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### Of Knowledge: To the Point of Moral Certainty

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# Of Knowledge: To the Point of Moral Certainty

Say first, of God above, or Man below,  
〈How〉 [What] can we reason, but from what we know?<sup>1</sup>

***Great questions proposed.*** The field of our knowledge is now sketched out before us: Knowledge of ourselves; of other selfs; in a limited way also knowledge of things of the earth, air and sea; knowledge of the sun and moon; knowledge of the solar system, as to the number of planets at least, something of their size and their distance from the sun and from each other, something we know in outline of the sidereal system, its extent, its immensity, and its orderliness (the most striking thing about it as we ***shall see in the chapter following this***, from the quoted comments of Professor Moulton, is its orderliness). And now we have reached the point where something else must be learned, something else we need to know in order to attain our purpose in this writing, but which can only be known with approximate certainty, and only to be found out by the process of ratiocination, from that which we most definitely know to what we may know only approximately, and yet know, as I think, up to the point of moral certainty.<sup>a</sup> Let us put the process of reasoning from what we know to the probability of what is not absolutely known to the test.

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<sup>1</sup>Pope, *Essay on Man*, epistle 1, sect. 1, lines 17-18.

<sup>a</sup>The *Oxford English Dictionary*, under its definition of “moral,” gives meanings for evidentiary and “moral certainty” as follows:

Used to designate that kind of probable evidence that rests on a knowledge of the general tendencies of human nature, or of the character of particular individuals or classes of men; often in looser use, applied to all evidence which is merely probable and not demonstrative. *Moral certainty*: a practical certainty resulting from moral evidence; a degree of probability so great as to admit of no reasonable doubt; also,

We have ascertained from our quotations from various authorities upon astronomy that it is possible and even probable that the suns which make up our galaxy—our universe—have circling about them groups of opaque worlds, even as our sun has ~~eight~~ **nine** such worlds moving about him in their respective orbits. But is it true that each of these suns of the sidereal system, or even a considerable number of them, has a like group of planets to which it is the center of gravitation, and from which these planets receive light and warmth and vital force, resulting in life such as we know it on our own earth? The answer must necessarily be that this is not definitely known, and hence scientists in astronomy speak with caution, and only say that it may possibly be so. It may even be probable. But science can speak with no positive assurance on this subject, because really scientists do not know.

*Are the “fixed stars” centers of solar systems?* The distance, as we have seen, lying between our earth and its sun and the nearest fixed star is so great that if there are planets moving about Alpha Centauri, then the borrowed light in which they shine is so dim, and the planets themselves so small, that they are lost to vision by us who are inhabiting the earth, even though we use our mightiest telescopes in our efforts to discover them. We are thus barred by these immense distances, and the but faintly illuminated opaque worlds, that we have no real knowledge as to their existence. But this we do know, namely, that our own sun, in constitution like the other suns of the stellar universe, has a group of opaque planets moving about him in great regularity and order; and reasoning from this knowledge it would seem at least not improbable that a similar condition obtains with reference to other suns so like ~~him~~ **ours** in every other way. Also the thought obtrudes itself into the mind, why should it be thought that our sun—much smaller and therefore less powerful than other and mightier suns—is the only one around which groups of opaque planets revolve? And when we think of the great galaxy making up the stellar universe ~~as being so immense~~, we are naturally led to the reflection, what a waste of energy there must be in the existence of these suns of the

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something which is morally certain. . . . The currency of the terms *certitudo* [certainty], *evidentia moralis* [moral evidence] appears to be due to the Cartesian logicians of the 17th c.

The *OED* cites as an example the following definition from Isaac Watts’s *Logic* 2.2§9 (1725): “In Matters of Faith, an exceeding great Probability is called a moral Certainty.” Roberts appears to be using the term in its technical sense as used in logic.

universe if only one out of the hundreds of millions of them is to have an attendant group of worlds!

*Is there life on other worlds than our own?* There remains also still another, and even we may say, a more important question, which I shall confine for the moment to the planets of our own solar system, viz.: is there life upon these planets, vegetable, and animal, and human? To that question man must answer that he does not know. But this he knows, that his own earth sustains life, vegetable and animal and human; and reasoning from what he knows as to conditions upon his own earth, it would at least seem that similar conditions might obtain upon other planets of his world system; if not, then again the thought, what a waste of energy, for without life upon these worlds how vain is their existence! And we might well ask to what purpose do they exist if they are without life? Or, even if they bring forth life, vegetable and animal life, and not human life, or something akin to it, the same question would be pertinent. Nothing can be clearer than that our own earth would become meaningless if human life were not here. Human life is unquestionably the crowning fact and glory of our earth, and such sentient and intelligent life as humans possess, or some intelligent life forms superior to humans, would *alone* seem to justify the existence of these worlds.

*Is life in other worlds climaxed with the equivalent of human life?* What good purpose would be served by such worlds—the worlds of all the universe, unless, as in the case of our own earth, the life upon them—if such exists—is not climaxed by sentient and intelligent life, such as we know on our earth, or something equivalent or superior to it? Or some form of life which, through some sort of development, might be capable of becoming equal to or superior to human life?

*Are the earth and all things in it made for man?* Nothing can be clearer to intelligence than that our earth, however rich it might be in vegetable and animal life, would be without purpose worthwhile with human life absent from it. To become thoroughly aware of the truth of this statement, it is only necessary to suppose the human race, with all it has produced, banished from the earth. Let all things else remain: the earth's place in the solar system and its form; let the islands and the continents be as they are now; also the seas, the majestic mountain ranges, the imperial valleys, the extensive plains; let these be clothed with the richest verdure, with the most fragrant flowers in

profusion, with shrubbery and forests abounding; let all this be bathed in the glory of the sunlight. Let all forms of animal life abound in all the seas and the rivers, and in the air and on the earth, in the mountains and the plains, and in the woods; let the birds fly through the air and fill the silence with their songs; let the seasons follow each other in their regular course, refreshing spring and glowing summer; let the grains and the fruits come to ripeness in autumn; let the forests put forth the glory of their foliage in the spring-tide and in summer, and then in the autumn fall to enrich the soil whence they grew, only to be followed by more foliage the next summer, which shall fall upon the ground in the succeeding autumn, and rot and enrich the soil in which it grew! Let the moon come out and look upon the scene of the earth in its glory night after night, age after age. Let the stars from their immense distances look down upon it night after night, and age after age, and see all these things, save only man on the earth; and with him absent, what would all this earth with its wealth of beauty and glory, with its vegetable and animal life, mean?

What would it matter that enormous coal fields underlie the earth's surface with their vast stored up energy drawn from the sunlight of past ages? There would be no man on the earth to let loose that energy for useful production—man is not here! What would it matter that other parts of the earth's interior hold vast oil reservoirs, another kind of stored up energy? It would be there with no purpose with man absent from the earth. What matter the stores of iron, of granite, and marble, of clay for bricks—man the builder is not in the earth, and with the builder absent all these would be unused and worthless. What avails the store of faultless Venetian marble, with man the sculptor not here to fashion it into all but a living, breathing statuary? What does it matter that there are pigments of endless variety in the earth? Man the artist is not here to blend them on the canvas into a landscape of dreamy beauty, or paint a portrait true to life of the great, and thus perpetuate the memory of noble persons and great deeds?

What boots it if the everlasting hills are seamed with silver, or that the quartz strata, or the river sands, hold the precious gold stores? Man is not here to fashion them into objects of beauty or utility. What matters the existence of precious stones deep-buried in the selected places of the earth, or hidden in the "midnight caves of ocean"—no queens or princesses or other women of grace and beauty are on earth for whom they will be fitting adornments for enhancement of comeliness, there is no beauty—woman absent—that they can fittingly adorn!

Who of all the creatures inhabiting the earth—man absent—would appreciate the earth and the things associated with it? Who would love

dawn or passing evening? Who would contemplate that “inverted bowl we call the sky,” with all its star-glory? Who would love the flowers, or the song of birds? Who would uplift the face to think of God? Man is the only erect and upward-looking being in earth life. Who would desire immortality, or long for higher things than just bare existence, brutish life? Contemplate the earth with man absent from it: how stale, flat, unprofitable, and meaningless it all would be! And as it would be with our earth and the group of planets of which it is but one—so would it be with all these billions of suns with their attendant groups of planets, if tenantless by intelligent beings who would be equal to, if not superior to, human earth inhabitants! If tenantless by such beings, or at least beings capable of rising to such excellence, and to higher stages of development, they might as well sink into the oblivion of non-existence, as to be, and not to be the habitat of intelligent, progressive beings—intelligences!

***What is the trend of authority on the inhabitancy of other worlds?*** So impressive is the likelihood of the inhabitancy of other worlds than our own, however, that, as we have already seen in the excerpts from the lecture of Professor Moulton, quoted in chapters 5 and 6, that he holds that about half of the billion stars of our galaxy, being in size and constitution and temperature essentially similar to our own sun—he holds that “it is not improbable, it is in fact probable, that a majority of them have planets ~~circulating~~ **circling** about them as our earth revolves about the sun.” “It may be,” he continues, “that a fraction of them, perhaps in all hundreds of millions, are in a condition comparable to that of the earth, and that they support life!”

Some years ago the celebrated English astronomer Sir Robert Ball,<sup>b</sup> in the *American Press* (September 30, 1894), in dealing with the subject “Possibility of Life on Other Worlds,” and reviewing the subject at that time and the state of the question from a scientific standpoint, said: “No reasonable person will, I think, doubt that the tendency of modern research has been in favor of the supposition that there may be life on some of the other globes.”<sup>2</sup> Later, however, Sir Robert Ball grew bolder and in a subsequent statement to the above said:

Granting the, to us, impossible hypothesis that the final cause of the universe is “accident,” the fortuitous concourse of self-existent atoms, still the “accident,” which produced thinking beings upon this little

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<sup>b</sup>Sir Robert Stawell Ball (1840–1913) was an Irish astronomer and mathematician whose many books and lectures popularized astronomy, but his greatest work was in mathematics.

<sup>2</sup>Ball, “Possibility of Life on Other Worlds,” 156.

and inferior world ⟨of ours⟩, must have frequently repeated itself; while if, as we hold, there is a sentient Creator it is difficult to believe, without a revelation to that effect, that he has wasted such glorious creative powers upon mere masses of insensible matter. God can not love gases. The probability, at least, is that there are millions of worlds (for after all what the sensitized paper sees must be an infinitesimal fraction of the whole) occupied by sentient beings.<sup>3</sup>

Still later, August 27, 1910, the Associated Press announced that in a lecture before the Popular Educational Society, known also as the “Materialistic Association,” Professor T. J. J. See is represented as saying, that in the completion of his researches in *Cosmic Evolution* to which he had devoted ten years, ~~stated as~~ his conviction *was* “that the planets revolving about the fixed stars are inhabited by some kind of intelligent beings.”<sup>4</sup> He also cited an address delivered at Philadelphia in 1897 by Professor Newcomb,<sup>c</sup> in which similar views were held and said that the proof is much more complete now—1910—the time of Professor See’s declaration—than at that time—1897. “Life flourishing on the earth and believed to exist in Mars and Venus,” continued Professor See, “is but a drop in the Pacific Ocean as compared to that flourishing on the thousands of billions of habitable worlds now definitely proved to revolve about the fixed stars with the habitability of these extensive worlds.”<sup>5</sup>

Sustained by such authority, I think we may proceed in future discussions of this great theme—the habitancy of other worlds than our own—upon the assumption that this inhabitancy may be fairly well assured. It should also be observed that this line of reasoning, limited in the foregoing to the planets of the solar system, can be just as consistently applied to the sidereal universe and the attendant group of planets that may be circling their suns, only it is with increasing emphasis that we are forced to the thought of wastefulness by misuse of matter and energy, if the millions of suns have no attendant worlds and the worlds no sentient, intelligent life upon them.

~~*The age of worlds.*~~ ***Are there worlds and world systems older than our own?*** Again we question in order to form the basis of more

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<sup>3</sup>Ball [source not found].

<sup>4</sup>See *Cosmic Evolution* [source not found].

<sup>c</sup>Simon Newcomb (1835-1909), an astronomer, standardized the observation methods of the United States Naval Observatory. His planetary theories and computation of astronomical constants are still in official use today or have been replaced only recently.

<sup>5</sup>See *Cosmic Evolution* [source not found].

reasoning. Are any of the suns of the sidereal system and their supposed attendant systems of worlds older than our own sun and its system of worlds? Again we can not speak with positive knowledge, but we do know that things in our own earth are younger and older than other things, and it is not unreasonable to conclude from the knowledge that this fact imparts to us, that some of these greater suns of the universe and their probable group of planets may be many millions of years older than our own.

Again referring to our earth experience, we know that age sometimes affects, and favorably, development; that there is cumulative knowledge and cumulative experience which results in higher excellencies, and reasoning from this truth, in larger and more desirable developments both as to individuals and states of civilizations. **Reasoning** from what we know, may it not be that in some of the older suns of our galaxy and their attendant worlds, there may be superior conditions existing in such worlds because of the longer time element which has led to larger knowledge and to deeper wisdom, resulting in more exalted states of intellectual life and of civilization, than those which are known to us on our earth? And there ~~has~~ **may have** been developed also higher and mightier intelligences than any that have been developed on our ~~own~~ earth. If such higher intelligences do exist in other worlds, ~~and higher states of civilization,~~ may we not enter upon the same line of ~~questioning and~~ reasoning from what we know, apply ~~what~~ **the principle** we have been following ~~in relation~~ to the social and sympathetic and moral qualities as connected with these higher intelligences?

This we know in respect of the inhabitants of our own world, that higher intellectual life and higher states of civilization produced exalted moral feelings, resulting in higher states of righteousness and love of truth and sympathy for fellow men, leading to desire for the uplift of those less highly developed, and thus is produced among our own earth-people a desire to restrain the strong and vicious by laws and group agencies under forms of governments, and to uplift and better the conditions of the lowly and undeveloped peoples. This is manifested in the missionary work that Christian people, especially, undertake in uplifting the undeveloped peoples of our world. Large sums of money and noble lives are devoted to, and sometimes sacrificed in, the reclamation of what are called the heathen tribes and races of our earth's population. Are such qualities as these characteristic of the highly developed intelligences of other worlds? And may they be moved by sympathy arising from the love of kindred inhabitants of other worlds to seek a similar uplifting, perhaps even redemption, of other-world



inhabitants they esteem less fortunate than themselves, less highly developed yet capable of improvement? And may it not be that their highly developed knowledge of the *means of* transition through space have led to interplanetary, ~~inter-world-system communication and~~ visitations that they may ~~be able to~~ carry on large ~~interplanetary, inter-world-system~~ missionary and social service work throughout all this vast universe we have been contemplating?

*What of the altruism of other-world inhabitants?* Do these higher intelligences of the stellar universe and planetary systems have so developed in themselves the quality of love that makes it possible to think of them as being willing to sacrifice themselves—to empty themselves in sacrifice to bring to pass the welfare of others whom they may esteem *to be* the undeveloped intelligences of the universe? And may they not be capable of giving the last full measure of sacrifice to bring to pass the higher development of the “lowly” when no other means of uplift can be serviceable? Is the great truth operative among these untold millions of intelligences that greater love hath no intelligence for another than this, that he would give his life in the service of kindred intelligences when no other means of helpfulness is possible?<sup>d</sup> Is it possible that there exist throughout all these worlds conceived of in this chapter—is it possible that there are races of intelligences kindred to our own, and are they bound together by mutual ties of sympathy and interests, born of love, and begetting a sense of universal brotherhood? And may there be, when the way is found, some psychic means, and perhaps some physical means, of interplanetary and inter-solar system method of communication among all these worlds and world-systems, by which they may impart—in the case of some of these worlds, knowledge of their needs; and in the case of other worlds of higher development, ability to dispatch the helpfulness necessary to achieve the uplift desired?

Again the questions asked with reference to these high things must be answered with the statement that we do not know, with absolute knowledge of human origin—by man’s wisdom—that these worlds are inhabited by such intelligences. But this we ~~do~~ know, viz: that our own earth is peopled with sentient intelligences, who, whatever may be their limitations and shortcomings, are nevertheless capable of attaining unto, and have attained unto, very high things in intellectual, moral, and spiritual life, and deep sympathies born of life, which lead them to

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<sup>d</sup>Roberts paraphrases John 15:13: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” This passage serves to identify the “higher intelligences” with Jesus Christ.

restrain the vicious by wholesome community laws, and raise the lowly by deeds of kindly helpfulness; and reasoning from that knowledge, it is not difficult to rise to the conception that ~~in~~ other worlds and world systems do sustain multifarious life forms including beings akin to our human race, and that in some cases they may be far advanced beyond our earth inhabitants in physical perfections (perhaps have learned how to become immortal!), in moral virtues, and in spiritual exaltations; and reasoning from what we know, from our own earth and its inhabitants, such existing populations for the universe of worlds seem not outside the realms of likelihood. And if it be not so!—then again that reflection: what a waste of force and matter in the existence of all these worlds and world systems if they are tenantless by intelligences! To what purpose do they exist? To think of such a universe as we have contemplated in these pages as tenantless by sentient intelligences, except for the inhabitancy of our earth, violates all reason, and makes hesitancy in affirming a positive conclusion about it insufferable pedantry.

*The voice of revelation on the habitancy of other worlds.* Here I cannot refrain from adding the voice of revelation, the “more sure word of prophecy” (2 Pet. 1:19) to these tentative admissions of scientists, their more or less weak “probabilities,” “possibilities,” and their tentative “perhapses” in relation to the habitancy of other worlds and world systems than our own. The Prophet of the New Dispensation brought forth and developed more or less this “sure word of prophecy” upon the subject in the Mosaic fragment—book of Moses, chapter 1. It is written as part of the vision of Moses there described, that “he beheld many lands; and each land was called earth, and there were inhabitants on the face thereof” (Moses 1:29). Then Moses is represented as saying as he talked with his Lord face to face:

Tell me, I pray thee, why these things are so, and by what thou madest them? . . . And the Lord God said unto Moses: For mine own purpose have I made these things. Here is wisdom and it remaineth in me. . . . And worlds without number have I created; and I also created them for mine own purpose; and by the Son I created them, which is mine Only Begotten. And the first man of all men have I called Adam, which is many. (Moses 1:30–34)

From the last statement it appears that Adam is a generic name, that there are many Adams carrying the significance perhaps of being first placed on the creations of God. “And the Lord God spake unto Moses, saying: The heavens, they are many, and they cannot be numbered unto man; but they are numbered unto me, for they are mine” (Moses 1:37).

The whole **Mosaic** fragment seems to take for granted the habitancy by sentient intelligent beings of the same race with men and divine beings.

The Abrahamic fragment—book of Abraham—seems even more explicit with reference to the habitancy of other worlds. Here the Lord reveals to Abraham, by Urim and Thummim, the great creations of the space depths: “I saw the stars, that they were very great, and that one of them was nearest unto the throne of God; and there were many great ones which were near unto it; And the Lord said unto me: These are the governing ones” (Abr. 3:2-3). As he proceeds with the description of these creations, it seems always taken for granted that they were inhabited. Addressing Abraham, the Lord says of these creations:

I dwell in the midst of them all; I now, therefore, have come down unto thee to *<deliver>* [declare] unto thee the works which my hands have made, wherein my wisdom excelleth them all, for I rule in the heavens above, and in the earth beneath, in all wisdom and prudence, over all the intelligences thine eyes have seen from the beginning. (Abr. 3:21)

Then follows the description of the preexistent intelligences and spirits which the Lord revealed to Abraham.

In chapter 4 of this fragment comes the account of the creation of the earth, and throughout that chapter the various acts of creation are represented as the accomplishment of “the Gods,” the title always used in the plural. The chapter opens as follows:

Then the Lord said: Let us go down. And they went down at the beginning, and they, that is the Gods, organized and formed the heavens and the earth. . . . And the Spirit of the Gods was brooding upon the face of the waters. And they (the Gods) said: Let there be light; and there was light. (Abr. 4:1-3)

And so on throughout all the creative acts. And the same plural is used in the fifth chapter. And what were these creative Intelligences designated as “the Gods,” but the higher intelligences of other and older world systems engaging in the creation of this earth to which our revelations **for the most part** are limited.

In the revelation received by the Prophet in behalf of the Church in December 1832, and called by him, because of its gracious spirit, the Olive Leaf, and wonderful for the enlightening power of it, there he directly teaches, by this revelation from God, the habitancy of other worlds (D&C 88). For instance, in verses 37-39 of the revelation he says:

There are many kingdoms; for there is no space in the which there is no kingdom; and there is no kingdom in which there is no space,

either a greater or a lesser kingdom. And [un]to every kingdom is given a law. . . . All beings who abide not in those conditions are not justified. (D&C 88:37-39)

The intimation being that this infinity of kingdoms is inhabited by intelligences. In verse 45 our Prophet says:

The earth rolls upon her wings, and the sun giveth his light by day, and the moon giveth her light by night, and the stars also give their light, as they roll upon their wings in their glory, in the midst of the power of God. Unto what shall I liken these kingdoms, that ye may understand? . . . Behold, I will liken these kingdoms unto a man having a field, and he sent forth his servants into the field to dig in the field. And he said unto the first: Go ye and labor in the field, and in the first hour I will come unto you, and ye shall behold the joy of my countenance. And he said unto the second: Go ye also into the field, and in the second hour I will visit you with the joy of my countenance. And also unto the third, saying: I will visit you; And unto the fourth, and so on unto the twelfth. And the lord of the field went unto the first in the first hour, and tarried with him all that hour, and he was made glad with the light of the countenance of his lord. And then he withdrew from the first that he might visit the second also, and the third, and the fourth, and so on unto the twelfth. And thus they all received the light of the countenance of their lord, every man in his hour, and in his time, and in his season; . . . Every man in his own order, until his hour was finished, even according as his lord had commanded him, that his lord might be glorified in him, and he in his lord, that they all might be glorified. Therefore, unto this parable I will liken all these kingdoms, *and the inhabitants thereof*—every kingdom in its hour, and in its time, and in its season, even according to the decree which God hath made. (D&C 88:45-46, 51-58, 60-61; emphasis added by hand)<sup>c</sup>

Be it remembered here that these kingdoms and the inhabitants thereof are the kingdoms of the space depths in the universe, all the worlds, and the world systems, and by the word of God they have their inhabitants.

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<sup>c</sup>Roberts capitalized the word “Lord” in verse 58.

Further references recommended by Roberts for this lesson: Roberts, *New Witnesses for God*; Moses; Abr. 3-5; D&C 130:4-8. On the themes of chapters 9, 10, and 12, see pages 642-44 below.