

"What exactly is the will? Is it determination, like the determination of your grandson Lucio to have a motorcycle?"

"No," don Juan said softly and giggled. "That's not will. Lucio only indulges. Will is something else, something very clear and powerful which can direct our acts. Will is something a man uses, for instances, to win a battle which he, by all calculations, should lose."

"Then will must be what we call courage," I said.

"No. Courage is something else...Will, on the other hand, has to do with astonishing feats that defy common sense."

-A SEPARATE REALITY
(Castaneda 1973:146)

14. FREE AGENCY - Part 1¹

¹The second Part is Chapter 48 FREE AGENCY: FACT OR FALLACY in Section VI POST-RESURRECTION STATE of this work. It takes up issues related to free agency not addressed in this chapter which deals primarily with pre-existence issues.

CHAPTER CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	257
LINCOLN AND AGENCY	257
AGENCY IN THE PE	259
DRAGON AND OLD SERPENT	261
FOURTH ARTICLE OF FAITH	263
FREE AGENCY AND PAIN	264
FREE AGENCY AND TALENTS	265
AGENCY AND 3-DIMENSIONAL CHOICES	266
CONCLUSION	267

INTRODUCTION:

We have alluded frequently to the matter of free agency above. Indeed, two of the four principles which constitute the basic model here involve agency². We need to elaborate a bit more on it. When we use the term "free agency" in everyday discourse, we feel familiar and comfortable with the term, as if we understood what it is. We use it easily, thinking we know what it is. However, we claim here that mortals really know what free agency is. After we describe how it is manifested, e.g. through the process of making a selection from a set of choices, exercising volition, acting with intention, etc., we have basically exhausted our knowledge of what agency is. It is, indeed, manifested in those ways, but they are not definitions of agency, rather are merely descriptions of the consequences, or manner, or effects of its use.

That is equivalent to describing the symptoms of a disease and claiming that such a description is a definition or statement of the etiology or underlying pathology. For example, one can describe the dermatological manifestations of lupus erythematosus, eg. the lupus butterfly across the checks and forehead, etc., But that is not a description of the underlying nature of the disease. It is a highly complex collagen-vascular disease apparently involving auto-immune responses of the organism, possible viral insult, etc. Lists of symptoms are only that. In the same vein, saying that 'choice making' as a definition of agency is incorrect:

Choice making is a manifestation of agency, but it is not a definition of the underlying characteristic or quality of our spirits we term free agency.

We will look further to see if we can come up with a better definition of free agency.

LINCOLN AND AGENCY:

So: what is agency? We don't know, in truth, in spite of our comfort in exercising it every waking moment³. But we have a belief that we want to explain now, that is best explained by using an analogy. Go back to January 1, 1863 and find Abraham Lincoln. On that date, he issued the "Emancipation Proclamation", one of the

² See 5. UNIFIED THEORY OF THE POS for a review of those propositions.

³ This issue of free agency usage is fascinating when considering dreams. In Chapter 24. BRAIN ANATOMY AND PHYSIOLOGY we address this issue in more detail, but will foreshadow that discussion briefly. Phrase the issue as a question:

when we dream, are we exercising 'free agency'?

If we are, there is one set of consequences, and if not, then obviously there is a different set. This is not a trivial matter, if voluntarily thinking is the same as doing, as noted by the Christ in the NT.

pivotal documents in the contemporaneous Slavery question. The paragraph from that document that is relevant here is:

"And, by virtue of the power and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated states and parts of states are, and henceforward shall be, free: and that the executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons."

This document obviously played a major role in the national discussion about slavery, and the outcome of the Civil War. But its relevance to the present discussion involves the matter of being "free".

In common parlance, it is stated that Lincoln "gave" the slaves their freedom. However, we doubt that anyone who has thought much about this, really believes that, in a literal sense, Lincoln conferred free agency to them. Granted, slaves were externally limited in what they were allowed to do, but while that was the case, their minds and the agency residing therein were nonetheless not limited. For obvious reasons, self-preservation was a major concern of individuals in captivity, so prudence prevented them from exercising that agency in a way that would incur wrath of the owners.

But at any time, any slave could choose to disobey whatever strictures had been imposed on him. They could think, in their mind, any thoughts they wished to think. No one could prevent that. True, cruel penalties may have been imposed on them after they had exercised their agency in seeking their freedom, or otherwise disobeying the owner's orders. But the thought processes of the individual were not actually limited.⁴ In this sense, slaves' mental freedom was not fettered. So Lincoln did not "give" slaves their freedom or agency, although he did grant the legal status of "freedom from slavehood" to them, thereby setting legal precedents that we are still dealing with today in the area of race relations.

We claim here that in a comparable fashion, the Father did not actually bestow free agency on our spirits, any more than Lincoln "gave" slaves their agency when he took steps to remove them from the legal conditions of slavehood. It is believed here, as alluded to above, that agency is an innate characteristic of spirits who are formed from intelligence. It is a sophisticated version of the quality or trait of blind obedience, which we believe is inherent in intelligence. We claim that the birth-process and ordinances transformed the blind-obedience quality of intelligence, into the

⁴ Obviously, it was likely that various conditions that created tremendous fear caused individuals to basically give up their freedom of thought, in which case they would appear to have no will. However, we suggest that agency remained in their minds in spite of its disease or disuse.

sophisticated, god-like agency we hold.⁵

Another example that illustrates our perception of free agency is the process of bearing children during mortality. The bearing of mortal children is analogous, in regards to free agency, to the bearing of spirit children. Mortal parents do not "give" agency to their children, though they clearly do contribute some physical qualities and characteristics. We believe that this is essentially the same process for the Father. He did not grant us agency, rather He -and his wife?- modified the primitive version of obedience that was inherent in the unprocessed intelligence, transforming it into the remarkable thing we term free agency. This concept contradicts the general impression created by SMD about the source of agency.

However, there is a narrow sense in which we could say the Father "gave" us agency. If He is responsible for our being created or formed as spirits, then in that sense He did "give" us agency. We are assuming that the gestation/birth process for spirits was one that pre-dated Him, and was a set of priesthood ordinances with a long long history. He utilized those processes to form our spirits from intelligence.

But it is possible that He did actually have control over the gestation process itself, that He could control how the process transformed intelligence into spirits. If He was able to manipulate the process, and was able to determine whether new spirits would have full agency or not, then we do owe Him a thank you. But if He didn't have that control, then we only thank Him for making us into spirits, but don't need to acknowledge Him in a specific sense for giving us agency that was actually a byproduct of the birth process, any more than our mortal children need to thank us for their free agency.⁶

Do we know what agency is now? No. In spite of these examples about it, we still have not defined it. It is not possible for us to define it because it a characteristic of our spirits themselves. Since spirits are invisible to mortals, we cannot examine them, so we cannot determine what their attributes and qualities are. We can merely look at the manifestations of agency and wonder. But, since we are focussing here in the PE, let's look at the evidence regarding the existence of free agency there. Free agency was exercised throughout the PE, with the War Decision simply being the most famous -only documented example- of the exercise of agency there.

AGENCY IN THE PE:

The following scripture is the Abraham scripture referred to

⁵ See the next chapter, 15. CONSCIOUSNESS, for more speculation about intelligence and agency. The basic idea there is that there are degrees of agency granted to "things" and a hierarchy of spirits is proposed.

⁶ Do I sound ungrateful? I'm not.

often in this work:⁷

"Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones.

And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them and he said: These I will make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good; and he said unto me: Abraham, thou art one of them; thou wast chosen before thou wast born."

(Abraham 3:22-3)

These verses are commonly used in two ways in LDS discussions. First, they are used in some contexts to demonstrate that Abraham had been selected during the PE to be a leader. He was identified, based on his qualities, as one worthy to be a leader, and SMD teaches that he was being called in this convocation to be the Father of Israel because of his excellence.⁸ Second, this same passage is used to demonstrate that the process of foreordination is a real one, that it occurred in the PE, that the Father controlled the process, etc.

They can probably used in another dozen ways, but the meaning we wish to bring out here is based on the business of being "noble and great ones," and "they were good". This issue has already been raised above, but let's re-focus on it by this question:

Just how did these spirits, and Abraham in particular, manage to demonstrate qualities that the Lord would term "noble, great and good"?⁹

There are various answers to the question, depending on one's perspective and emphasis at the moment. The one focussed on now revolves around the concept of 'free agency'. It seems apparent to us, within the context of the metatheoretical constraints, specifically the OPPOSITION CONDITION, that the spirits who were described in that scripture as being "noble and great" and "good" must have proven in some manner that they had stellar qualities. They must have lived in an environment where the opposing forces were impinging on them constantly.

⁷ This chapter will diverge from common practice in this work by citing a number of Christian scriptures. Suppose that's OK because we have cited quite a few Buddhist ones.

⁸ I have been studying the MISHNAH, and the more I read of it, the more I find it difficult to believe that the Jews were The Chosen People. They were down-right rotten in many case, a bunch of caviling lawyers in others. What would they have been like if they hadn't been given The Promise?

⁹ Of course, there is a philosophical question regarding what actually constitutes "noble, great and good." However, the general sense is clear, so we won't pursue further that question. We expect that the words translated as "noble, great and good" have the same meaning in the PE as they do in mortality. Fair assumption? Please say yes.

Under these conditions, they were able to exercise their agency, i.e. make choices, by being confronted with options and then selecting which ever ones they wished. If the higher-valued options were consistently selected from those available, then the individual would have earned greatness. Since Abraham and others managed to be termed "noble and great", which means they contrasted with other spirits who must not have been noble and great, the inference we draw is that there was, in fact, a lot of testing going on up there. But rather than just make this claim, let's look for a few bits of scriptural evidence that support it. Of course, the corollary to this discussion is that faith had to be operable when free agency was being exercised.¹⁰

DRAGON AND OLD SERPENT:

Let's start with the vivid images of the war as described in Revelations:

**"And there was war in Heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and the dragon fought and his angels,
And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.
And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world; he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him."**

(Revelation 12:7-9)

This most famous passage describes the two sides in the war. The sides, championed respectively by Christ¹¹ and by Satan, represented the choices which were presented to us in the Council. Michael and his followers took Christ's side, opposing Satan the serpent. The process of choosing sides was an expression of agency, or evidence of agency¹². Decision-making is only

¹⁰ I suppose one could argue that true free agency can only be exercised when there is no knowledge, in which case it is redundant to point out faith was simultaneously operable.

¹¹ See the appendix, THE ADAM/GOD THEORY, for a discussion of Adam and his role in this battle and relationship to Christ and us.

¹² Stop here just a moment to look harder at this matter. "Michael and his angels fought." Wow. What does that mean? Was Michael our Commander in Chief in that battle? Sure sounds like it. This is a startling doctrine to us. We have believed heretofore, that the Savior Himself, was our leader in the battle, and that Satan lead the other side. But if Michael was leading us, and we were described as "his angels", then Christ must have been sitting the thing out in some corner. That wouldn't seem unrealistic within the context of a political context in the USA where candidates do campaign, but where lieutenants actually marshall forces in battle on the candidates' behalf.

This business of being led in battle suggests other things. Within our experience and understanding, we take it as an indication that we must have been organized in some fashion. Were we in groups of tens, and hundreds and thousands, etc. like the Jews -and later LDS- were organized at some points in time? And how, or with what, were we armed?

We, here, are personally perplexed about whether there was actually a bellicose contest, or whether the reference to a "war" is a figurative one to capture the idea that there were two opposing philosophical sides

possible for individuals who have a fully developed and operational version of agency¹³, who are also confronted with alternative choices.¹⁴

The number of spirits who exercised free agency and selected the wrong choice is described here:

**"...and also a third part of the hosts of heaven turned
he away from me because of their agency."¹⁵
(D&C 29:36)**

Note the usage of the important word "agency" here. Agency is specifically noted as the factor that allowed or enabled this third to make their mistake. It is obvious that agency was the means whereby two thirds made the other choice.

Another scripture that explicitly refers to "good works" in the PE follows:

"And this is the manner after which they were ordained -

to the matter. If the former is the case, then Michael was the Commander-in-Charge, but if the latter is true, then he was more like a debate coach, urging and exhorting us. Whatever the case, Michael occupied a supreme position in our ranks in the PE, even before coming to earth. So, we note within the context of this particular chapter, that Michael had also demonstrated super-stellar nobleness, perhaps even exceeding Abraham. How else could he supersede Abraham by leading 15 billion of us in the war? Abraham only got to "father" the lineage of Christ and the house of Israel, a much smaller number than 15 billion. Not that really makes much difference I suppose.

We have to ask, however, whether the term 'Michael' actually referred to Father Adam. The evidence that it did is the creation story where Michael assisted Christ in putting this world together. But it also seems entirely possible that the term may be the name of a position, like captain, of leadership, which may have been occupied by different people. In the P of GP, the Lord notes that the name 'Adam' was the name given to the first man on a new world, as was Eve the name of the first woman. So perhaps this 'Michael' was the titular name given to the leader of the struggle in those PE wars fought over the Satan/Savior choice.

If Michael led the battle, however it was fought, we here begin to suspect that he was the head of the PE church which must have existed to help us blinded spirits after our departure from the presence of the Father. (See above for the discussion of this separation.) He would have been the high high priest, or some such thing, which would be why he would be the one to lead us in battle.

¹³ Which is why mentally/intellectually impaired mortals are not responsible for their actions. Lucky people. They have it made. At least for THIS phase. But in keeping with the EQUAL OPPORTUNITY CONDITION, I suspect that their testing will nonetheless be as complete as yours and mine when the metamorphosis is complete. The difference will be that most of their active testing will have been compressed into testing phases 1 and 3, instead of being spread across the 3.

The interesting question, then, is: why were they selected for impairment during mortality? Or was it accidental? (Christ addresses this briefly in the NT, but His answer is only part of the picture.) And if it is possible to be impaired in mortality, by analogy we ask whether there will be impaired spirits in post-mortality? And were there impaired spirits in the PE? We doubt the latter just because we were so fresh, but we certainly don't know. If we operated in the dark there, which we had to in order to be tested, perhaps some spirits were impaired in some fashion as a result of the birth process or the veiling, etc..

¹⁴ Things like rocks do not possess a fully developed version of agency that can detect different options and then select one of them. They don't have free agency, even though they are obedient, in a limited sense, to the priesthood.

¹⁵ Please note the two-way indeterminacy of this passage. On the one hand, it can be glossed as a reference to the Christ/Satan choice only, and this is generally the interpretation given it in SMD, based on its context. And this is doubtless the interpretation that the rest of Christianity would give it.

However, the passage allows a much broader meaning if one will look beyond the traditional interpretation. The key words are the phrase "...because of their agency." This process of "turning away" by exercising "agency" could be one that had been going on as long as spirits existed, rather than only during the war. Spirits could have been exercising their agency in many other contexts, the War choice merely being the most spectacular of the choices that we made there. We all could have created massive dossiers on ourselves through exercise of our agency. This, obviously, is the position taken here. We also claim that this 'dossier' was actually nothing more than the nature of our spirit matter, which nature was determined by our exercise of agency and/or the action of priesthood forces on us.

being called and prepared from the foundation¹⁶ of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works;..."
(emphasis added. Alma 13:3)

We maintain that "Good works" always entail the exercise of agency, the process of selecting the higher-valued options from open sets.¹⁷ If that is true, then free agency had to have been operative during the PE. We were being tested there, just as we are here on earth. Free Agency is actually the foundation for the entire plan of salvation. Free agency figures in two of the Four Principles (Chapter 5), otherwise the Plan would be powerless to affect us in any manner. For that reason, we claim that free agency is active during all three phases of our metamorphosis¹⁸.

FOURTH ARTICLE OF FAITH:

Another LDS item we would like to drag in as a curiosity is the fourth Article of Faith, which used to be part of the LDS Catechism that all children had to memorize¹⁹. It is obviously just fine the way it stands in the Pearl of Great Price²⁰, but we've often thought that if we were to re-write it, we would cast it in this form:

"We believe the first principles of the Gospel are: first, free agency, second, faith, third, obedience and fourth, repentance."

¹⁶ This particular word is a bit of a problem for us here. In one sense, it can be interpreted to refer to a "long time ago", which is the sense adopted here. But it is also possible to interpret it to refer to the absolute beginning of our PE, a time period before any of us would have been able to demonstrate the degree of willingness we would use in following the commandments given to us there. It is believed here, then, that the word "foundation" was the one closest in meaning to the original word which would have additional connotations relevant to this matter which were truncated by the choice of this word. But this problem is more a problem of translation, a deficiency of the English vocabulary, because there is probably no other word that would capture all of the nuances of the original.

¹⁷ Note the not-insignificant reference to "faith". As noted above, it is essential to worthwhile exercise of agency. Choices selected in an arena where the chooser KNOWS the implications of all options and consequences of all options, are not particularly interesting ones. But ones made when we are blindfolded, uncertain and afraid, are tremendously interesting. And worthy of enormous rewards.

¹⁸ If you do not believe that testing is done in the PE -though even the one War Decision required exercise of agency- nor in post-mortality, then you will disagree with this claim. But you will have to explain away the preceding scriptures that refer to faith and agency.

¹⁹ Having gone through that process in the early 1950's, and having benefitted so much from having memorized all thirteen articles of faith, I have a difficult time understanding why SLC decided that it was no longer going to require that of kids. Sounds like the mickey mouse SESAME STREET mentality of "Don't strain their (feeble) brains, for heaven's sakes!" foisted on us as progressive education by feeble minded educators. Growl. Now, we just require them to bandy about the cant that, "I know beyond a shadow of a doubt." Real progress, that.

²⁰ For those of you unfamiliar with it, here it is: "We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the gospel are, first, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, second, repentance, third, baptism for the remission of sin, and fourth, the laying on of hands for the gift of the holy ghost."

Free agency is fundamental to the POS and our performance in it. It is the precursor to exercise of faith, to obedience and to repentance. This rendering of the Fourth Article of Faith illustrates how we perceive the major salvation behaviors stacking up: all resting on top of free agency.

FREE AGENCY AND PAIN:

As noted in discussions above, there is a paradoxical dimension to this thing called free agency. In gospel discussions, we get warm fuzzy feelings about free agency, thinking what a wonderful thing it is, and how fortunate we are to have it. Those are true statements, and it is wonderful to have it. But it is a most difficult thing to handle.²¹ Here's another story that demonstrates this:

One of my daughters asked me if she was allowed to do a certain thing that there were well-established rules for in the home. Given the age of the person, I said, "You can do what you want." The response was, "Dad, just tell me what to do!" We talked that way for several minutes and I did not make the decision for her. She was greatly troubled because no order was given, that she had to make the decision. It would have been much easier for her if I had just told her what to do, but it was not the most healthful way to handle the matter.²² Her pain arose from having to choose between two options where she really wanted to do the one that was not "legal". She ultimately did choose the higher valued option, but the curious thing is that she had to remake this particular decision several times after that time. It would have been less painful to have just allowed the first decision to stand for the next decision. But that is idealistic theory, not pragmatic reality.

Another example of the difficulty and frustration that comes with handling free agency comes from secular life in the US. Emigrants who were raised to adulthood under the repressive rule of totalitarian or communistic governments respond variously to the

²¹ A tangential issue to raise somewhere here involves hypnosis. SMD does not address this matter officially, but within MMF there is occasionally a sense that something is wrong with doing or being hypnotized. Official declarations are absent but the young can pick up the sense of suspended judgment. If there is, in fact, a denigration of hypnosis, it may revolve around the matter of agency. In the process of being hypnotized, the individual relinquishes his/her control of him/herself. S/he gives up agency. Since the purpose of our mortality is to exercise agency, this situation would be in conflict with that assignment.

I have not heard whether individuals have been "suggested" to perform acts or do things that conflict with fundamental values, so I don't know what the outcome would be of such suggestions. Obviously, practitioners of hypnosis are not going to publish the results of such experiments.

Another obvious question about hypnosis: just how does it work and what does it do to an individual's agency? The evidence is that they give up agency, to some degree, in some manner.

The last note: was there something like hypnosis in the PE and will there be hypnosis in the post-mortal world? One suspects that the possibility of doing hypnosis may be the byproduct of the anatomy and physiology of this particular type of mortal body which serves as the input/output device for the spirit in this particular set of dimensions.

²² As a parent, it was difficult to refuse to make the decision, even though it was better for the person, because I could see the pain it caused.

freedoms found in the USA. And some of them experience great difficulty in dealing with it. In contrast to the usual picture presented by READER'S DIGEST articles, some of these people blow a fuse when faced with the riot of choices present in our political system and economic system, choices which were not present under centrally controlled societies and economies.

For example, a typical American super market has many thousands of goods to choose from, in contrast to a much smaller number of goods in the markets they are used to at home. As an example of this complexity that Americans deal with, without even thinking about it, take the meat department of any good-sized supermarket. There are not just one or two kinds of meat, but pork, sheep, veal, beef, corresponding types of organ meats, fish of many kinds, squid and shrimp, chicken, turkey, duck, processed meats like bologna, etc. Then for some of these meats, there are various cuts from which to make a choice. If you want ham, what kind, what brand, picnic, canned, large or small, sliced or not, etc.? Steak? What kind, how many, what size, etc.

Then when a person who is not used to having to make many food choices is faced with this same shocking variety of choices in every department in the store, it can become painful and unpleasant. It's that way everyday in the market. It never changes. So some of those people do not like the broad choices because they are forced into making choices that they didn't have to deal with²³. That's how freedom is. More importantly, that's how free agency works. It is not easy to live with. The emigres may even capitulate and return to the motherland where they are not overwhelmed by this untidy riot of alternatives²⁴.

FREE AGENCY AND TALENTS:

When one hears free agency discussed in gospel settings, there is typically an emphasis on the use of this agency to demonstrate or assure the liturgical purity of individuals. It is usually discussed as if the primary purpose of agency was to allow us to "obey" commandments. Doubtless, agency does allow us that opportunity, which is highly valued in this model. But there is another equally important application of agency in this model.

While this second application is tacitly recognized within SMD, it is nonetheless relegated to second place by practitioners of the faith. This application is simply the process of enlarging our talents. The Parable of the Talents is the prime example because it illustrates this application in contradistinction to the usual Christian emphasis on the liturgical, i.e. obedient, use of

²³ One wonders how much this problem figures into the nostalgia of pro-communists in post-Perestroika Russia for the old regime. Whether or not it is acknowledged, it seems likely that this exposed condition is uncomfortable for anyone accustomed to letting the State make most of the decisions.

²⁴ This comparison to communism seems apt because it, like Satan, delimits individuals' free agency. It also insists on blind faith in the party, just as a liturgical form of religion does.

agency. In this parable, different servants use their talents (a clever, though largely unintentional, pun in English) in various ways. They are rewarded according to their deeds by the Lord. The point of the parable is that mortals are required to enlarge upon their talents. Success and failure will earn blessings or punishments respectively.

Note two things about this parable. First, its emphasis is on the talents and multiplication thereof. There is no specific acknowledgment of the fact that it is only through the exercise of agency that individuals will be able to so expand these attributes. But agency is obviously part of the picture. Second, note that this parable does not refer to obedience, to theological requirements of any type. The individual's own talents are the subject of the parable. So agency is used for the benefit and development of the individual, independent of any religious requirements. This is the second dimension to the usage of agency: we use agency in all aspects of our life, not just for ecclesiastical reasons. When we enlarge our talents, we are doing that through the application of agency.

Now note how these two usages of agency, as they would probably be described in SMD, in fact reduce to a unitary principle in this model:

The exercise of our agency to obey gospel laws affects our spirit matter, just as the pursuit of interests in physics, art, law or medicine, etc. also affects our spirit matter.

Ultimately, then, the use of agency in the pursuit of anything, alters our spirit matter. That is the sole purpose of our experimental sequence, the metamorphosis condition. This is why the judgement will only address our wilful responses to our environment.

AGENCY AND 3-DIMENSIONAL CHOICES:

This, then, brings us to another familiar and lovely insight:

This three dimensional world was created in such a way that we mortals are confronted with a stunning range of choices every waking moment of our life.²⁵

Some of those choices are internal ones, invisible to other people. Other choices are presented to us by our environment. We walk into a forest and make choices about what we will look at and what we will listen to and what we will do. We sit in a classroom and we make choices about what we will respond to. We go to a bookstore to buy a book, and we are faced with a riot of choices that we

²⁵ Actually, this is an attribute of the testing environments in the PE and PM worlds. It must be the case. The Non-Equilibrium Condition requires this condition as part of the test.

quickly scroll through to get to the ones we choose to select.

The Lord set this reality up in such a way that we are faced with an over-whelming range of options. It is a merciful characteristic of our nervous system²⁶ that we cannot, usually, accommodate more than a few stimuli in our mental work area. Were we to have to consciously recognize and process all of the minutiae that is being continuously fed into our brains by our nervous system, we would blow a fuse in short order. But He did set things up so that we would have a plenitude of options to occupy ourselves with during the 30 to 100 or so years we spend down here²⁷. The exercise of our agency to select stimuli to respond to, affects our spirit matter as greatly as does its exercise in obedience to laws of the gospel.

CONCLUSION:

It is no accident that all significant events in history revolve around the exercise of free agency by individuals or groups, regardless of whether the issues involved are religious or secular. It is most significant that when judgment, the big one, occurs, the only aspects of your life on earth -or in any testing phase- that will be evaluated are the ones where **you** personally and individually exercised agency. All of those choices, and only those choices, will be the substance that is evaluated at that point. It will not matter what was done to you. It will not matter how old you were, once you were of accountable age. It will not matter whether the choices were overt or covert. They will all be evaluated. Whether you specifically chose to not do right, or whether you just neglected to do good, all results will be evaluated.²⁸

²⁶ And this characteristic is also not accidental. It was built into our central nervous system precisely to prevent us from being incapacitated with the moment-by-moment deluge of data deposited deep into our skulls. If you doubt that, just remember that EVERY ONE OF YOUR NERVES (of which there are more than one or two) is CONSTANTLY collecting data and transmitting it to your brain. Every nerve. Every split second. That's a lot of data. We are fortunately capable of tuning out the data tracks about the tightness of our belt, or the itch around our ankle from the tight socks, or the irritating hum of a CRT, or the distracting shadow cast by our head on our newspaper, etc. BUT: all of that data IS being transmitted to the brain and stored there. So the Lord did us a wonderful favor when he bestowed on us this marvelous ability to selectively filter out from our consciousness 99% of the data stream flowing to our brains.

²⁷ One can't help wondering whether one's life span is relevant in any way to the final judgment. That would probably have some relationship to our national assignments since life expectancies vary so remarkably by nation. Somehow it seems like having to put up with this miserable existence for a hundred years versus only 20 seems more laudable. Yet, one of the vineyard parables has the owner paying everyone the same wage regardless of whether they started in the morning or just before quitting time. That implies that the length of goodness is irrelevant. Just get yourself inside the vineyard before quitting time and you get full pay. So I suppose it doesn't matter. But some days, I think I'd trade my prospect of another 30 years for maybe a shorter one of 10 or 15 years. (Notice I didn't say 5 years. That's a bit too short!) Unless it somehow gets better as I age! Unfortunately, the latter is entirely up to me, isn't it.

²⁸ But how about accidentally doing good? Is an accidental good work worthy or reward? It seems like it should be on one hand, but if it wasn't done through the exercise of agency, it doesn't seem that the reward should be as great as if it were intentionally done.