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Korihor, Psychology, and False Doctrine: Korihorian Arguments in Modern Psychology

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e live in perilous times-times when men are "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7). The scriptures are replete with warnings against false teachings that will be rampant in the latter days; such teachings are calculated to deceive even the elect (see Joseph Smith-Matthew 1:22). Because they saw our day (see Mormon 8:35), ancient prophets wrote the Book of Mormon for us of these perilous last days. Thus the experiences, stories, and visions recorded in the Book of Mormon have relevance in our day, and were selected to give us guidance in our lives. The dialogue between Alma and Korihor found in Alma chapter 30 is no exception. Mormon had a purpose for including it in his abridgement, and that purpose may very well be to serve as a warning against false doctrine. Since such false doctrines and ideas are apparent in modern psychology, this paper shall examine the similarities between Korihor's arguments and the arguments of the modern psychologist, tracing their similarities, and discussing the implications of these arguments for Latter-day Saints.

MODERN PSYCHOLOGY

Psychology as a modern discipline is concerned with understanding principles of behavior, motivation, and mental illness. As such, it makes claims regarding human nature. In making arguments about human nature, much is at stake if there are errors in the argument. Therefore, we must understand psychological arguments that appear to be at odds with the gospel, especially those that are the ideas of anti-Christs.

To establish the presence of Korihor's ideas in modern psychology, this paper shall present the words of prominent psychologists rather than an interpretation of their words. The arguments presented will not be representative of mere opinions, but of serious parts of published theories. Latter-day Saints must be aware that these theories bring with them serious consequences. It is not, however, the purpose of this paper to demonstrate that all psychology is evil—indeed there much good in it—but rather to bring these serious ideas into consideration so Latter-day Saints can be at least aware of them, and not be deceived by the precepts of men.

The responsibility for these ideas in psychology does not rest solely on the theorists. Such ideas result from assumptions about human nature that result from the prevailing naturalism within the field of modern science. Tracing the naturalistic roots of psychology is beyond the scope of this paper, and has been discussed by several researchers. Whatever their origins, these ideas are a large part of psychology and must be considered.

Critically, these ideas will be analyzed using a very simple test provided in Moroni 10:6, which reads, "And whatsoever thing is good is just and true; wherefore, nothing that is good denieth the Christ, but acknowledgeth that he is." In other words, if something is good, it will invite and testify of the living Savior.

KORIHOR AND ALMA

Long before Skinner and his rats, Pavlov and his dogs, and Maslow and his hierarchy of needs, Korihor, an anti-Christ, stood before the prophet Alma offering bold arguments against the truthfulness of the gospel, While he made several arguments that parallel those used in modern psychology, this paper will focus on three of them. First, that "ye cannot know of things which ye do not see," second, that believing one has had a remission of sins is "is the effect of a frenzied mind," and finally, that "whatsoever a man did was no crime" (see Alma 30:15-17). Korihor, who claims to have been deceived by the devil, used these arguments to criticize religion and the belief in a Savior. As we shall see, these three ideas are very much a part of the theories of modern psychologists.

EPISTEMOLOGY

One of the first claims Korihor makes to Alma is epistemological: "ye cannot know of things which ye do not see" (Alma 30:15). Korihor's argument presents an idea known as empiricism. This idea has taken a prominent role in both philosophy and psychology. As Slife and Gantt observed, "Empiricism holds that the only reliable form of knowledge is that which comes through sensory experience," and that "only the observable . . . can be real knowledge."2 Korihor's empiricist claim is a direct affront to the prophet Alma, who would later discuss faith as a hope in unseen truths (see Alma 32:21), and had previously argued an epistemology that allowed for revelation (see Alma 5:46). As shall be demonstrated, Korihor's argument fits perfectly with the ideas of contemporary psychologists Max Meyer, John Watson, and B. F. Skinner. It shall be further demonstrated that a strict empiricism has serious implications for Latter-day Saints.

Max Meyer. Max Meyer is considered a forerunner of behaviorism, and as such advocates empiricism.3 According to Meyer, though psychology had been misdirected in the past by trying to understand the soul, it has now "triumph[ed because] . . . it has learned to restrict itself to describing merely that which one can measure." Such measurement is simply "comparing a thing by means of our sense organs with another thing which we regard as our standard unit, and counting the number of units," and this measurement was to be accomplished only by the vehicle of the senses.⁴

Because of his assumption that unobservable things could not be the object of study, Meyer considered it a waste of time "to make the soul [and consciousness] an object of scientific inquiry." Thus, while he does not explicitly deny the existence of the soul, Meyer is advocating, like Korihor, that "ye cannot know of things which ye do not see" (Alma 30:15).

The behaviorists. Let us now consider the work of the behaviorists, specifically B. F. Skinner and John Watson. Behaviorism, born as a rejection of the introspection of Wundt, is the belief that only behavior can be an object of psychological inquiry, and that behavior must be studied according to the methodology of the natural sciences. This idea, as is apparent in the words of Skinner and Watson, is decidedly empiricistic, because as shall be seen, Skinner does not allow for the mind to be studied, while Watson rejects the existence of the mind and the unseen world completely.

B. F. Skinner. A prominent theorist in psychology, Skinner has been heralded as "one of the most prominent and celebrated figures in psychology in the latter half of the twentieth century." Skinner's brand of behaviorism, which he called "radical behaviorism," was not as extreme as Watson's behaviorism in terms of rejecting the mind and the soul, however, he did question the reliability of its study. According to Skinner, "Radical behaviorism . . . does not insist upon truth by agreement and can therefore consider events taking place in the private world within the skin. It does not call these events unobservable, and it does not dismiss them as subjective. It simply questions the nature of the object observed and the reliability of the observations." Clearly, Skinner allows for the existence of an "unobservable" world, but he does not consider it reliable.

Several researchers have considered Skinner a logical positivist,9 though other researchers have disputed this.10 As a logical positivist, Skinner would only focus on what can be directly observed,11 and would thus believe, with Korihor and Meyer, that we cannot gain reliable knowledge from that which we cannot see.

John B. Watson. Another prominent figure in behaviorism, John Watson attempted "to establish psychology as a science by making it more objective."12 To that end, he penned what would later be known as the "Behaviorist Manifesto." In this 1919 work titled Psychology from the Standpoint of a Behaviorist, Watson observed: "According to the opinion of many scientific men today, psychology even to exist longer, not to speak of becoming a true natural science, must bury subjective matter, introspective method and present terminology. Consciousness, with its structural units, the irreducible sensations (and their ghosts, the images) and their affective tones, and its processes, attention, perception, conception, is but an indefinable phrase."13 Such ideas of consciousness, perception, and conception were problematic to Watson specifically because they are unobservable. He sought as his goal a psychology based on observation-a psychology that did not speculate about the inner workings of the soul or take subjective approaches.14

Because he wanted an objective psychology that could be studied as a natural science, Watson saw behavior as determined by genes and environment, explicitly denying the existence of a soul, consciousness, or mind.15 The result of such an idea is a strictly empirical psychology that studies and gains knowledge only from what can be seen, or, as Logue observed, "the only data actually available to psychology are whatever is observable (i.e. behavior)."16

Implications. Inasmuch as these empiricistic claims are clearly present in psychology, it is important to understand their implications for Latter-day Saints. An important aspect of Latterday Saint doctrine is seeking revelatory confirmation of its truthfulness. The prophet Moroni encourages Latter-day Saints to ask God about the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, and informs them that they can learn the "truth of all things" by the power of the Holy Ghost (Moroni 10:5). Such a revelatory experience is believed not to come as the result of concrete, empirical observations, but as a confirmation within heart and mind (see D&C 8:2).

For a Latter-day Saint, the strictly empiricistic epistemology of Korihor would specifically deny such a subjective confirmation because it cannot be observed. Knowledge of the truthfulness of prophets, scripture, and salvation—because it is not based on observation—is thus, as Skinner would say, suspect and unreliable.¹⁷

This stands in stark contrast to the words of Jesus Christ when He told Peter that his testimony of Christ, gained not from flesh and blood (observation) but from God (revelation), is a sure foundation against which hell cannot prevail (see Matthew 16:17). Furthermore, if our very eternal life hinges upon knowing and having a relationship with Jesus Christ (see John 17:3), then strict empiricism would prevent us from being a partaker of eternal life.

The psychopathology of religious experience. The implications of accepting a strictly empirical epistemology are further illuminated by Korihor himself, in another of his arguments against Alma. If we cannot gain knowledge from spiritual experiences, we are forced to question their very nature. Korihor does this by telling Alma that believing one has had a remission of sin "is the effect of a frenzied mind" (Alma 30:15). Inasmuch as Alma's knowledge of his own remission of his sins came from revelation (see Alma 36), this argument can apply to all revelatory experiences. To Korihor, having a religious experience is tantamount to insanity, or at least some form of psychopathology. As with Korihor's epistemology, his views on religious experience are very

much a part of contemporary psychology, and one need not look far to discover them. For example, Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, regarded religious experience as an "illusion . . . a psychotic delusion and a neurotic compulsion."18

Speaking specifically of people who claim they have received revelation about the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, Albert Ellis, a prominent psychotherapist and founder of rationalemotive therapy, claims that "they're deluded."19 Ellis then goes on to argue that even believing one has a relationship with God is the result of a delusion.

Such ideas, while they represent a striking idea, are not new. While Fenwick concludes that "today, hearing voices and experiencing altered states of consciousness are no longer thought of as seeing through the veil of reality into its true structure but as the misfiring of a disordered brain distorting the everyday world,"20 Korihor was making the same argument millennia before. An argument that, if accepted, means that rather than having authentic religious experiences, the millions of Latter-day Saints who have claimed divine confirmation of the Book of Mormon are merely deluded. It further means that Joseph Smith did not have an authentic vision, but simply had a frenzied mind and was mentally ill-an argument that has been made before.21 This is again problematic, as the very truthfulness of the restoration hinges upon these events.22 As William James once observed, "Medical materialism finishes up Saint Paul by calling his vision on the road to Damascus a discharging lesion of the occipital cortex, he being an epileptic. It snuffs out Saint Teresa as an hysteric, Saint Francis of Assisi as a hereditary degenerate. George Fox's discontent with the shams of his age, and his pining for spiritual veracity, it treats as a disordered colon."23

The existence of God. Another important implication of a strict empiricism is that it can be used to dispute the existence of God. For, as Korihor observes, God "never has been seen or known" and thus "never was nor ever will be" (Alma 30:28). In other words, if only what can be seen is ultimately real, and God cannot be seen, God cannot exist.

Though Korihor's argument is threatened by the multiple scriptural accounts of prophets seeing God (see Exodus 33), he nonetheless dismisses those events as deception, foolishness, or delusion. Inasmuch as most people do not actually see God, to accept Korihor's ideas, we must reject the possibility of the existence of God, as many psychologists have done.

RELATIVISM

Having criticized Alma's belief in deity as well as the reliability of religious experience, Korihor makes a claim regarding sin, that "whatsoever a man did was no crime" (Alma 30:17). Such a claim is quite bold and is an excellent example of relativism—the idea that values, standards, and truths are all created by an individual, and thus are not absolute. As with his other arguments against Alma, Korihor's relativism runs parallel with the ideas of several theorists in modern psychology. This section will examine the relativism of Carl Rogers and of other existential psychologists, and discuss the implications of their ideas for Latter-day Saints.

Carl Rogers, Rogers is widely influential in modern psychology because of a therapy method he created known as client-centered therapy. This method won him awards from the American Psychological Association,²⁴ and caused him to be "voted the most influential American psychologist" in polls conducted in two leading psychological journals,²⁵

Though he apparently allows for the existence of evil behavior,²⁶ Rogers's therapy advocates a form of moral relativism. In therapy with a client, "Rogers encouraged the therapist to put aside his or her preoccupation with actively diagnosing, evaluating, or guiding the patient" in order to encourage "the client to discover himself or herself."27 By refraining from making evaluations of the client or seeking to diagnose him or her, the therapist is engaging in what Rogers calls unconditional positive regard.28

Unconditional positive regard requires the therapist to never appear judgmental.29 Indeed, as Rogers says, "true empathy is always free of any evaluative or diagnostic quality,"30 because functional people do "not have to satisfy the introjected standards of other people, [they are] guided entirely by the organismic valuing processes and enjoy . . . total self acceptance,"31 Thus, patients are valued and accepted for the people they are. As long as the client feels he or she is being true to themselves, the therapist must value and accept this.

Inasmuch as clients are to be accepted and valued, without judgments, Rogers is advocating a form of moral relativism-at least in the therapy session. To Rogers, whatsoever a man does, as far as therapy is concerned, is no crime.

Existential psychologists, Building on such ideas, many (but not all) existential psychologists have gone further to perpetuate this idea of moral relativism. Indeed, one existentialist has suggested that "the human condition . . . cannot be served by a narrow moral code created by those-political fanatics, religious zealots, social psychologists-who are convinced that they know what is ethically valid. Instead, humankind has to pragmatically create its own moral code to serve its diverse needs."32 Thus, according to Howard Kendler, humanity is not benefited by God and His laws. Indeed, they are irrelevant. Such a negative view about an external morality leads Kendler to conclude that "naturalscience psychology, as well as other social sciences, can help, but not dictate."33

Kendler's idea is in harmony with other existentialist ideas, For example, Martin, Campbell, and Henry claim that there are no objective external values, but a person must create them himself. People then "are free to act on the basis of the values that feel valid for them in the specific context in which they find themselves." Martin, Campbell, and Henry are thus of the opinion that we must create our own values, and our own laws, and live accordingly. There would thus be no sin, and, indeed, whatever a person does is not a crime, as long as it is accordance with his or her own value system.

Blending these ideas with Rogers's theory of unconditional positive regard, Joseph Wolpe posits that "all that the patient says is accepted without question or criticism. He is given the feeling that the therapist is unreservedly on his side. This happens not because the therapist is expressly trying to appear sympathetic, but as the natural outcome of a completely nonmoralizing objective approach to the behavior of human organisms. For example, when the patient shamefully recounts an extramarital love affair, it is sincerely pointed out that this is no reason for shame, because factors in the circumstances made it a natural thing to happen—as indeed they must have:"35

Implications of relativism. For Latter-day Saints, the implications of relativism are broad. If we accept the ideas of Rogers, Kendler, Martin, and Korihor, we must reject the idea that God has a standard for us, because we would be ultimate source of truth and morals, not an external being, such as God. Martin, Campbell, and Henry assert that behaviors cannot be rewarded or punished, thus allowing us to question ideas of heaven and hell.

Perhaps more striking than simply rejecting the existence of heaven and hell are the consequences for a belief in God. If we accept relativism, we must accept, with Korihor, that there is no sin. Lehi masterfully tells us the consequences of that belief in 2 Nephi 2:13: And if ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin, If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness. And if there be no righteousness there be no happiness. And if there be no righteousness nor happiness there be no punishment nor misery. And if these things are not there is no God. And if there is no God we are not, neither the earth; for there could have been no creation of things, neither to act nor to be acted upon; wherefore, all things must have vanished away.

It becomes clear from Lehi's standpoint that acceptance of moral relativism asserts that God does not exist, and if He doesn't exist then there is no creation and hence no existence. This type of nihilism very troublesome because nothing is "more essential to the work and mission of the adversary than to convince the children of God that a nothingness lies at the bottom of their lives and relationships, and that, therefore, their acts have no real moral meaning."36

Williams further observes that this type of nihilism ultimately destroys the purpose of religion (because it is only valuable insomuch as it helps us feel better about nothingness) and the need for a personal relationship with the Savior. Thus, while relativism sounds attractive, and may even have its benefits in therapy, at least according to Rogers, as Latter-day Saints we must be very careful in accepting it, because with it come serious consequences for our belief system.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the presence of the ideas of Korihor, an anti-Christ, in modern psychology-specifically his strict empiricism, and his belief in moral relativism-and has suggested some implications of these ideas. Inasmuch as the ideas used by Korihor to deceive the people of the Book of Mormon are still alive and well, Latter-day Saints must therefore be careful in selecting

therapists and in accepting research because such research can be rooted in ideas that are contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

For if we hold to Korihor's strict empiricism—believing that we can only gain knowledge from the senses and from observation—personal revelation is in doubt. If such experiences are in doubt, then a foundation of knowledge on revelation is not possible, nor are any of the claims about the truthfulness of the restoration. The visions of Joseph Smith and the revelatory confirmation of truth must be explained away as mental illness. If this is the case, then the very foundations of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints must crumble to the ground. If we agree with this idea, then Joseph Smith was merely a madman and testimonies of the Book of Mormon that are based on feelings are mere delusions.

Additionally, if we hold to Korihor's idea of moral relativism that is so present in the psychologies of Rogers and many existential psychologists, then we are lead down a path that ultimately leads to nihilism and denial of God. Such issues—that revelation is unreliable, that religious experience is the result of insanity, and that there is no moral law (and thence no God)—are not compatible with Latter-day Saint belief. As such, we must take a critical approach to these theories, and seek the spirit of discernment, so that the elect of the earth be not deceived by the philosophies of men.

Perhaps the greatest challenge, however, is to be certain our psychological theories and practices promote an atmosphere and framework wherein men and women can come closer to Jesus Christ, such an invitation being the hallmark of a good thing, according to Moroni. Further, perhaps the advice of the Lord to Joseph Smith is most salient for Latter-day Saint practitioners and consumers of psychology. Speaking of the Apocrypha, the Lord explained that "there are many things contained therein that are true.

... [However,] there are many things contained therein that are not

true.... Therefore, whoso readeth it, let him understand, for the Spirit manifesteth truth; and whoso is enlightened by the Spirit shall obtain benefit therefrom" (D&C 91:1-2, 4-5). Likewise to a knowledge of the truth—which truth is Jesus Christ.

NOTES

- L. See, for example, Brent D. Slife and Richard N. Williams, What's Behind the Research; Discovering Hidden Assumptions in the Behavioral Sciences (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995).
- 2. Brent D. Slife and Edwin E. Gantt, "Methodological Pluralism: A Framework for Psychotherapy Research," Journal of Clinical Psychology 55, no. 12 (1999): 1454.
- 3. See B. F. Skinner, About Behaviorism (New York: Albert A. Knopf, 1974), 16-17.
- 4. See Max Meyer, Psychology of the Other-One: An Introductory Text-Book of Psychology, 2nd ed. rev. (Columbia, MO: Missouri Book Company, 1921), 3.
- 5. Meyer, Psychology of the Other-One, 406.
- 6. See John B. Watson, Psychology from the Standpoint of a Behaviorist (London: Frances Pinter, 1982), 3.
- 7. Wayne Viney and D. Brett King, A History of Psychology: Ideas and Context (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2003), 319.
- 8. Skinner, About Behaviorism, 16-17.
- 9. See Gary Hatfield, "Psychology, Philosophy, and Cognitive Science: Reflections on the History and Philosophy of Experimental Psychology," Mind and Language 17, no. 3 (2002): 207-32.
- 10. See B. R. Hergenhahn, An Introduction to the History of Psychology (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1997), 274.
- 11. See William Indick, "Fight the Power: The Limits of Empiricism and the Costs of Positivistic Rigor," Journal of Psychology 136, no. 1 (2002): 21-36.

- See A. W. Logue, "Watson's Behaviorist Manifesto: Past Positive and Current Negative Consequences" in Modern Perspectives on John B. Watson and Classical Behaviorism, ed. James T. Todd and Edward K. Morris (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 115.
- 13. Watson, Psychology from the Standpoint of a Behaviorist, 3.
- See Robert D. Nye, Three Psychologies: Perspectives from Freud, Skinner, and Rogers (Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1992).
- 15. Logue, Watson's Behaviorist's Manifesto, 114.
- 16. Logue, Watson's Behaviorist's Manifesto, 111.
- 17. See Skinner, About Behaviorism, 16-17.
- See Andrew R. Fuller, Psychology and Religion: Eight Points of View (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994), 39.
- See Steven Lars Nielsen and Albert Ellis, "A Discussion with Albert Ellis: Reason, Emotion and Religion," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 13, no. 4 (1994): 327–41.
- See Peter Fenwick, "The Neurophysiology of Religious Experience," in Psychosis and Spirituality: Exploring the New Frontier, ed. Isabel Clark (London: Whurr Publishers, 2001), 15.
- See Daniel Peterson, "The Protean Joseph Smith," www.fairlds.org/ pubs/conf/2002PetD.html (accessed October 25, 2004).
- See R. N. Williams, "Restoration and the 'Turning of Things Upside Down': What Is Required of an LDS Perspective," AMCAP Journal 23, no. 1 (1998): 1–30.
- William James in Bernard Spilka and others, The Psychology of Religion: Empirical Approach (New York: Guilford Press), 257.
- See Brian Thorne, Carl Rogers (London: Sage Publications, 2002),
 15.
- See Howard Kirschenbaum and Valerie Land Henderson, eds., Carl Rogers: Dialogues (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), 5.
- See Carl R. Rogers, "Reply to Rollo May's Letter," Journal of Humanistic Psychology 22, no. 4 (1982), 85–89.

- 27. See Donald Moss, "Carl Rogers, the Person-Centered Approach, and Experiential Therapy," in Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology: A Historical and Biographical Sourcebook (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 44.
- 28. See Carl R. Rogers, Client-Centered Therapy, Its Practice, Implications, and Theory (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), 116.
- 29. See D. Rice, "Carl Rogers: Client, Heal Thyself," in Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology: A Historical and Biographical Sourcebook, ed. Donald Moss (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 385-87.
- 30. See Carl R. Rogers, A Way of Being (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), 154.
- 31. Carl R. Rogers in Edwin E. Gantt, "Hedonism, Suffering, and Redemption: The Challenge of a Christian Psychotherapy," BYU Studies 42, no. 2 (2003): 91-114.
- 32. See Howard H. Kendler, Amoral Thoughts About Morality: The Intersection of Science, Psychology, and Ethics (Springfield, IL: C. C. Thomas, 2000), 30.
- 33. Kendler, Amoral Thoughts, 30.
- 34. See L. L. Martin, K. W. Campbell, and C. D. Henry, "The Roar of Awakening: Mortality Acknowledgment as a Call to Authentic Living," in Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology, ed. Jeff Greenberg, Sander L. Koole, and Tom Pyszcynski (New York: Guilford Press, 2004), 432.
- 35. Joseph Wolpe in Joseph F. Rychlak, A Philosophy of Science for Personality Theory (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publication Company, 1981), 187.
- 36. See Williams, "Restoration," 13.