subverted in one way or another by the object of its criticism and thus fails in the end to fully supersede the enlightenment heritage. A good example is Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), a German

Secular modes of discourse do violence to the sacred—that is, to sacred texts and to texts involving believing discourse—by reducing them to a moment in the life of a theory that claims universal validity.

philosopher and historian. On the one hand, he sought to escape from the speculative philosophy of Hegel, only to find himself increasingly in its grasp. On the other hand, he sought to detach the human sciences from the natural sciences, only to end up harmonizing them.³⁹

Gadamer recounts how Dilthey had sought to defend the human and cultural sciences against the encroachments of enlightenment science. He benefitted in his critique of *naturalism* and *causality* from the exhaustive analysis and scrutiny of enlightenment rationalism found in the first edition of Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, published in 1900–01. Husserl had “bracketed” (isolated and interrogated) all the terms used in “naturalistic explanation” in order to follow them carefully to their basic assumptions. Even *Cartesian doubt* would be bracketed, for it was not at all clear that doubt could be construed as a method capable of opening up a neutral and objective perspective in which reason could gaze upon the “undoubtable,” i.e., the self-evidence of pure experience and the forces that are said to move it. Not only this, it was not hard to show that *Cartesian doubt* concealed an unjustified objective standard that always went “undoubted,” an objective standard that both authorized doubt as a method and identified that which was an appropriate object of doubt. But why indeed should not the *Cartesian method*, with its standards and rational processes, also be subject to doubt? Obviously, following this line of reasoning would involve us in an endless regress. Moreover, since doubt is supposed to take us to certainty by dissolving the residue of error that keeps the truth from being seen, *Cartesian doubt* must implicitly assert that the truth is essentially self-evident and thus beyond doubt. As will become clear later on, none of these assumptions can resist Husserl's phenomenological analysis. For clearly, what seems worthy of doubt is always historically conditioned and in the case of Descartes, the very truth that seems beyond doubt and indeed does not get doubted is enlightenment science's own idealized version of the world, of science, and of scientific rationality.

But Gadamer shows how Husserl's analysis goes further. Not only does *Cartesian doubt* fail to provide the historian with an objective point of departure, but *naturalistic explanation* itself cannot claim to provide a justifiable methodology capable of objectively accounting for human activity. Consequently, it is an inadequate foundation for historical scholarship. Gadamer follows Husserl in his painstaking investigation of the assumptions inherent in naturalism and shows why they cause problems not only for Dilthey, but also for revisionist historians.

To demonstrate this inadequacy, Gadamer relates how Husserl disputes the argument that naturalistic understanding can ever be based upon brute or raw perception. This, of course, is the claim made when historians say that the truth was clear from just looking at the facts, just reading the histor-

ical texts. And, despite Thorp's qualifiers, this is what he and other revisionist historians claim to do.⁴⁰ Actually, naturalistic explanation *never gets to nature or the brute facts*. In a certain sense, Kant had already demonstrated that experience is not something external or exterior to consciousness that comes in from the outside to inform consciousness. Rather, as Kant points out, all understanding is cooperative. In the absence of a “mind” or a state of “consciousness” capable of organizing the inflow of sense data into discernable patterns, we could not have understandable experiences at all. Imagine, for example, a hose running water out into a street.⁴¹ Of course nothing builds up because there is nothing to contain the water. But were one to put the hose into a round pool, the sides of the pool would contain the water and form it into a circle. So it is with sense data or perception. Without concepts provided by the “mind” to contain and form (organize) incoming perception, there could be no experiences and thus no understanding. Perception could never be more than an undifferentiated flow of sensations with no meaning at all.

This, in part, is what Husserl is getting at when he argues that all claims to empirical knowledge must presuppose the prior existence of the unifying activity of consciousness. This state of consciousness (or mind) is already structured by an integrated set of ideas (by a worldview) capable of intelligibly organizing the inflow of sense data into some kind of understanding. Otherwise there could only be a diffuse and inchoate influx of sensation. Another example might help. When we see a book, what we really understand as a book is *not* how book atoms feel. Rather, it is how in consciousness a stream of perceptions are apprehended, processed, and organized under an ideal meaning (or concept) called a book. Gadamer emphasizes Husserl's surprising conclusion that the “real world,” the “natural world,” is never found in, but rather *precedes*, our apprehension of “raw experience,” or the “brute facts.” Indeed, it is always within the categories of this *ideal world or preconceived reality*—categories already present and underway in the unifying activity of consciousness—that the influx of sense data gets connected together and grasped.

So much for the claim that naturalistic explanation is only passively mirroring the “truth of nature.” Every understanding of “nature” is already mediated by a pre-existent idea in the unity-of-consciousness about what constitutes nature! But Husserl takes the analysis a step further. What is the central “ideal” around which naturalistic explanation organizes the flow of sense data into “objective knowledge?”

As Kant had long ago demonstrated, the “natural world” is a material world, defined by the notions of objective time and space, and linked together by the concept of *cause*. Obviously materiality, time, space, and cause are not sensations. For example, what would a causal atom feel like? Therefore, the hidden causal chains that naturalistic explanation seeks to use in

order to define the "real" or the "truth" could not possibly be known directly through concrete sensation. As has already been shown, they are rather the idealized meaning imputed to concrete perception by naturalistic theories. *Oddly enough, then, by sorting and linking together in succession the influx of concrete perceptions according to a set of naturalistic categories, "consciousness" ends up producing the very causal sequences it is supposed to be discovering!* This is why "experience" or the "raw facts" can never objectively verify naturalistic theories and the explanations they harbor.

At this point, Gadamer raises the more crucial question of "consciousness" itself? How does it fit into the natural world and how can it be explained in natural terms?

First, as Husserl has shown, the unity of consciousness is the "site" or at least the unifying activity of "mind" where all "truth" is discovered and knowledge arrived at. It is necessarily prior to the sensation that it is supposed to order. For this reason the study of the psyche, or psychology, should then be the queen of all sciences because it aspires to explain how "consciousness" works. It seeks to know the principles or causal sequences that determine the mental activity that produces knowledge in all other fields of inquiry.

However, Husserl quickly points out that this very claim *uncritically presupposes the very conclusion it should be discovering*, that is, that "consciousness" is determined by a sequence of physical causes and therefore is something to be understood naturalistically. Obviously then, when naturalistic theories describe consciousness in materialistic and causal terms, it is not due, in the first place, to empirical evidence. Rather the very categories that naturalism uses to make sense of empirical data require that it be ordered in such a manner. By definition "consciousness" must be understood as emanating from some bodily organ or vital function. In order to be consistent with itself, naturalism must show that the material world and the consciousness within which it appears are somehow connected causally—that is, "naturally." In this way, "sensations, perceptions, and ideas must by definition be the result of a causal action of reality on consciousness."⁴² By definition, "the whole of conscious life is only a flux of inert states of psychic atoms: evidence is an atom among other atoms, truth is only this feeling of evidence." All this, then, is defined in a rather loose way as the experience in which knowledge is somehow located.⁴³

Clearly, naturalism is caught in a double bind. On the one hand, Husserl has already demonstrated that naturalistic explanation cannot be justified on the basis of direct, concrete experience (because the concepts that constitute naturalistic explanation and the unifying activity of consciousness to which they belong are necessarily prior to the experience they organize and give meaning to). On the other hand, since naturalism must understand the unifying activity of consciousness as merely a part of the "natural order," psychology, the study of consciousness, would not either provide an independent site where the assumptions of naturalistic explanation could be tied down because it too shares in those same assumptions. Psychology has no way of getting outside of the unity-of-consciousness or dispensing with its mental activity to objectively

validate against some kind of "pure experience," the ideas, the concepts, and the theories, it uses to structure psychological explanation. *To explain psychological processes, it must assume in advance what those processes are!* Every psychological attempt to justify psychological cause will fall back into the very psychology it is trying to explain! Husserl calls this *psychologism*.

Gadamer shows that psychologism is a crucial weakness in every naturalistic explanation. Psychologism is a fallacy for Husserl because it *reflects the inability of naturalistic explanations to give a satisfactory account of consciousness in natural terms, and yet recognizes the dependence of naturalistic explanation on the unity of consciousness for all knowledge of "natural" things*. But not only is psychologism internally contradictory, it makes assumptions that reduce human beings to the mere function of a biological machine. "Consciousness" itself can only be the accidental byproduct of the operation of this biological mechanism, and all human activity is understood beforehand as the product of the mechanism in relation to its environment. Thus, naturalism inherently denies the possibility of human agency as well as the possibility for authentic moral action. What is more, we are left to wonder what function "consciousness" plays in the "natural order." Is it some kind of strange opening in nature where nature becomes aware of itself? And why is this "consciousness" continually preoccupied with its own being and how it produces a world in which percepts can be gathered together under ideal meanings and knowledge achieved? And what is the relationship between individual consciousness and the historical consciousness within which the individual defines itself? Finally, naturalism places into question the very possibility of *authentic change*. History is reduced to a routine of change governed by objective laws and principles that are not conditioned by time. Human beings, like automatons, act out the roles of history according to a script written by nature.

Having reviewed the weaknesses that Husserl had shown to be inherent in naturalistic explanation, Gadamer shows how, in the light of this critique, Dilthey understandably wanted to move away from naturalistic explanation toward "verstehen," or understanding. The *Geisteswissenschaften* (more or less the human sciences), Dilthey argues, require something different than causal explanation and naturalistic theories. We are able to understand human phenomena because we are in a sense inside the phenomena. This "insight" into the meaning of human events is inherent in our very humanity and allows us to relive the meaning and the "living" contexts out of which past events were produced. By making the recovery of meaning the principal task of the historian, Dilthey's historicism refocuses the writing of history on the worldviews within which events were understood and acted out. Human behavior does not follow from a set of "natural causes." Rather, it only makes sense within the framework of meaning, the "world" or the "world-view" of the historical moment in which it occurs. Thus, every event—every objectification of meaning—had to be traced back to the context of meaning, to the environment that produced it. For these reasons the basic task of the historian is redefined as a hermeneutical one where through interpretation

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understanding is achieved.⁴⁴ Unfortunately Dilthey's historicism and thoroughgoing environmentalism seemed to involve the worst of all possible worlds. It risked collapsing into Hegelian idealism on the one hand without being spared *psychologism* on the other. This is because the historian's power to interpret past meaning through "in-sight" relies on psychological assumptions that, as we have seen, Husserl has already discredited. In order to make transparent the meaning of ideas and thus also the events occurring in different historical moments, "in-sight" must presuppose a *universal psychology* common to all humans no matter where and when they lived. But this position could only be justified if it were possible to claim in advance a knowledge of the underlying psychological causes that determine all human mental activity. And this naturalistic assumption is precisely what Husserl has labeled a *psychologism* and what Dilthey had sought to escape.

This is why Thorp's and revisionist historians' acceptance of environmentalist explanations begs the question by presupposing as self-evident the necessary or natural relationship between the rise of Mormonism and, for example, religious and magical practices extant in nineteenth-century America.⁴⁵ Yet every conclusion arrived at in this manner conceals an unexamined psychology that necessarily involves the problem of *psychologism* that assumes in advance the very psychological nature of the human activity it is supposed to explain. Therefore, moving from their own prejudice about human nature, historians script the Mormon past to include such relationships, with little concern for or awareness of the methodological fallacies they involve.

It is worth noting that not only does a careful reading of Gadamer bring us to this conclusion, but a fair "repetition" of the ideas of Foucault and Derrida (authors that Thorp cited) would have articulated an even more radical critique of contextualist and environmentalist explanations.

THE PROBLEM OF TIME AND CONSCIOUSNESS

It is not possible for a historian who is in history to elucidate historical experience through concepts that are historically unconditioned and universal.

CLEARLY, Dilthey fails in his effort to implement Husserl's critique of naturalism to move beyond naturalistic explanation to firmer ground upon which to found the writing of history. Indeed, he falls prey to the very problem of psychologism he wanted to avoid. Gadamer shows us, however, that by taking Husserl's concepts to a more fundamental conclusion, more promising alternatives are available for understanding history. Gadamer notes that Husserl's later work involves an increasingly "radical critique of objec-

tivism . . . and the objectivist naivete of all previous philosophy."⁴⁶ His rigorous phenomenological inspection of naturalism reveals its hidden metaphysics and shows how its constituent concepts—*experience, objectivity, and causation*—founder on the shoals of an unresolvable psychologism. In the face of all of this, it is not surprising that Husserl concluded that "applying the objective concepts of natural sciences to the human sciences was nonsense."⁴⁷

Gadamer shows that in order to avoid psychologism, Husserl abandons the psychologically tainted concept of "consciousness" in favor of what he called *life* and *life-world*, "the anti-thesis of all objectivism."⁴⁸ He moves away from the naturalistic metaphysics that holds that "reality" can be known on the basis of universal and natural principles that stand outside of time in order to explore alternative possibilities inherent in *time* itself. He asks how it is possible to account for the concepts or the ideal meanings that organize perception and produce "knowledge." Hegel had already convincingly argued that the broad and diverse array of concepts, that is, the terms or the language within which understanding is worked out, must necessarily be historical and given to change and transmutation. For this reason, Hegel concludes, it is not possible to understand consciousness a-historically, that is, from a stand point outside of history. Said in a different way, it is not possible for a historian who is in-history to claim to elucidate historical existence through concepts (theories) she claims are a-historical, that is, historically unconditioned, universal, and objectively true.

Moving from this insight, but not wanting to be trapped by Hegel's historical idealism, Husserl implements the concept, *life world* or *lebenswelt*, as an open ended *horizon of meaning* in which we live as intentional "historical creatures." A *horizon* could never be reduced to an absolute or objective universe because it is always moving.⁴⁹ In describing Husserl's thought, Gadamer states:

The infiniteness of the past, and above all the openness of the historical future, is incompatible with the idea of a historical universe. Husserl has explicitly drawn this conclusion without being frightened by the "specter" of relativism.⁵⁰

The term *Horizon* captures "the way meaning merges into a fundamental continuity of the whole. A horizon is not a rigid boundary but something that moves with one and invites one to advance further."⁵¹ Husserl's point is how our incoming perceptions always get organized into a whole, but not a fixed or objective whole or universe. Rather it moves in time as the horizon moves, that is, it moves in time with us. In the same way, a horizon is something that includes us, but unlike "consciousness" is not inside of us. Within a horizon we are neces-

sarily engaged in a way of life, in a present where at one end stands a past moving through the present toward a future.

Heidegger draws radical consequences from the concept, showing that human understanding always gets worked out in a horizon. Indeed Heidegger's use of the notion of human facticity relies on the idea of horizon. It is more precisely being "fallen" into a world (horizon) already moving toward a future; it is always already being situated historically within a structure of relatedness or meaning that is underway and has a direction. Being is time. And what is "Dasein's" (humankind's) specific way of being in the world? It is by way of understanding.⁵² It is only in the understanding or horizon of humankind that anything gets disclosed (gets made sense of). Thus, "the concept of understanding is no longer a methodological concept. . . [it] is the original characteristic of the being of human life." Our very way of being human is to move understandingly, that is, to project ourselves understandingly in our relatedness within a temporal horizon. In this sense, the past is always in the present moving toward a future. Human understanding is inherently historical in that we must constantly reappropriate the past in order to constitute the future, but obviously there is no objective point of departure for this appropriation. We are born into a "way of life," into a way of understanding things, a way of disclosing the world, a way of using language that is already underway. To us then, the world "is already there" even as we continue to disclose it. Heidegger calls this the "givenness of being," or the "givenness of the world." For us, that way of life, that way of understanding, that "language" or that "world" seems "natural," indeed, the way things are or have always been. In our very relatedness to our environment through language, we reappropriate the past toward the future within the terms of the way of life in which we find ourselves and, of course, give stability to the very world which made the initial assessment possible, the very world we will in a thousand ways continually supersede.

Thus, the language we use to make sense of things, within which we at the same time disclose ourselves and the "world" that surrounds us, is historically conditioned and a part of a tradition of understanding that came before and necessarily prejudices in one way or another the conclusions we arrive at. This is why Thorp's efforts to characterize believing history as *traditional* and revisionist history as *progressive* is wrong. *In fact, both histories work within traditions* that have long pedigrees where an absolute point of origin would be impossible to define. Both are bound to a set of prejudices and commitments that allow histories produced within each tradition to have an identity, although here, too, lies ambiguity; for while nominally separate, their vocabularies overlap and blur at points. Certainly, within a given tradition of scholarship where historical accounts script the past in a given way and make appeal to an accepted set of standards and criteria, it is more or less possible to talk of better and worse histories. But all such verifying languages, all such standards and criteria are themselves historical and work within the limit of time. They, too, are subject to change and transmutation. For this reason, Thorp's reference to the "ecumenical Gadamer," whose approach is said to

authorize a standard against which certain accounts can be judged better and others worse, simply fails to do justice to the text.⁵³ According to Gadamer (Husserl, Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida), there is no external or universal a-historical standard against which historical accounts worked out within different traditions can be judged "stronger" or "weaker."⁵⁴ To claim that there exists a verifying language that has no limit merely repeats the prejudice of "enlightenment reason."

THE SACRED

*A language open to the sacred
in no way cuts it off from reason.*

THORP'S essay repeats an assertion made by other revisionists: that because of what he characterizes as the private or self-enclosed nature of sacred discourse, its use to frame the Mormon past would be unacceptable because it would eliminate "all rational discussion on the subject."⁵⁵ In advancing such an argument, Thorp once again repeats the prejudice of "enlightenment rationalism," a prejudice that seems to permeate Thorp's essay. Moreover, it is surprising that Thorp would want to assume such a posture, since it has been discredited by modern linguistic theory and also refuted by Gadamer. Wittgenstein long ago displaced arguments for a private language, a point argued even more forcefully by Derrida.⁵⁶ Obviously, a private language would not be a language at all. Language is necessarily public. A language always presupposes a reader or hearer. It is our common "human" way of disclosing or sharing the world. Furthermore, the fact that a language is open to the sacred, to the possibility of belief, in no way cuts it off from reason. To the contrary, Gadamer shows that the distinction between the sacred and the profane is a relative one in which the sacred has historical priority.

Let us review Gadamer's argument. For Gadamer, questioning the past is not a negative activity designed to progressively rid historical understanding of error in order to establish its objective truth. It is not exorcising history of its superstitions and its naiveté by steadily displacing the sacred with the profane, that is by reducing the sacred to something that can be fit into the secular universe of naturalistic explanation. This is the narrow and dichotomous project of "enlightenment reason," and its very pursuit involves a fundamental misunderstanding of history, an ungrounded method, and a naiveté about the capacity of the present to interrogate the past. Gadamer insists that "Philosophy must make this clear to an age credulous about science to the point of superstition."⁵⁷ It is precisely because the use of naturalistic discourse does not understand its limit, believing unsuspectingly that its methods and standards are guarantors of truth, that histories worked out in its terms are naive and end up producing their own kind of superstition. Emmanuel Levinas repeats the same warning with regard to the exegesis of Jewish scripture by showing how those who claim to be able to de-mythologize the sense of the religious in which Jewish wisdom operates only end up imposing their own more obscure and heartless myths.⁵⁸

Gadamer clearly foresaw the unnecessary separation of the

A believing history works within a language of faith that affirms that an honest account written in genuine earnest and in accord with one's best efforts to constitute a past in believing terms and can open up a space in which the Spirit may attest to the truth of what is given.

sacred from the profane in his critique of naturalism and the narrowness of "enlightenment rationalism." He notes that in the Classical age there existed only a nominal separation "since the whole sphere of life was sacrally ordered and determined."⁵⁹ It was actually within Christianity that this distinction became understood in a somewhat stricter sense, one in which "this world" is distinguished from the realm of God as the profane in rebellion against, but not exterior to, the sacred. It alludes to the powers of the "world" which opposes the powers of "heaven" and defies its higher law, and, more specifically, to those who live a life which profanes God's teaching. In both cases, Gadamer stresses, the meaning of the profane must presuppose the sacred it profanates. This dependency accounts for why we find parallel and overlapping vocabularies in both secular and sacred discourse for the description of a variety of things ranging from basic selfishness to carnal desire. This is also why sacred accounts of the Mormon past can and do use, although generally in a negative way, language that is analogous to that used in some secular accounts. In any case, while in refusal of the sacred, it is quite clear that the profane is always understood as in a *dependent and ultimately expiring relationship* with what it refuses. So, Gadamer concludes that even though Christianity opens up a space for the secular state, giving a broader meaning to the word profane "does not alter the fact that the profane has remained a concept related to sacred law and can be defined by reference to it alone. There is no such thing as profaneness in itself,"⁶⁰ its use always presupposes the prior claim of the sacred.

Gadamer's questioning of the absolute opposition between the secular and the sacred necessarily leads us to question as well the almost "airtight" (logocentric) opposition that Thorp and others establish between the related ideas of the sacred and the rational. Although "enlightenment rationalism" seeks to purge rationality of every trace of the sacred, it only does so, as we have seen, by unduly privileging naturalistic discourse, reducing the sacred to a mere "feeling" or "sentiment" in consciousness, one to be explained psychologically. Clearly, this reduction is an act of intellectual violence—justified in the name of science—to drain the language of faith of its power by discounting it to a mere effect of psychological cause. In the end such a claim floats in air, for, as Husserl has shown, every such reduction ends up as a *psychologism* unable to rationally ground its own conclusions. And of course, this is exactly the point that Gadamer makes when he talks about the credulity of our age where science produces its own superstitions. Is not this also the meaning of Levinas's warning that the effort to demythologize the religious ends up creating myths of its own, obscure and heartless ones.

Interestingly enough, it is in the myth of "enlightenment reason"—of naturalistic explanation—and not a discourse

open to belief where we find a totalitarian temptation. It is naturalistic discourse that seeks to reduce all rational discussion to its own narrow form of logocentric racination—to "colonize" under its unchallengeable hegemony every other way of using language. It is only here in the prejudice of "enlightenment rationalism" that reason must be bifurcated such that intellect and faith find themselves in an unequal and tense opposition. Such a narrowing of rational discussion could not account for the rabbinic tradition and its effort to get clear on the word. It could not understand ancient, medieval, and even much of modern philosophy. And it certainly could not account for the Mormon *unwillingness* to see spiritual understanding reduced to a mere flush of irrational feeling.

Paradoxically, in a mute and concealed manner and despite itself, naturalistic discourse recognizes the priority of the claim of the sacred on the profane with a dim and indistinct hope that could only be justified by faith. Here the disorder that characterizes human relations and certainly human history is harmonized and elevated to actually constitute a higher order, a *natural order* not immediately evident in experience, over which nature itself presides. Surreptitiously, *nature is sacralized* and thus returned to its primordial heavenly status.

In the end the Lord does call us to "reason together," but it is a higher form of reason in which there is an opening for faith and for the sacred as well as a space for the refusal to believe. The opening present in believing discourse does not, of itself, assure in any way that the account is "true," or "sufficient." It does not, of itself, make "bad" history "good" history. Rather, a believing history works within a language of faith that affirms that an honest account written in genuine earnest and in accord with one's best efforts to constitute a past in believing terms can open up a space in which the Spirit may attest to the truth of what is given. The writing of such a history must be seen, then, as an act of generosity, where the author constitutes a past designed as a gift to the reader, but also as a gift to the Most High. There could be no more elevated standard, for here there is no room for professional jealousies or private vanities. Would an imperfect gift based on shoddy workmanship and incomplete effort be anything but a source of shame? And what would be its value?⁶¹ Since the claim of the re-presented past on the reader remains incomplete without the warrant of the Spirit, language open to belief is not enough to validate such an account. The text itself must frame the story so that it is worthy of being warranted, and the reader must be open to God's attestation.⁶² I am well aware that such straightforward language might be embarrassing to some LDS historians, but in the measure that it is, it reveals the closure of a thinking that rules out in advance God's truth-affirming power only to insert a worldly standard in its stead.

SUMMARY

Naturalistic explanations introduce their own superstitions, totalizing the past in its own language and repressing the expression of the sacred and silencing its claim.

W HERE has this long and complex excursus into the assumptions of revisionist history taken us? Although ostensibly it was written to respond to Professor Thorp's effort to reassert the primacy of secular approaches to history, it was also an excuse to look into the problems of revisionist history in general. In responding to Thorp, I have tried to raise honest questions that, while keeping in view the "pre-text" of the discussion, focus on Thorp's reading of Hans Georg Gadamer. I have shown that despite disclaimers and qualifying statements, the language of Thorp and other apologists seeks to reinstate a variant of "enlightenment reason," that privileges secular accounts of Mormon things. Secular discourse becomes the universal and valid mode of discourse, which alone is said to broker rational discussion and thus alone constitutes the preferred register for the writing of all Mormon histories. For Thorp, then, revisionist history does occupy a "higher ground," and is the standard that can produce "better" accounts, ones that "image reality," indeed the standard against which all other accounts ought to be judged.

I have further shown that such a position is thoroughly opposed to the position advanced by Gadamer (and, in fact, the position of other authors Thorp cites such as LaCapra, Foucault, and Derrida). Indeed, Gadamer's *Truth and Method* is a frontal assault against the pretensions of "enlightenment rationalism." By carefully working his way through Husserl's critique of "naturalism," Gadamer demonstrates why naturalistic explanation fails. He demonstrates why its various explanatory registers, including *positivism*, *objectivism*, *historicism*, and *environmentalism* with their often interrelated vocabularies, cannot be used to establish the claim of secular histories to be "higher," "better," that is, "truer," than other histories. Indeed, Gadamer shows why naturalistic explanation, locked in *psychologism* as it is, ends up miscasting the very activity of historical understanding it seeks to embody. Claiming to possess an objective methodology, such an approach "heroically" understands itself as bearing the standard of reason and truth against myth and superstition, when in fact, as Gadamer clearly demonstrates, it is only introducing its own superstitions. It seeks to totalize the past in its own language, such that the sacred is reduced to a moment in its explanatory categories. Nevertheless, the resulting histories do "violence" to the very sacred language they are seeking to subsume, repressing its expression, silencing its claim. And yet the trace of its absence remains a voiceless witness to its exile. The abundance is gone. What remains is a phantom wandering aimlessly on an arid plain where withered fields attest to famine and desolation. ☞

NOTES

1. In *Being and Time* Heidegger refers to this kind of blindness. It is somewhat like a person who has been wearing glasses so long that they are no longer con-

scious that they are wearing glasses and that the way in which they see the world is affected by the curvature of the lenses. This leads to a kind of intellectual discussion dominated by *chatter*, where the framing language within which "reality" is presented is repeated variously and continually, but no new ground is actually explored because it is not even anticipated, so natural seems the "world" that language frames. Note also the similarities to Husserl's *natural position*.

2. Since I had first published "No Higher Ground" in 1983, similar arguments had been raised in a much more comprehensive way within the American historical establishment. Peter Novick, a University of Chicago history professor authored a highly critical and very exhaustive treatment of objectivism and positivism in the American historical establishment. Moreover, he had also addressed new Mormon historians at the 1988 Sunstone Symposium. Philosophically speaking, Novick's critique had much in common with my "No Higher Ground," and supplemented arguments of Dominique LaCapra's books published in the early and mid-1980s, which called for a rethinking of how history is written. Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 379–80. Dominique LaCapra, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), chapters 1 and 4.

3. Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*, 2d ed., vol. I & II (Halle: Neidmeyer, 1900). As is well known this work came out in various editions with important corrections. His arguments against *psychologism* are further developed in *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie* (Halle: Neidmeyer, 1913). Finally Husserl's direct references to the historical character of human understanding can be found in his *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie* published in the *Husserliana* VI, extracts of which can be found in *The Search for Being*, ed. Jean T. Wilde and William Kimmel (New York: Noonday, 1961), 377–412.

4. I remember Malcolm commenting in the early 1980s (although not necessarily in an approving manner) that the growing methodological criticism of the "new Mormon history" was nothing more than a tempest in a teapot because *friends* controlled the avenues of publication and would not let these criticisms see the light of day. On the whole, he was right. To its credit, SUNSTONE did publish several articles questioning the claims of the "new Mormon history," including Ronald K. Esplin's "How Then Should We Write History? Another View," SUNSTONE 7:2 (March–April, 1982) and Neal W. Kramer's "Looking for God in History," SUNSTONE 8:1 (January–March 1983). But in 1982 when SUNSTONE considered my "No Higher Ground" essay, unsolicited letters were written to the editor of SUNSTONE to repress the article's publication; indeed, such letter writing campaigns have been used in a number of places to forestall criticism, arguing that to raise questions about the revisionist position constituted a personal attack against historians. See Scott C. Dunn, "So Dangerous It Couldn't Be Talked About," SUNSTONE 8 (November–December 1983): 47–48.

In addition to writing letters, revisionist historians called on the dean of the college of social sciences at BYU to censor critics of the new Mormon history, and to require the deletion of all references to revisionist historians, not only from the relevant texts, but even from the footnotes of works critical of revisionism. For years *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, a journal that presumably advocates the liberal and free discussion of ideas, would only publish articles friendly to revisionist accounts. When the editors did relent, it was after a protracted (more than two years) and tasteless struggle to unduly edit and rewrite an extensive essay from M. Gerald Bradford, currently executive director of the Western Center of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Indeed, emasculating critical texts through forced rewrites and unjustified editing has frequently been a preferred means of deflecting criticism of the new Mormon history.

This is not all. To avoid dealing with intellectual issues, many historians preferred to reduce the discussion to personalities. Take, for example, attacks against Louis Midgley, professor of political philosophy at Brigham Young University. He has been vilified by historians and even accused of "intentional . . . misrepresentation and obtuseness" (Thomas G. Alexander, "Historiography and the New Mormon History: A Historian's Perspective," *Dialogue* 19 [Fall 1986]: 44–45, n.5.) Yet few historians have wanted to deal with Midgley directly on the issues presumably due to his mastery of the subject matter.

It is disappointing that the very people who claim to have been *victims* of libel end up libeling Midgley; and the same people who warn against censorship end up repressing articles critical of their work. I could give many more examples, but it should be enough to point to BYU professor Dan Peterson's introduction to the 1992 *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, which chronicles in some detail similar political problems in Book of Mormon research.

5. Take for example a recent book ironically entitled *Faithful History*, edited

by Gary Bergera for George Smith (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992.) Here a variety of historians endeavor to repost the revisionists standard, but disappointingly none really face up to the task. For example, Edward Ashment draws from a dated secondary work on history and religion authored by Van Harvey that neither directly engages the central questions nor references the critical texts under examination in this discussion. I am surprised that moving from a position of such obvious weakness, Ashment everywhere uses a tone of condescension and derision. Another contributor, Paul Edwards, retreats to an eclectic subjectivism, and D. Michael Quinn responds by reasserting the rhetoric of orthodox professionalism as if no further arguments were required. It is troubling that Quinn apparently finds it regrettable that the general authorities find discomfort in the exploration of "the Mormon experience" by academics, while Quinn himself is unwilling to risk a careful examination of the methodological problems involved in founding the kind of knowledge claims implicit in his writings. Without such a foundation, Quinn will himself be condemned to take flight from or at least ignore the uncomfortable truths that cast a shadow upon his work. See D. Michael Quinn, "150 Years of Truth and Consequences about Mormon History," *SUNSTONE* 16 (February 1992).

6. The general reader may not be acquainted with many of the theorists referred to in this essay. To keep these already too lengthy endnotes from further expanding, I will here merely include the full names to facilitate later bibliographic reference for those interested. They include Friedrich Nietzsche, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur, Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Derrida, Philippe Lecoue-Labarte, and Jean-François Lyotard.

7. David Couzens Hoy, *The Critical Circle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.) This good introduction to hermeneutics and the problem of intentionality.

8. *Faithful History*, 250–56.

9. *Faithful History*, 250–56. Note also Louis C. Midgley's letter to the editor, *SUNSTONE* 16 (February 1992), 9–10 as well as critical letters found in the August 1992 issue, 4–10.

10. I raised these questions with Jim Faulconer, chair of Brigham Young University's philosophy department, who referred me to a piece in Jacques Derrida's *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1988), 111–54, entitled "Toward an Ethic of Discussion."

11. Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 110–60, citation from 112. Here Derrida reflects upon his highly charged exchange with John Searle in which he, Derrida, had used ridicule and mockery to reveal the failure of Searle's arguments to genuinely advance the discussion. Accounting for the failure of true dialogue to develop, Derrida notes that his initial derisive response to Searle criticism was occasioned by what he understood to be Searle's apparent unwillingness to take his, Derrida's, arguments seriously. But in the same vein, Derrida finds himself obliged to ask if he fully took Searle's concerns in earnest, and, thus, if his response to Searle was fair.

12. Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 112.

13. It is worth noting that while Gadamer and Derrida agree on much, Derrida argues that it is impossible—or not even desirable—to fully dispense with the political, while Gadamer seems to believe that in the opening of the dialogical relationship the political can be superseded. Derrida also explores the ontological priority of the question in *Spirit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) where he explores the "Zusagen" in Heidegger, the "yes, yes," the promise, the more original origin. In this extraordinarily rich text, I would alert the reader not to miss the footnotes, especially to chapters 8 and 9. I do not see this as an undermining of Gadamer, but as furnishing it a more fundamental "ground."

14. Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2d rev. ed. (New York: Crossroads, 1989), 372. Hereafter cited as TM.

15. TM, 372.

16. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburg: Duquesne Univ. Press, 1969), 183.

17. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 42–52.

18. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 50.

19. This theme has been developed by Midgley in a number of places, most notably in his review of *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* by Peter Novick, in *John Whitemer Historical Association Journal* 10 (1990): 102–04. This, of course, is the appropriate place since Novick treats in great detail the whole issue of professionalism in American historiography.

20. The intent here is not to indict a given historian, but rather to allow the text to be encountered in terms of the larger discourse of which it is a part, including whatever obvious interests and motivations might be found there.

21. Note the redefinition of objectivity by D. Michael Quinn and how it depends upon an assumed standard of professionalism, "Editor's Introduction," *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), vii–xix. It is also useful to examine the very glowing and uncritical terms in which Quinn deals with professionalism in "On Being a Mormon Historian (and Its Aftermath)," *Faithful History*, 69–111. But the most revealing is Quinn's letter to *SUNSTONE* 16 [March 1993]: 4–5, in which he assails the critics of new Mormon history for dichotomous reasoning and falsely stigmatizing the writers of new Mormon accounts. It is troubling, indeed, that Quinn does not seem to grasp in even the most elementary way what the discussion is about. It has nothing to do with saving the Church from embarrassment or sanitizing its past. It has to do rather with deep and complex issues that Quinn has never confronted. It explores the way historians use language to constitute the past and the limit of the claims that can be made for their accounts. Above all it opposes *revisionism* which for us is the recasting of the Restoration in language that explains the sacred in *naturalistic* terms, making genuine belief impossible. Revisionism is not simply "getting the details straight," or "the facts right." Actually, every generation of Mormons will necessarily "re-present" their common past differently than those who went before. They will struggle with different issues and different questions; they will in some measure write a different script. But it will, nevertheless, work within the shared conviction that the Church was restored by God's power.

But in a larger sense, I find it difficult to understand why it should bother Quinn that we explore unexamined assumptions? Why should he be disturbed that we investigate the various vocabularies at work in the scripting of the Mormon past and expose how they belong to given traditions of understanding whose metaphysical foundations are generally hidden from view. Does not honest scholarship require this? Would we not all benefit from the greater circumspection, humility, and charity that recognizing limits necessitates?

Finally, the accusation of dichotomous reasoning makes very clear Quinn's failure to read carefully, if at all, essays critical of revisionist history. While it may be politically useful to represent one's opponents as a mere caricature, the practice makes genuine dialogue impossible. For example, in all of my articles, I have recognized that the sacred/secular distinction was only nominal and not absolute. Language is necessarily ambiguous and does not yield absolute or objective distinctions. Certainly this essay should leave little doubt where I stand on the issue. It is rather the present generation of professional historians who advance such airtight distinctions, believing as they do that scientific rationalism—and in particular that variant found in the social sciences—has given us a mode of discourse—a new meta-language—that can assure neutral and objective historical accounts. It is revisionist historians and their friends who have scoffed at treatments of our past worked out in believing language. It is they who label it "bolstering, uncritical, and pollyannaish." It is they who have found Hugh Nibley and others "outrageous" because these writers did not shrink from framing the Mormon past in faithful terms.

22. For example, the foregoing discussion of the "pre-text" that operates in the margins of revisionist accounts is not a discussion of anyone's intention, but rather an effort gain a better understanding of the motivation of the text by bringing into view the language that works in its margins.

23. Here, of course, I am thinking about Gadamer, Foucault, Hoy, and LaCapra.

24. One only need read the pages of *SUNSTONE* and *Dialogue*; Quinn's article cited earlier is an excellent example.

25. Even the reporting of judgments or conclusions made in historical texts is not a "value-free" activity, since the text will likely include a variety of judgments. The historian is faced with which ones to report and how they will be made to fit into his or her overall account.

26. See Malcolm Thorp, "Some Reflections on New Mormon History and the Possibilities of a 'New' Traditional History," *SUNSTONE* 5 (November 1991): 39–46. I invite the reader to carefully inspect Thorp's article for the proof of the assertion. Throughout his piece, Thorp justifies history in terms of the *new*. For example, "And, as is also the current practice, historical accounts that stand out as insightful will be those which raise new and meaningful questions, or which make available new or significantly different readings of familiar texts, thus carrying the discussion further." (Italics are mine.)

27. In the past I have referred to the Hofmann forgeries and continue to do so because I feel that they would not have been possible had the ground for their acceptance not have already been prepared by revisionist longing for the kind of "documents" that could justify their speculations. I can remember many conversations with historians at lunch and in their offices and often with Thorp himself. Reference was often made to the flood of new documents like the "Salamander Letter" and later the "McLellan Papers" that, according to secret insiders (Hofmann

himself), would soon be available. Almost always, mention of such documents was with allusion to the kind of trouble they were going to cause the Church and how historians had been right all along about these matters.

28. In fact Marvin Hill refers to "sectarian and secular extremes," a position that has become increasingly unclear over the years. See Marvin S. Hill, "Secular or Sectarian History: A Critique of *No Man Knows My History*," *Church History* 43 (March 1974): 78–96, then see Louis C. Midgley, "Which Middle Ground?" *Dialogue* 22 (Summer 1989): 6–8. The best analysis is found in Midgley's "The Challenge of Historical Consciousness: Mormon History and the Encounter with Secular Modernity," *By Study and by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, vol. II ed. by John Lunquist and Stephen D. Ricks, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1991), 502–51.

29. Louis Midgley argues that Hill underrated the degree to which Dale Morgan and Fawn Brodie understood the underlying methodological issues. See *Mapping Contemporary Mormon Historiography*, 2–8. Also see references in the preceding endnote.

30. Reproduced in *Faithful History*, 1–17.

31. Thorp, "Some Reflections on New Mormon History," 41.

32. Thorp, 39, *passim*.

33. The debate between Habermas and Gadamer is well known. It involved an effort on the part of Habermas to reinstate the claim of a universal and rational standard of social criticism in the form of an "ideal speech situation," where led by reason, participants of good will come to similar conclusions. Gadamer challenges this position in "Replik," in *Hermeneutik and Ideologiekritik*, ed. K. O. Apell, et al. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971, 283–317) where he argues that although all interpretation operates in a tradition of understanding, it remains critical because interpretation necessarily involves the restatement and re-presentation of what has been given. This involves reflection and, in a certain measure, distance between what has been said and what ought to be said. But at no point is there an objective standard capable of resolving in some final way the interpretation of the past. Habermas continues to argue the same position, although with refinements, against Derrida. See Habermas's contribution to *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians Debate*, ed. Jürgen Habermas, trans. Sherry Weber Nicholson, intro. Richard Wolin (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1989). The position is refuted by Fred Dallmayr in *Margins of Political Discourse* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 39–72.

34. The following bibliography comes from the research of Louis Midgley, who seeks to record the more explicit references to naturalism in Mormon Historiography:

Leonard J. Arrington has called for Mormon history to be done in "human or naturalistic terms." See Arrington, "Scholarly Studies of Mormonism," *Dialogue* 1 (Spring 1966): 28. According to Arrington, "Most of those who have promoted both the [Mormon History] Association and *Dialogue* are practicing Latter-day Saints; they share basic agreement that the Mormon religion and its history are subject to discussion, if not to argument, and that any particular feature of Mormon life is fair game for detached examination and clarification. They believe that the details of Mormon history and culture can be studied in human and naturalistic terms—indeed, must be so studied—and thus without rejecting the divinity of the Church's origin and work." Arrington, "Scholarly Studies of Mormonism," 28. For other apologies for naturalistic explanations, see the preface to Arrington's *Great Basin Kingdom* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), viii–ix.

Hill has quoted with approval Arrington's original apology for his use of naturalistic explanations of the causes of revelation. See Hill, "The 'New Mormon History' Reassessed in the Light of Recent Books on Joseph Smith and Mormon Origins," *Dialogue* 21 (Autumn 1988): 115, 117. See also Hill, "Critical Examination of *No Man Knows My History*," by Fawn M. Brodie, copy of a manuscript in Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, n.p., n.d., 17. The acceptance of "a deterministic, environmental interpretation of Joseph's history" he once called "a naturalistic interpretation of Joseph Smith." This bias can be seen in his efforts to advance his version of "environmentalism," as he now calls his naturalistic *a priori*, against Bushman's account in *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, where the story of Joseph Smith is told in a way that separates the core of the message of the Restored Gospel from narrow environmental causation, or from simplistic product-of-culture explanations. See Hill, "Richard L. Bushman: Scholar and Apologist,"

Journal of Mormon History 11 (1984): 126; and also his "The 'New Mormon History' Reassessed in the Light of Recent Books on Joseph Smith and Mormon Origins," *Dialogue* 21 (Autumn 1988): 115, 117. Sterling M. McMurrin endorses naturalist humanism in his *Religion, Reason, and Truth* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1982), 279–80, 166–67. Explanations that are labelled as naturalistic have obviously been attractive to some Latter-day Saint historians. Despite expressing confidence that the use of "human and naturalistic terms" would not lead to a rejection of "the divinity of the Church's origin and work," in 1966 Leonard J. Arrington indicated that an unidentified historian had raised with him the question of whether it is "really possible to humanize all phases of Mormon history without destroying church doctrines regarding historical events." He then acknowledged that this "is a subject which warrants a full essay." Arrington, "Scholarly Studies of Mormonism in the Twentieth Century," *Dialogue* 1 (Spring 1966): 28, n.44. In the 1940s, Dale L. Morgan, who rejected the prophetic claims upon which the Mormon faith rests, argued that naturalistic explanations necessarily undercut the foundations of the Mormon faith. But it was not Morgan who was the unidentified historian mentioned by Arrington. In a letter to Arrington commenting on a draft of Arrington's "Scholarly Studies," Morgan indicated that he wondered "whether 'one reader' is not truly your own alter ego, merely a literary device for getting over some important points, 'without stirring up trouble'." Morgan to Arrington, 19 November 1965, 2, Morgan Papers (microfilm), Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

Foster naively assumes that his naturalistic approach actually reconstructs "precisely what Joseph Smith actually experienced." See Foster's "A Radical Misstatement," *Dialogue* 22 (Summer 1989): 5. He thought this would allow him to "come to grips with the actual experience itself in all its power and mystery" (5). He asserts that his approach affords the possibility of getting behind the texts, and also behind what the faithful credulously believe to have happened, "to what really happened" (6). This wonder is accomplished by focusing "on the naturalistic components of those experiences" (5). He has also attempted to suggest "some of the sources that could contribute to the development of a comprehensive naturalistic explanation of the Book of Mormon—an explanation which could go beyond the conventional Mormon view that it is a literal history translated by Joseph Smith or the conventional anti-Mormon view that it is a conscious fraud" (*Religion and Sexuality* [Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984], 294).

In *Mormons and Their Historians* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), Davis Bitton and Leonard J. Arrington call attention to the naturalistic explanations or assumptions of Morgan, Brodie, and Bernard DeVoto (117, 119, 123); they also stress (131–32) that Arrington "did not hesitate to give a naturalistic interpretation to certain historical themes sacred to the memories of Latter-day Saints," as they quote with approval the passage from the preface to *Great Basin Kingdom* (vii–viii) in which Arrington defends his use of naturalistic explanations of the causes of divine revelations. For additional Latter-day Saint historians who use or defend the use of naturalistic explanations, see Thomas G. Alexander, "The Place of Joseph Smith in the Development of American Religion: An Historiographical Inquiry," *Journal of Mormon History* 5 (1978): 15; Alexander, "An Approach to the Mormon Past," *Dialogue* 16 (Winter 1983): 147; Alexander, "Historiography and the New Mormon History: A Historian's Perspective," *Dialogue* 19 (Fall 1986): 25, 30, 40–44; Marvin S. Hill, "Brodie Revisited: A Reappraisal," *Dialogue* 7 (Winter 1972): 73; Hill, "A Note on Joseph Smith's First Vision and Its Import in the Shaping of Early Mormonism," *Dialogue* 12 (Spring 1979): 90, 95, 97; Hill, "Richard L. Bushman: Scholar and Apologist," *Journal of Mormon History* 11 (1984): 125; and also his "The 'New Mormon History' Reassessed in the Light of Recent Books on Joseph Smith and Mormon Origins," *Dialogue* 21 (Autumn 1988): 115, 117; and his letter "Afterword," *BYU Studies* 30 (Winter 1990): 117–24; Sterling M. McMurrin, "A New Climate of Liberation: A Tribute to Fawn McKay Brodie," *Dialogue* 14 (Spring 1981): 74; Davis Bitton, "The Mormon Past: The Search for Understanding," *Religious Studies Review* 11 (April 1985): 115. For non-Mormon acceptance and use of the label, see Jan

Shipp, "The Prophet Puzzle: Suggestions Leading Toward a More Comprehensive Interpretation of Joseph Smith," *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974): 11, reprinted in *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past*, ed. by D. Michael Quinn (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992); Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 294–97; Foster, "A Radical Misstatement," *Dialogue* 22 (Summer 1989): 5–6; Mario S. DePillis, "Bearding Leone and Others in the Heartland of Mormon Historiography," *Journal of Mormon History* 8 (1981): 85, 88, 97; DePillis, Review of Richard L. Bushman's *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, in *Utah Historical Quarterly* 53 (Summer 1985): 293; and LeAnn Cragun, "Mormons and History: In Control of the Past" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Hawaii, December 1981), 130, 157, 185–86, 189.

35. Despite reference to naturalistic explanation in his essay, Thorp does not seem to understand its full import in this discussion. Indeed, in his efforts to deal with naturalism, he seems unaware that there is a problem at all, which is strange when one considers that *Truth and Method*, a text important to Thorp's position on the nature of historical understanding, is a frontal attack against naturalistic explanation. For example the following statement taken from Thorp's text is simply confused:

language is essentially naturalistic (evolutionary) and historically situated. This indeed is at the root of one of the most serious problems in Bohn's essays. He assumes, because terminology employed by historians (and, for that matter, all other scholars) often originates from positivism and naturalistic disciplines, that language use remains within the original mode of understanding. This is clearly not so, for language changes in meaning and context, and hence scholarly usage. Moreover, the use of secular vocabulary does not necessarily presuppose any ontological grounds for belief or disbelief. (Thorp, "Some Reflections," 43.)

To mistake *naturalistic* for *evolutionary*, and further to mean *historically situated*, scrambles together concepts that have different genealogies. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer makes clearer the problems involved in naturalism.

I also thought that it was odd that Thorp would state that I had somehow suggested that it was a "sin" to use naturalistic discourse. I do not believe in print or private conversation I have ever said that. My only effort in more than ten years of writing on the subject has been to show the limit of naturalistic discourse in framing the sacred. I don't consider myself in a position to judge other people's sins! Thorp, endnote 52.

Finally, in the next sentence he says that "naturalistic language is rooted in all human language." That is false and certainly runs counter arguments of Gadamer that Thorp ought to have known. But Thorp's polemic boards on a grotesque form of mockery when he implies that I am calling for some kind of new language, a sort of "God-Speak." Thorp, endnote 52.

In all of this, Thorp does not seem to have fully understood how the concept of *intentionality* overcomes the subject-object distinction and renders nominal and indeed unnecessary absolute distinctions. We are born into a tradition of understanding in which secular and sacred are already related to each other. Indeed, it is precisely the claim of secular discourse to have superseded the sacred which must be justified, a claim that Thorp continues to assume in the foregoing citations.

36. Also see Gadamer's, *Reason in the Age of Science* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), 1–21.

37. This material was provided by Professor John Grondin from copies of unpublished material in the Gadamer Archive. In addition, his unparalleled discussion of Gadamer at the 1992 session of the *Collegium Phenomenologica* held Perugia, Italy, was valuable in the preparation of this paper.

38. TM, 272.

39. TM, 224

40. David Bohn, "Unfounded Claims and Impossible Expectations," in *Faithful History*, 227–63. It seems to me that an effort to get to the truth by tracing it back to the facts, back to the brute or raw perspective which have been glossed over, always falls prey to originary thinking. In addition to Husserl, the critical texts here are Derrida's *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction* by Jacques Derrida (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989) and his *Speech and Phenomenon*.

41. In the end, even in Kant, phenomena could never be more than the way the mind presents sensation to itself, since thought can never reach beyond the sensation to the supposed object itself.

42. This is an excellent book on Husserl by the preeminent philosopher,

Emmanuel Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 13. Also see pages 31–42 of Jean-François Lyotard's *Phenomenology* (Albany: State University of New York Press).

43. *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, 15.

44. Dilthey's preference for hermeneutics is not accidental. He was Schleiermacher's biographer and was fully apprised of the possibilities involved in applying hermeneutics to a more general study of history.

45. D. Michel Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987). Strange that he even uses the terms "world view" which reflects Dilthey's environmentalism.

46. TM, 243–48 and TM, 245.

47. TM, 261.

48. TM, 247.

49. TM, 247.

50. TM, 247.

51. TM, 254.

52. TM, 257.

53. "Some Reflections," 40. Thorp misunderstands Gadamer's position in *Truth and Method* when he argues against me that:

The hermeneutical position developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer (which Bohn uses in his Critique) is an ecumenical endeavor aimed at clarifying the process in which understanding takes place; it is not an endeavor that creates battle lines between radically different approaches. As Gadamer says, mediation makes insightful sharing possible, thus throwing light on the conditions of understanding in all modes of thought. Bohn, however, seeks to divide, not to bring about reconciliation and multi-perspectival understanding.

To the contrary, Gadamer does not try to reconcile differing positions, making final judgments between competing explanations. Rather he seeks to show how it is that we can *understand* each other from within different horizons. In fact, Thorp's call for "bringing about reconciliation and multi-perspectival understanding" is inherently contradictory, and seems to me to be a longing for the kind of *finality* of judgment that *objectivism* claimed to make possible. Rather, it is precisely because different approaches frame the past in different terms that they cannot be reconciled, although they can be understood. Finally, Thorp uses nihilism and relativity as a "scare" tactic in order to draw historians back to objective approaches to historical composition, but at the same time uses the term "multi-perspectival understanding." He must be aware that "perspectivism" is a term largely traceable in methodological discussions to Nietzsche whose relativism rigorously argued against any final reconciliation of views.

54. "Some Reflections," 40. Thorp again fails to see that the "rigorous criticism" that gives rise to "stronger and weaker formulations" continues to work within a horizon and are conditioned by the pre-understanding that both makes them possible and legitimates such judgments. It seems to me that everywhere in Thorp's paper is the *subrosa* appeal to finality, which despite all qualifications calls for an *objectivist* metaphysics. In the end, Thorp's claim is that reconciliation of differing accounts is possible with some coming out as "stronger" and others as "weaker" in terms of some over-arching standard. That certainly does not fit with his later tongue-in-cheek call for a "Foucaultian probing" of discontinuities in Mormon history, a position, by the way, that Derrida has deconstructed because of its privileging of the vocabulary of power.

In his footnotes (particularly #52) as well as in private conversations with me, Thorp has argued that Gadamer's idea of suspension allowed for a setting aside of faith in order to assure an open reading. Again, I believe that Thorp has misunderstood the textual usage of "suspension" in Gadamer's text. In the first place, Malcolm's reference to *Truth and Method* does not cite faith, only the suspension of prejudices. It then proceeds to define two kinds of prejudice, recognizing that in the more fundamental sense it is our prejudice, our preunderstanding that brings us to the text and makes the reading possible. Suspension in no way involves a kind of neutrality or detachment as in objectivist historiography, for as Gadamer notes, to do so would be to deny the historicity of the historian and the effect of history on interpretation. Rather suspension takes the form of a question that is formed as the text addresses the interpreter. As we have seen, questioning is not Gadamer's way of calling for Cartesian doubt, it is rather a call for an openness in which the question can be explored (TM, 300).

I believe that revisionists are far more guilty of Thorp's charge of not remaining open to the meaning of the text. Many dismiss the believing language of the text by reinterpreting it in the light of the explanatory language of naturalism, which is secular in character (environmentalism for example). Their end is not *understanding*, it is rather *explanation*. Also in the same section Thorp references, Gadamer

advances arguments drawn from Heidegger to show that the meaning of a text is not fixed, for not only is the text historical, but the historical horizon in which it will be interpreted by the interpreter is historical (underway). For this reason, the reader looks for the possible meanings of the text, indeed explores the play of language exhibited by the text.

I have carefully examined the thirty-six instances in which Gadamer used the word *faith* in his most recent revised edition of *Truth and Method*. Nowhere does it address the subject of *faith* in the way that Thorp argues. In any case, Mormons would not necessarily understand the claim of faith in the same way as Gadamer and traditional Lutheranism. Clearly, we are born into a condition of faith, that is, already with the light of Christ. Through the way in which we live our lives, we can distance ourselves from its call, indeed, at times only the absence of its presence—the haunting emptiness of our understanding and our lives—may remain as we stand in refusal of faith and its light. But we could never actually suspend it, for as already argued, even the secular language we replace it with echoes the void. Interestingly enough, Gadamer argues that Heidegger also saw the need to deal with *faith* differently and hints in the direction of an understanding not entirely opposed to that noted above (see *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 207–08).

Finally, in endnote #52 of his piece, Thorp cites Gadamer in a way that does not give full expression to the text. The reader might wish to continue on and read the next page in *Truth and Method* (210).

55. "Some Reflections," 41.

56. The best arguments can be found in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (trans. G.E. Anscombe [Blackwell: Oxford, 1953]), although they were anticipated by Descartes in his mediation on the *evil genie*.

57. TM, 552.

58. Emmanuel Levinas, *Du sacré au saint* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1977), preface.

59. TM, 150.

60. TM, 150.

61. In the end, all standards are necessarily historical and will work within a horizon that is momentarily satisfying to writers and readers.

62. Richard Bushman has elegantly stated the difficulty of framing the truth of the Mormon past. It involves more than the artful use of technique or imposing symmetry by implementing the latest models. Its requirements are higher. "The trouble with wishing to write history as a Mormon is that you cannot improve as a historian without improving as a person. The enlargement of moral insight, spiritual commitment, and critical intelligence are all bound together. We gain knowledge no faster than we are saved." (Reprinted in *Faithful History*, 18.)

There is a sense in which all of us would like a cheaper way to the truth, one that would obviate coming to terms personally with our failings. But that is not a genuine possibility.



SALT CRUSTED ON AUTOMOTIVE GLASS

Between me, safe in my seat on this bus,
And the decadent majesty of the salmon-red
 cliffs of eastern Utah,
A ghost landscape stands sentinel,
As if etched into the glass by a cadre of
 capering goblins.
The residue of a hasty window washing—
Loops and whorls of dirt left untouched,
 uncleansed,
Unrepentant, at the bottom of the glass on each
 fluid upstroke—
It sparkles, gritty and salt-sharp in the
 oblique sunlight,
Like a series of pearly solar flares,
Or a graph of the desert's pulsebeat,
Or spectral negatives of a washed-out sandstone
 arch,
Photographed in stages over eons of time—
Snapshots from a child-god's flip-book—
Frothing, leaping, peaking, then falling back
 into the ground
Like fountains of earth,
A time-lapse planetary signature
That will melt and return to dust
With the next unlikely rain.

—D. WILLIAM SHUNN

THE WIND CRIES

The wind cries:

I am the scouring hiss of wind and sage,
the voice of the high-flown eagle
looking down with cold, golden eye.

The mountain sighs:

The brow of the skirted butte
is my crown;
my skin the clotted clay:
weathered hide of old bony
mountains, asleep in the sun.
Antelope traverse the threaded trails,
finding grass at dawn,
and hidden springs at night.
The jackrabbit knows
where the coyote lairs,
and the laughing wolf finds
the high ridge path
where the lightning dances.
But the mysteries that beckon here
are seeds you have forgot.

The desert sings:

I will taunt your thirst with vanished water.
I will haunt you with forgotten dreams.
I will pick your tangled bones
with the comb of the wind,
And fill your empty eyes
with visions of eternity.

—ELIZABETH H. BOYER