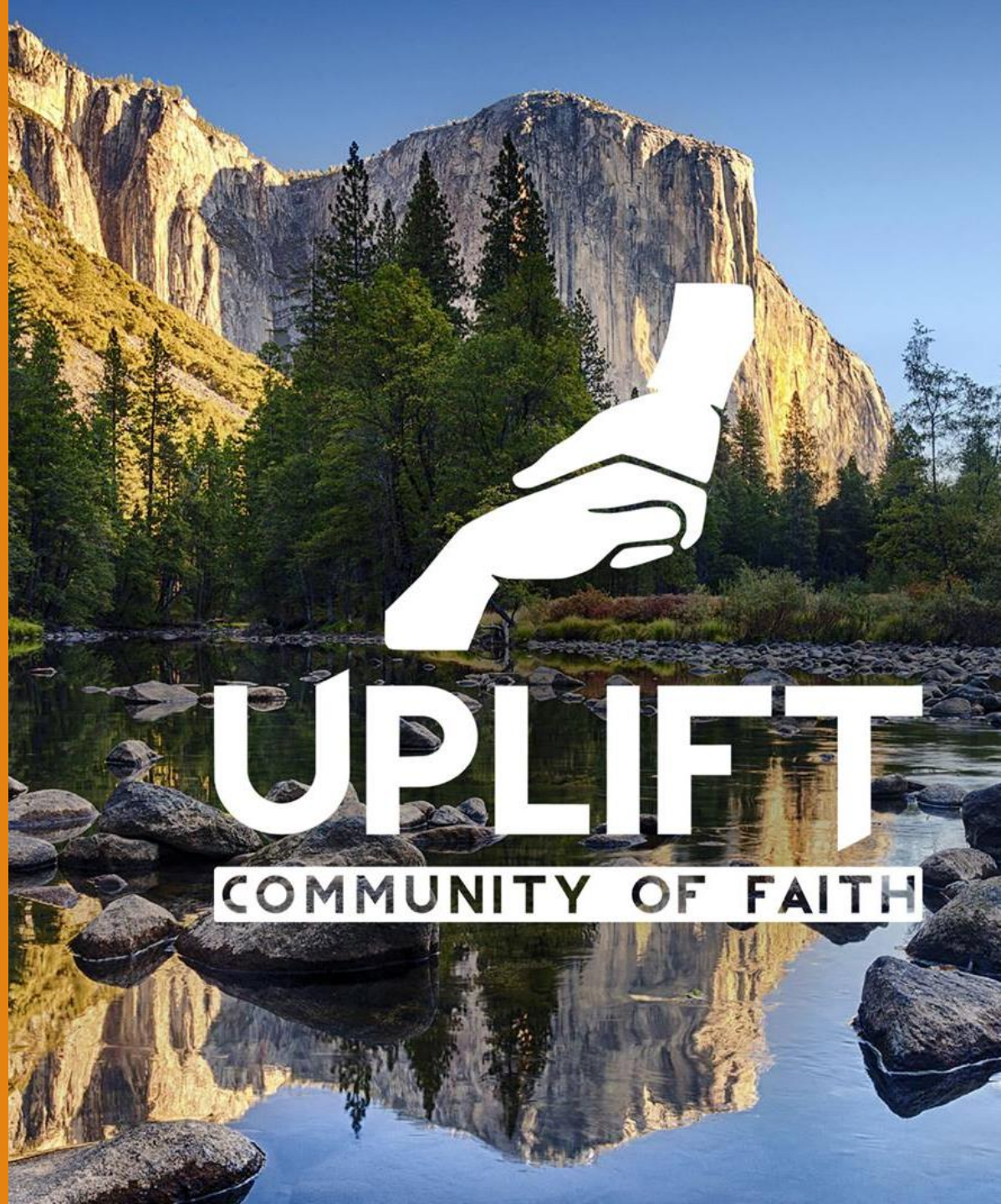


Latter-Day  
Saint  
Epistemology

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# What is Epistemology?

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The study of knowledge



Distinguishes between belief, justified belief, and knowledge



# Epistemology – Your Mind is a Courtroom

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In a courtroom,

- a judge decides which evidence is admissible and which witnesses can testify
- A jury decides how much weight to attach to each item of evidence or testimony
- A prosecutor leads the presentation of the state's case
- A defense attorney leads the presentation of the defense against the state's case

# Why Epistemology?

When it comes to seeking truth, epistemology is everything. Epistemology determines all of the following:

- Possible outcomes of our questioning
- Which voices we are willing to trust
- Which sources of information we trust

Why do some people lose their faith?

Why do some people regain their faith?

Why do some people never lose their faith?

Why do some people never regain their faith?

Why do people looking at the same evidence arrive at different conclusions?

Why are people willing to listen to some points of view, and unwilling to listen to others?

Why do people in disagreement “talk past” each other?

Why do people trust some sources of information, and distrust other sources?

***Epistemology!***



# Epistemology Examples

## Thomas Kuhn on science:

These examples point to the third and most fundamental aspect of the incommensurability of competing paradigms. In a sense that I am unable to explicate further, the proponents of competing paradigms practice their trades in different worlds. One contains constrained bodies that fall slowly, the other pendulums that repeat their motions again and again. In one, solutions are compounds, in the other mixtures. One is embedded in a flat, the other in a curved, matrix of space. Practicing in different worlds, the two groups of scientists see different things when they look from the same point in the same direction. Again, that is not to say that they can see anything they please. Both are looking at the world, and what they look at has not changed. But in some areas they see different things, and they see them in different relations one to the other. That is why a law that cannot even be demonstrated to one group of scientists may occasionally seem intuitively obvious to another. Equally, it is why, before they can hope to communicate fully, one group or the other must experience the conversion that we have been calling a paradigm shift. Just because it is a transition between incommensurables, the transition between competing paradigms cannot be made a step at a time, forced by logic and neutral experience. Like the gestalt switch, it must occur all at once (though not necessarily in an instant) or not at all.

Kuhn, Thomas S.. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: 50th Anniversary Edition (p. 149). University of Chicago Press. Kindle Edition.

# Epistemology Examples

## **Peter Van Inwagen on Critical New Testament Scholarship:**

First, “ordinary” Christians (Christians not trained in New Testament scholarship) have grounds for believing that the gospel stories are (essentially) historical— grounds independent of the claims of historical scholarship. Secondly, New Testament scholars have established nothing that tells against the thesis that ordinary Christians have grounds independent of historical studies for believing in the essential historicity of the gospel stories. Thirdly, ordinary Christians may therefore ignore any skeptical historical claims made by New Testament scholars with a clear intellectual conscience.

Quoted in Hoffmeier, James K.; Magary, Dennis R.. *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?: A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture* (p. 34). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

# Categories of Epistemic Frameworks

**Internalist epistemology** requires that all justified beliefs and knowledge be based on things that are possible to verify with the truth-seeker's own senses and mental resources.

- Observable
- Logical
- Verifiable

**Externalist epistemology** maintains that it is possible to arrive at justified beliefs with the help of things that are not verifiable to the truth-seeker.

- Witness Testimony
- External Authorities
- Trusted systems for determining truth

# Epistemology in Belief Systems

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Every belief system has its own epistemology

- Science
- Social science
- Political ideology
- Atheism
- Empiricism
- Religions

Pro Tip!

*Three ways to waste huge amounts of time:*

- 1. Tetris*
- 2. Solitaire*
- 3. Evaluating a belief system's validity using an epistemology that is foreign to that belief system*



# Epistemology as Round Table

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In your questioning, which voices will you allow at the table?



# Epistemology as Round Table

In your questioning, which voices will you allow at the table?



Logic

Strengths	Weaknesses
Allows for a high degree of confidence	Depends on accurate assumptions

# Logic Examples

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Only Toyotas carry the Toyota emblem.



*premise (true)*

This car carries the Toyota emblem.



*premise (true)*

Therefore, this car is a Toyota.

*conclusion (true)*

Toyota cars carry the Subaru emblem.



*premise (false)*

This car carries the Subaru emblem.



*premise (true)*

Therefore, this car is a Toyota.

*conclusion (false)*

# Religious Logic Examples

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God can inspire people through scripture.

*premise (true)*

This book is scripture.



*premise (true)*

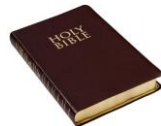
Therefore, God can inspire me through this book.

*conclusion (true)*

Scripture is always scientifically accurate.

*premise (false)*

This book is scripture.




*premise (true)*

Therefore, this entire book is scientifically accurate.

*conclusion (false)*

# Epistemology as Round Table

In your questioning, which voices will you allow at the table?



**Witness Testimony**

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Enables understanding of events that cannot be observed	Witnesses can be compromised <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Financial interest</li><li>• Mental soundness</li><li>• Problems with memory</li></ul>

# Witness Testimony

“Witness” has two dictionary definitions:

1. Someone who can answer a question from personal observation or experience
2. An evidence or proof of something



## High Credibility

- Good character/reputation
- Clear thinking (sober, sound mind)
- Bears testimony against self-interest
- Testimony is corroborated by other witnesses
- Witness willing to endure adverse consequences for testimony

## Low Credibility

- Bad character/reputation
- Muddled thinking
- Bears testimony for self-interest
- Testimony is countered by other witnesses
- Witness not willing to endure adverse consequences for testimony

# Witness Testimony

# Witness Testimony

*Restoration examples:*

## **Mary Whitmer (Related by John C. Whitmer):**

One evening, when (after having done her usual day's work in the house) [Mary Whitmer] went to the barn to milk the cows, she met a stranger carrying something on his back that looked like a knapsack. At first she was a little afraid of him, but when he spoke to her in a kind, friendly tone, and began to explain to her the nature of the work which was going on in her house, she was filled with inexpressible joy and satisfaction. He then untied his knapsack and showed her a bundle of plates, which in size and appearance corresponded with the description subsequently given by the witnesses to the Book of Mormon. This strange person turned the leaves of the book of plates over, leaf after leaf, and also showed her the engravings upon them; after which he told her to be patient and faithful in bearing her burden a little longer, promising that if she would do so, she should be blessed...

## **Emmeline B. Wells (Related by Ethel C. Lund):**

[Emmeline B. Wells] said when she got to the temple that next morning and was dressed, not in her robes but in her white dress, ... "I saw the Savior." She said, "I'm going to tell you where I saw him and when you go to the temple why always remember that that's a sacred place. I'll tell you right where it is."

Johnson, Janiece. *The Witness of Women: Firsthand Experiences and Testimonies from the Restoration* (Kindle Locations 612-618). Deseret Book Company. Kindle Edition.

# Witness Testimony

*Restoration examples:*

## **Three witnesses to the Book of Mormon:**

“...we declare with words of soberness, that an angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates, and the engravings thereon... And it is marvelous in our eyes.”

## **President Ezra Taft Benson:**

“There have been many in this dispensation who have seen Him. As one of those special witnesses so called in this day, I testify to you that He lives. He lives with a resurrected body. There is no truth or fact of which I am more assured or more confident than the truth of the literal resurrection of our Lord. (Ensign, April 1991)”

## **Elder David B. Haight:**

“I was shown a panoramic view of His earthly ministry: His baptism, His teaching, His healing the sick and lame, the mock trial, His crucifixion, His resurrection and ascension. There followed scenes of His earthly ministry to my mind in impressive detail, confirming scriptural eyewitness accounts. I was being taught, and the eyes of my understanding were opened by the Holy Spirit of God so as to behold many things. (October 1989 Conference)”

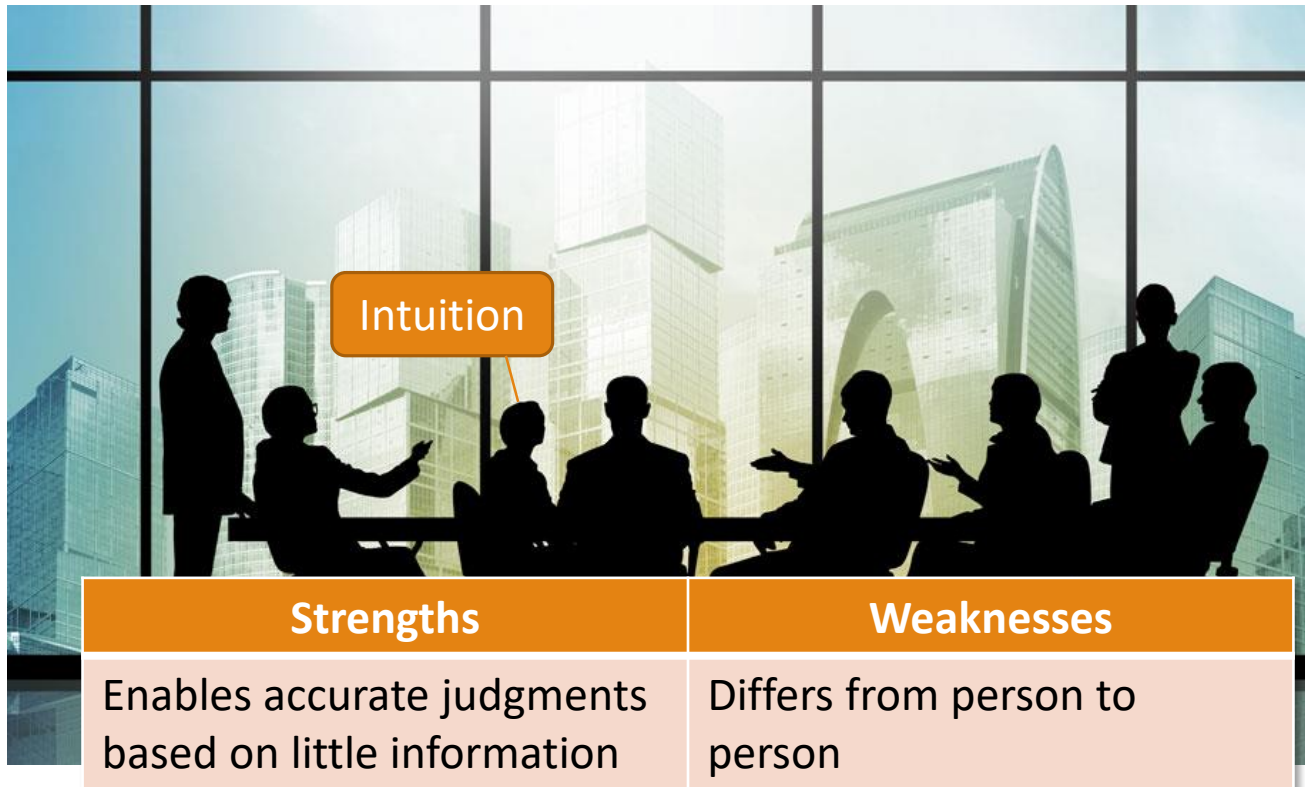
# Witness Testimony

Responses to religious witness testimony:

- Accept as true
- Reject as fabrication, misunderstanding
- Ignore
- Declare irrelevant
- Universalize (pantheism, omnism)

# Epistemology as Round Table

In your questioning, which voices will you allow at the table?




Intuition

Strengths	Weaknesses
Enables accurate judgments based on little information	Differs from person to person

# Epistemology as Round Table

In your questioning, which voices will you allow at the table?



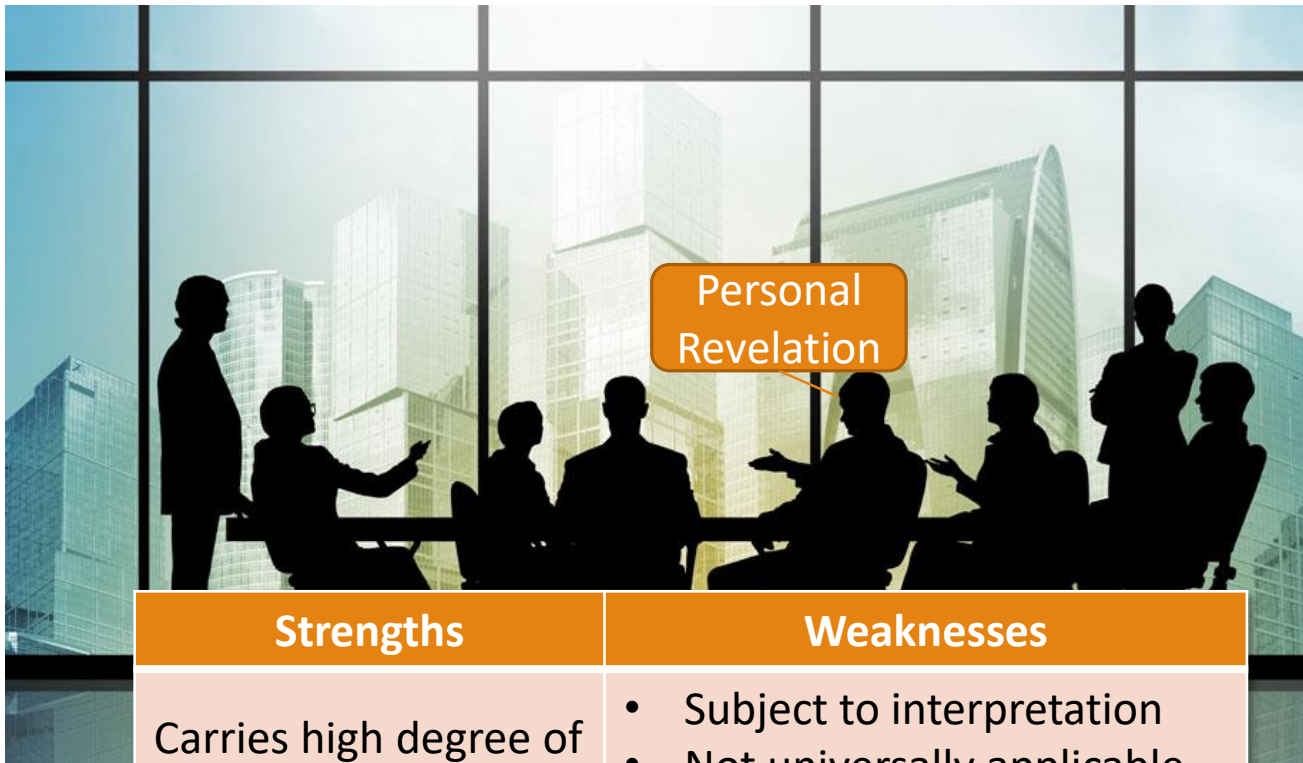
Ecclesiastical Authority

Strengths	Weaknesses
Can carry divine sanction	Affected by personality, self-interest, aptitude of the individual in authority



# Epistemology as Round Table

In your questioning, which voices will you allow at the table?



Strengths	Weaknesses
Carries high degree of confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Subject to interpretation</li><li>• Not universally applicable</li><li>• Limited in scope</li></ul>

# Epistemology as Round Table

In your questioning, which voices will you allow at the table?



Strengths	Weaknesses
Allows for decision making with low information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Subjective</li><li>• Not always an indicator of truth</li></ul>

# Epistemology as Round Table

In your questioning, which voices will you allow at the table?



Strengths	Weaknesses
Enables more informed judgments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Depends on methodology, data, accounting for biases</li><li>• Sometimes presents subjective judgments as objective</li></ul>

# Scholarship

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Scholars can bring significant expertise to bear in fields that are important to faithful inquiry:

History	Languages	Textual Analysis
Literary Analysis	Archaeology	Linguistics
Philosophy	Theology	Geography

In study of scripture, scholarship can shed light on specific questions:

- How has this text evolved over time in its transmission?
- What are other possible meanings to words and phrases?
- What is the author's original intended meaning?
- What is the historical context for this passage?

# Scholarship

Every scholar has his/her own epistemology:

- Peers whose research they find credible or not
- Assumptions about human behavior
- Ideological commitments and biases
- Adherence to particular scholarly schools of thought
- Deference to other scholarly work

# Scholarship

## Scholarly epistemology matters:

### On scholarly dating of the Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible):

It sometimes feels as if everyone has his or her own theory, and, worse, it seems that many scholars are not addressing one another's evidence, evidence that challenges their own theories... I admit that I too have sometimes missed published works, some that challenged me and some that would have supported me. On the question that we are addressing here, though, the question of when various texts were written, this state of the field has been particularly vexing. People date more and more of the Bible later and later. For every text that I have quoted from the early centuries of ancient Israel, one can find scholars who date them late. There are some who date practically everything past the time of the Babylonian empire. Forty years of research on the Hebrew language (a biblical number) has gone against their late dates. We can distinguish between the Classical Biblical Hebrew of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, on the one hand, and the Late Biblical Hebrew of Judah after the exile, on the other. The dividing line is essentially pre-exile versus post-exile Hebrew. Just as the English of Shakespeare's time is different from the English that I am writing right now, so Hebrew went through the natural development that all languages do over centuries. I have written about the challenge of getting the late-daters even to address all this evidence. If it is right, they are wrong. So one would think that they would have pounced all over it to challenge it. And one would think that they would have addressed it before they published their books and articles claiming that so many of the biblical texts were late— when those texts have been shown to be written in Classical Biblical Hebrew. It would be as if they claimed that a Valley girl wrote Hamlet. I have described sessions at international conferences in which they simply refused to discuss it. I have compared their dating of the Bible without taking Hebrew into account to someone writing about diabetes without mentioning sugar.

Friedman, Richard Elliott. The Exodus (pp. 166-167). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.



# Scholarship

## Scholarly epistemology matters:

### Epistemological challenges in historical Jesus scholarship:


Historical Jesus research is becoming something of a scholarly bad joke. There were always historians who said it could not be done because of historical problems. There were always theologians who said it should not be done because of theological objections. And there were always scholars who said the former when they meant the latter. Those, however, were negative indignities. What is happening now is rather a positive one. It is the number of competent and even eminent scholars producing pictures of Jesus at wide variance with one another...

...Even under the discipline of attempting to envision Jesus against his own most proper Jewish background, it seems we can have as many pictures as there are exegetes. Several of those works, and others that could easily be added, for example, Borg (1984) or Horsley (1987), contain elements and insights that must surely be retained in any future synthesis. But that stunning diversity is an academic embarrassment. *It is impossible to avoid the suspicion that historical Jesus research is a very safe place to do theology and call it history, to do autobiography and call it biography.*

Crossan, John Dominic. The Historical Jesus . HarperOne. Kindle Edition.

# Epistemology as Round Table

In your questioning, which voices will you allow at the table?



Experience

Strengths	Weaknesses
Enables first-person observation of cause and effect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not universally applicable</li><li>• Subject to interpretation</li></ul>

Fallacy	Meaning	Examples
The Non-Sequitur	Given that X is true, it does not follow that Y is true	____ was a prophet, so everything said by ____ is true.
The Ad Hominem	X is a bad person, therefore they cannot be trusted	President ____ lost his temper from time to time, so he could not have been a prophet.
Poisoning the Well	X is flawed in some way, therefore X cannot be trusted	Leaders of the Church were wrong about ____, therefore they cannot be trusted about anything.
No True Scotsman	X is not a good representation of their category	Real scholars adhere to ____ school of thought. Other scholars can't be taken seriously.

# Epistemology and Logical Fallacies

# The Power of Inference

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To infer is to arrive at a conclusion based on some evidence. For example, if I am driving home and I see water on the road in my neighborhood, I can reasonably infer that it recently rained there

- Other explanations are possible, such as a broken water pipe, a spill from a water truck, etc.

*Inference is important in matters of faith. Example: a prospective missionary in the U.S. has a dream that she is proselyting in Madagascar and the next day she receives her mission call to Madagascar. She can reasonably infer that her mission call was inspired of God.*

# Deconstruction

To deconstruct is to take something apart. Deconstructing belief consists of some combination of the following:

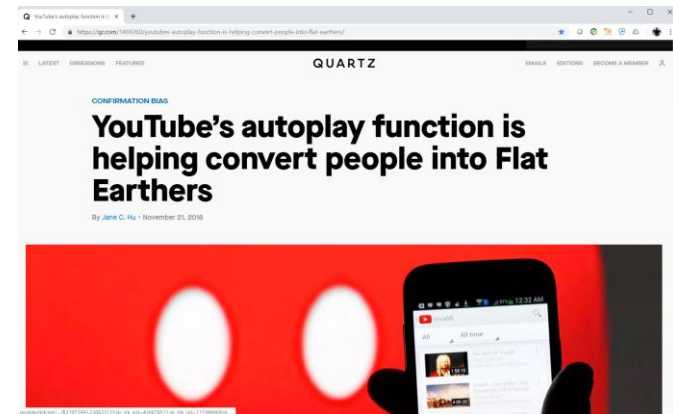
- Examining the evidence that supports the belief
- Examining the emotional or social factors that contribute to the belief
- Challenging the soundness of the thinking that leads to the belief

# Deconstruction, continued

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Deconstruction does not mean arriving at “the truth!”

- It is possible to deconstruct beliefs that are true, such as belief in a round earth
- Deconstruction of true beliefs is usually done with an overwhelming amount of accusations that the individual is unable to answer



# Epistemology and Paradox

Paradox is when two things are true but contradictory

Examples:

- Commandments to avoid partaking of the fruit and to multiply and replenish the earth
- The importance of being kind and being truthful
- Justice and mercy
- Merit and grace

# Epistemology in Scripture

## Revelation 11-13 and the War in Heaven: Accusation vs. Testimony

7 And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,

8 And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

9 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.

10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.

11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

12 Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

13 And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.

14 And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.

15 And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood.

16 And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.

17 And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.



# Epistemology in Scripture

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## Revelation 11-13 and the War in Heaven: Accusation vs. Testimony

“...you too (John is saying to his readers) are part of this drama. Don't be surprised that the dragon is out to get you, with more of his foul but powerful accusations, spat out like a flood. Trust that the God of creation will look after you. (It's fascinating that it is the earth that comes to the woman's rescue; creation itself is shown to be on the side of God and his people, rather than working alongside the dragon.) You must expect, though, that more is to come: more persecution, more attacks, more false accusations. 'Woe to the earth and the sea' (verse 12) 'because the devil has come down to you in great anger, knowing that he only has a short time.' The decisive battle has been won, and the devil knows it; but his basic nature of 'accuser' is now driving him, more and more frantically, to the attack, to accuse where it's justified and where it isn't, to drag down, to slander, to vilify, to deny the truth of what the creator God and his son, the lamb, have accomplished and are accomplishing. This is the ongoing battle in which all Christians are engaged, whether they know it or not.”

Wright, N. T.. Revelation for Everyone (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 113). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

# Epistemology in Scripture

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Matthew 16: Thou Art the Christ...

13 When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

14 And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?

16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

# Epistemology in Scripture

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Jeremiah 23

21 *I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.*

22 *But if they had stood in my counsel,* and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings.

# Epistemology in Scripture

## Pauline Epistemology – 1 Corinthians 1

17 For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

19 For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.

20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

22 For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:

23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;

24 But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

# Epistemology in Scripture

## Pauline Epistemology – 1 Corinthians 1

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6 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:

27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

# Epistemology in Scripture

## Pauline Epistemology – 1 Corinthians 1

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9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

# Epistemology in Scripture

## Epistemology in the Book of Mormon

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1 Ne 2:16 And it came to pass that I, Nephi, being exceedingly young, nevertheless being large in stature, and also having great desires to know of the mysteries of God, wherefore, I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father; wherefore, I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers.

1 Ne 15:8 And I said unto them: Have ye inquired of the Lord?

9 And they said unto me: We have not; for the Lord maketh no such thing known unto us.

10 Behold, I said unto them: How is it that ye do not keep the commandments of the Lord? How is it that ye will perish, because of the hardness of your hearts?

11 Do ye not remember the things which the Lord hath said?—If ye will not harden your hearts, and ask me in faith, believing that ye shall receive, with diligence in keeping my commandments, surely these things shall be made known unto you.

# Epistemology in Scripture

## Epistemology in the Book of Mormon

Alma 32:27 But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words.

28 Now, we will compare the word unto a seed...

33 And now, behold, because ye have tried the experiment, and planted the seed, and it swelleth and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, ye must needs know that the seed is good.

34 And now, behold, is your knowledge perfect? Yea, your knowledge is perfect in that thing, and your faith is dormant...and ye also know that it hath sprouted up, that your understanding doth begin to be enlightened, and your mind doth begin to expand.

35 O then, is not this real? I say unto you, Yea, because it is light; and whatsoever is light, is good, because it is discernible, therefore ye must know that it is good; and now behold, after ye have tasted this light is your knowledge perfect?

36 Behold I say unto you, Nay; neither must ye lay aside your faith, for ye have only exercised your faith to plant the seed that ye might try the experiment to know if the seed was good.



# Epistemology in Scripture

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## Epistemology in the Doctrine and Covenants

D&C 9: 8 But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.

9 But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong; therefore, you cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me.

# Epistemology in Scripture

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## Epistemology in the Doctrine and Covenants

D&C 46: 8 Wherefore, beware lest ye are deceived; and that ye may not be deceived seek ye earnestly the best gifts, always remembering for what they are given;

9 For verily I say unto you, they are given for the benefit of those who love me and keep all my commandments, and him that seeketh so to do; that all may be benefited that seek or that ask of me, that ask and not for a sign that they may consume it upon their lusts.

10 And again, verily I say unto you, I would that ye should always remember, and always retain in your minds what those gifts are, that are given unto the church.

11 For all have not every gift given unto them; for there are many gifts, and to every man is given a gift by the Spirit of God.

12 To some is given one, and to some is given another, that all may be profited thereby.

13 To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world.

14 To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful.

# Epistemology in Scripture

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## Epistemology in the Doctrine and Covenants

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14 To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful.

# Epistemology and Temples

## **Eliza R. Snow's inference:**

[The Temple] “testifies  
That Joseph Smith, the great, and good, and wise,  
Is God’s true prophet.”

# Epistemology and Temples

**Russell M. Nelson (March 2003 Ensign):**

“A temple is literally the house of the Lord...  
The temple is the object of every activity, every  
lesson, every progressive step in the Church.”

**Gordon B. Hinckley, October 1995:**

“These unique and wonderful buildings, and the  
ordinances administered therein, represent the  
ultimate in our worship. These ordinances  
become the most profound expressions of our  
theology.”

# Epistemology and Temples

...one night last May, I was awakened by those two little girls from the other side of the veil. Though I did not see or hear them with my physical senses, I felt their presence. Spiritually, I heard their pleadings. Their message was brief and clear: “Brother Nelson, we are not sealed to anyone! Can you help us?” Soon thereafter, I learned that their mother had passed away, but their father and younger brother were still alive.

Emboldened by the pleadings of Laural Ann and Gay Lynn, I tried again to contact their father, who I learned was living with his son Shawn. This time they were willing to meet with me.

In June, I literally knelt in front of Jimmy, now 88 years old, and had a heart-to-heart talk with him. I spoke of his daughters’ pleadings and told him I would be honored to perform sealing ordinances for his family.



**Russell M Nelson**

May 4, 2016 · 🌐



# Epistemology in Church History

- **Joseph Smith:** “by proving contraries, truth is made manifest”
- **Wilford Woodruff:** I will refer to a certain meeting I attended in the town of Kirtland in my early days. At that meeting...Brother Joseph turned to Brother Brigham Young and said, “Brother Brigham I want you to take the stand and tell us your views with regard to the written oracles and the written word of God.” Brother Brigham took the stand, and he took the Bible, and laid it down; he took the Book of Mormon, and laid it down; and he took the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and laid it down before him, and he said: “There is the written word of God to us, concerning the work of God from the beginning of the world, almost, to our day.” “And now,” said he, “when compared with the living oracles those books are nothing to me; those books do not convey the word of God direct to us now, as do the words of a Prophet or a man bearing the Holy Priesthood in our day and generation. I would rather have the living oracles than all the writing in the books.” That was the course he pursued. When he was through, Brother Joseph said to the congregation: “Brother Brigham has told you the word of the Lord, and he has told you the truth.”

# Epistemology in the Contemporary Church

## D. Todd Christofferson:

These same patterns are followed today in the restored Church of Jesus Christ. The President of the Church may announce or interpret doctrines based on revelation to him (see, for example, [D&C 138](#)). Doctrinal exposition may also come through the combined council of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (see, for example, [Official Declaration 2](#)).

Council deliberations will often include a weighing of canonized scriptures, the teachings of Church leaders, and past practice. But in the end, just as in the New Testament Church, the objective is not simply consensus among council members but revelation from God. It is a process involving both reason and faith for obtaining the mind and will of the Lord.

At the same time it should be remembered that not every statement made by a Church leader, past or present, necessarily constitutes doctrine. It is commonly understood in the Church that a statement made by one leader on a single occasion often represents a personal, though well-considered, opinion, not meant to be official or binding for the whole Church.

“The Doctrine of Christ,” April 2012 General Conference



# Epistemology in the Contemporary Church

- **Hugh B. Brown:** “Whether you are in the field of economics or political science, history or the behavioral sciences, continue your search for truth. And maintain humility sufficient to be able to revise your hypotheses as new truth comes to you by means of the spirit or the mind. Salvation, like education, is an ongoing process.”
- **M. Russell Ballard:** “My calling and life experiences allow me to respond to certain types of questions,” he said. “There are other types of questions that require an expert in a specific subject matter. That is exactly what I do when I need an answer to such questions. I seek help from others, including those with degrees and expertise in such fields.”
- **Russell M. Nelson:** “You don’t have to wonder about what is true. You do not have to wonder whom you can safely trust. Through personal revelation, you can receive your own witness that the Book of Mormon is the word of God, that Joseph Smith is a prophet, and that this is the Lord’s Church. Regardless of what others may say or do, no one can ever take away a witness borne to your heart and mind about what is true. I urge you to stretch beyond your current spiritual ability to receive personal revelation, for the Lord has promised that “if thou shalt [seek], thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, that thou mayest know the mysteries and peaceable things—that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal.”