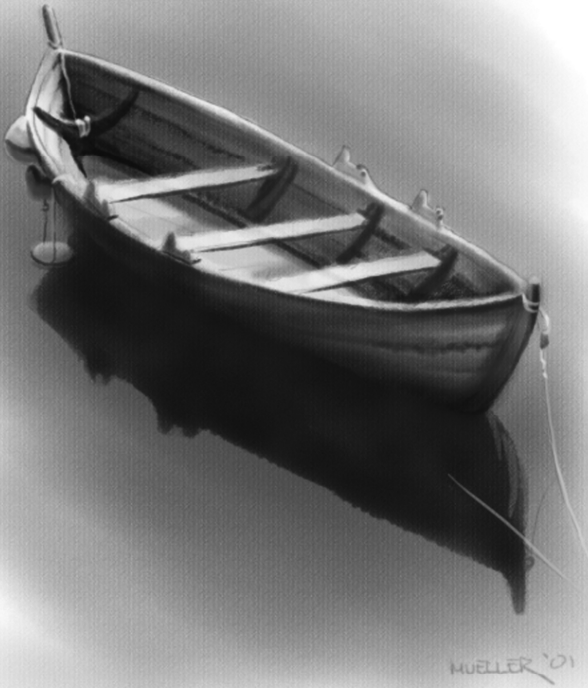


EXCERPTS

The Divine Paradox

Wherein Resides the Truth of All Things



Roger Ladd Memmott



A Compass Book

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The Divine Paradox

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“By proving contraries, truth is made manifest.”

—*Joseph Smith, Jr.*

Introduction

The Wisdom of the Paradox

Illogically Logical

Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage.

—“To Althea from Prison,” Richard Lovlace (1618-1658)

SUCH IS THE NATURE of the paradox—a seemingly contradictory statement that may nevertheless be true. On the one hand, we know for a fact—*literally*—that stone walls do make prisons and iron bars cages, but the poet suggests a truth that goes beyond fact. He suggests a truth in the figurative expression that speaks more to the heart, or perhaps to the soul, than to the head. In spite of his essentially self-contradictory assertion, we *know* somewhere beyond knowing that the poet is correct. We have only to read the remainder of the poem for clarification:

...

Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an hermitage;
If I have freedom in my love

And in my soul am free,
Angels alone, that soar above,
Enjoy such liberty.

The poet's love for Althea, in spite of incarceration, releases him from bondage and his mind soars, knowing and enjoying the liberty of angels. While the body remains in prison, the mind roams free. Such is the power of love.

We can liken this to our experience in reading the scriptures. When we are deeply engrossed, studying with "a sincere heart, with real intent," the Spirit touches us, and we find ourselves released from daily care and transported on the wings of faith, coming to an incomprehensible knowing of the "truth of all things." Such a knowing resides more in the heart than in the head; such a knowing resides in the soul.

Illogically logical

The paradox is used by almost all poets, but is a central device in metaphysical poetry, both in its religious and secular forms. And, as we shall see, it is a truly cogent form in scripture. While, as noted in the above example, the paradox, as a literary device, may transcend human sense and logic, contrary to certain philosophical views it is meant less to argue with a given logical premise than to elucidate and verify a premise with which logic grapples (see "Preface - End Notes 1 and 2"). The distinction between logically impossible and logically possible concepts or acts has to do with the idea of self-contradiction, but self-contradiction is the energy that fuels the paradox. Except in the paradox, a concept or an act the description of which is self-contradictory is logically impossible. For instance, the figurative

expression “pleasing pains” (truly an oxymoron, a relative of the paradox as discussed below), though far from logical is nevertheless true—as those who have experienced such will attest. It is in the seeming illogic of the pairing that logic, by the very nature of the paradox, prevails. In other words, “pleasing pains”—or, say, a “truthful lie”—though illogical in concept are nevertheless logically true.¹

While the scientist or even the philosopher may argue that creating a square circle or a four sided triangle are logically impossible acts, the poet and metaphysician, perhaps the theologian, may argue to the contrary and go on to *logically* prove the unprovable in the form of a paradox.

For the mathematician, a double paradox:

At the base of the three-sided pyramid
lies the truth of the four-sided triangle.

And for the physicist:

How circular the square of the universe.

The problem with logic is that we, as humans, assume that only by the principles of logic (created by humans) can the universe be explained. But as every physicist, whether astro- or micro-, knows, the logic of the universe, according to human understanding, is forever being challenged. One could go so far as to argue that the thesis of the great theologian/philosopher Thomas Aquinas proposing that God’s omnipotence does not require him to be able to do the logically impossible is false. God does the logically impossible all the time, for the acts of God transcend both human sense and logic, as well they should. In

scripture, the Lord is forever explaining, if not justifying, himself through the wonders of the paradox, for it is only by the paradox that both the nature and the acts of God may be perceived and comprehended. It is only by the paradox, as revealed by deity, that we may come to know the unknowable (see Moroni 10:4-5), or as President Hinckley has said, perhaps not intending to be paradoxical, "Within the furnace of faith lies knowledge."

Genealogy of the Paradox

A close relative of the paradox, whether cousin or child, is oxymoron. Oxymoron is a rhetorical figure in which incongruous or contradictory words are combined for special effect, as in such Shakespearean couplings as "loving hate," "bright smoke," "cold fire," "sick health." [Romeo and Juliet I, I]. And certainly we have all experienced those "pleasing pains" mentioned above or felt "sad joy" or been struck with a "deafening silence," just as we've each known a "cheerful pessimist" or, if not knowing, observed "miserable abundance." In its simplest form, oxymoron may be the coupling of two such contradictory words. But the usage can be, and often is, more elaborate, as in the anguish of Hamlet when he mutters, "I must be cruel only to be kind." Or as in Pablo Picasso's dictum that "Art is a form of lying in order to tell the truth." Or Gertrud Stein's observation that "...the essence of that ugliness is the thing which will always make it beautiful."

Emily Dickinson was a master of oxymoron. When she writes,

There's a certain Slant of light,
Winter Afternoons –
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of Cathedral Tunes –

we are caught up short. How, we wonder, do cathedral tunes oppress? And then it comes to us like a “slant of light.” We have all experienced that organ music that descends from the high-up nave of a cathedral with such weight that we can but hardly stagger between the pews. And then, when, in the next stanza, she goes on to write,

Heavenly Hurt it gives us –
We can find no scar,
But internal difference,
Where the meanings, are

we are deeply touched, not only with the oxymoron of “heavenly hurt” but with the extended paradox of her desperate desire to find meaning in something as meaningless as a simple slant of wintry light that somehow gets into the marrow of the bones, cools the blood, and pierces the soul.

When, in poem number 712, she writes “Because I could not stop for Death – / He kindly stopped for me –,” she reveals an intuitive and truthful understanding about “kindly death” that, in poring over the scriptures, any comprehending Latter-day Saint should appreciate and come to understand as deeply within his or her heart as the prophets, in either this or any other dispensation, have come to understand in theirs.

Read on.

Beyond Figurative Expression

As we know, in Adam’s fall lies the kindness of death, for “Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25). Adam’s fall is, of course, a paradox in and of

itself.² But when we find in the greater extension of this paradox, not in the figurative expression but in the literal meaning, the reality, that “...death hath passed upon all men, to fulfill the merciful plan of the great Creator...” (2 Nephi 9:6), our appreciation increases and we grow amazed. For as a result of Adam’s fall, in order to bring about the “merciful plan,” we are first cut off from the presence of God by a spiritual death; then paradoxically—or even ironically—in order to be able to return to the presence of God, we must die again a temporal death, which means *nothing* if not through the atoning sacrifice of the Savior through *his* temporal death which means *everything*. To those who die in Christ, death is sweet; for those who die in Christ shall come forth in the morning of the first resurrection (see D&C 42:46, Rev. 21:4, 7). Such is a brief glimpse into the paradox of Adam’s fall and our further understanding of “kindly death” as part of the Plan of Life and Salvation.

How then, given the Lord’s view which certainly should be our view, can we think of death as anything but kind? Without death, either spiritual or temporal, the merciful plan of the great Creator would be thwarted, and thus our salvation. And shouldn’t we, even from our mortal perspective, though perhaps slightly dumbfounded over the magnificence of the Lord’s Plan, appreciate this very literal and remarkable paradox which goes beyond figurative language, and exclaim as John Donne does in the closing couplet of his sonnet “Death Be Not Proud”:

One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die!

No one understands this as well as a Latter-day Saint who understands the true purpose of life from the perspective of

Adam's fall and the ultimate Plan. The scriptures are as worthy of oxymoron and as steeped in paradox as anything Shakespeare, Donne, or any other poet ever wrote—and to far better effect!

The Wisdom of the Paradox

In literature, the wisdom of the paradox in its various forms is perceived as a pithy, though sometimes extended, figurative expression in whose opposing juxtapositions resides an otherwise unknowable truth. In philosophy and science, the wisdom of the paradox, if not brought into question by an obsession with logic, is designed to elucidate a hypothesis or theory. In non-LDS theology, the wisdom of the paradox is often confused by the influences of Neoplatonic thought on early Christian theology. In LDS scripture, the wisdom of the paradox goes beyond a figure of speech, or any metaphorical import, it goes beyond theory and logic, it goes beyond the infirmities of Judeo-Christian Platonism and literally accounts for the reality of absolute truth—or humankind's ability, as uniquely manifest by the power of the Holy Ghost, to "know the truth of all things." Only by the paradox, as revealed by deity, can we come to *know the unknowable*—and not paradoxically, as the term suggests, but truly.

This begs the question: Outside the context of scripture, can we know the unknowable—literally? Consider first the astrophysicist's dilemma and then consider being awakened—*literally*—by the noise of silence. As the scientist of celestial bodies peers into the furthest reaches of the universe he comes to realize that, paradoxically, *nothing* accounts for *everything*. So suggests veteran science journalist K.C. Cole. In her book *The Hole in the Universe: How Scientists Peered over the Edge of Emptiness and Found*

Everything, she tells us that “Nothing is the all-important background upon which everything else happens.” Since physicists especially are consumed by the “properties of things that can’t be seen, don’t matter, don’t exist,” the co-existence of *no* thing and *some* thing appears to the astrophysicist to be the ultimate paradox. “When *nothing* changed, the universe was born,” says Cole. In paraphrase, what’s absent or lacking is as significant as what’s present in our understanding of just about anything, including how our brains perceive the world and people around us. What we don’t feel or remember, or don’t say or hear, can be just as revealing and instructive to psychologists and neuroscientists as the most sophisticated brain scans.³

Let me give you a personal example. I grew up in a small railroad town, the crew exchange stop between Las Vegas, Nevada, and Provo, Utah. My father was a railroad engineer and trains were in our blood. At night I lay in my bed listening to the engines rumbling in the yards, at first the steam- and then the diesel engines hostling back and forth, seething and dieing in power as they banged the cattle cars, boxcars, and flatbeds up and down the tracks. How I loved the rhythmic clack of a hotshot, maybe a hundred cars long, barreling through my dreams. Then one summer in the early 50s, during the transition between steam- and diesel engines, they tore down the roundhouse and for a time the hostling in the yards ceased. I found myself lying awake in the night, disturbed by noises not there, sensing the absence of clattering steel and the soundless rise and fall of an engine working the cars. Having become accustomed to such noise over the years, now in its absence I was quite literally hearing the sound of nothing—a rather bewildering experience for a boy of ten. In fact, my brother, six years younger than I with whom I slept, woke up weeping.

"Where is it?" he sobbed.

"What?" I asked. "Where is what?"

"I dunno," he whimpered, "but something's not there."

Quite literally, as we lay listening to the absence of sound, we experienced the phenomenon of knowing the unknowable, a truly marvelous, somewhat frightening, but observable fact apprehended by the human senses. In this instance, we experienced the paradoxical but curiously compatible wedding of *some* thing and *no* thing (i.e., sound and the absence of it), an impression superseding the figurative and becoming literal or *real*.

While the above anecdote is all well and good, such literalness of paradox in scripture is with what we are concerned; that is, the empirical truths that lie within the reality of opposition as "figuratively" revealed by God and by which we are saved—*literally*. For in all the simple complexity (or, again, complex simplicity) of the paradox lies the seed of wonder where at the core of existence we find the Lord's illustration of how a thing comes to mean.

Let me give you an obvious example from a reliable source. In a commencement address to the High School class of 1939 at Safford, Arizona, President Spencer W. Kimball told the graduating students:

A striking personality and good character is achieved by practice, not merely by thinking it. Just as a pianist masters the intricacies of music through hours and weeks of practice, so mastery of life is achieved by the ceaseless practice of mechanics which make up the art of living. Daily unselfish service to others is one of the

rudimentary mechanics of the successful life. “For whosoever will save his life,” the Galilean said, “shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” (Matthew 16:25.) What a strange paradox this! And yet one needs only to analyze it to be convinced of its truth.

Only when you lift a burden, God will lift your burden. Divine paradox this! The man who staggers and falls because his burden is too great can lighten that burden by taking on the weight of another’s burden. You get by giving, but your part of giving must be given first.⁴

How right this beloved prophet and prophets before and since—“Divine paradox this!” *This*, and so many others.

Consider the wisdom of the paradox in D&C 121:41, which we quote to one another at least seven times seventy in the course of a Sunday: “No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness, and meekness, and by love unfeigned.” In the eyes of the Lord, influence over another fails to find its efficacy in either power or authority but succeeds in humility and love. Give consideration to Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor. 12:7, 9, 10) wherein he glories in his infirmities and through weakness gains strength. Consider with wonder and awe how through the faith of the righteous garments are made white through the blood of the Lamb (1 Nephi 12:10, Alma 34:36). Consider the poignancy of suffering for the good of the soul (D&C 122). Consider the remarkable Council in Heaven before the foundation of the world, out of which came the great and grand paradox, wherein through

the blessing of agency the prospect of failure or loss was acknowledged and accepted as part of the Plan to save and redeem (Abraham 3:22-28, Moses 4)—and only by such “failure” could redemption occur, for in the exaltation of some and the salvation of others many yet would be lost. And yet who is responsible for any “failure” in God’s Plan? Be careful how you answer and hope that the name that you whisper isn’t your own.

O, the wisdom of the Father for your sake and mine!

The Testimony of One

As mentioned in the “Preface,” this book does not worry over paradoxes spawned by Classical Christian theology, which came about as a result of the unstable theological melding that occurred in the early centuries of Christianity when, according to the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Vol. 1, DOCTRINE, “(a) insights that came from personal Judeo-Christian revelation were (b) interpretively recast within an impersonal Neo-platonic view of reality.” Rather, each paradox considered is within the scope of LDS doctrine and supported by scriptural citation or reference. The *Encyclopedia* goes on to say, “Because Latter-day Saints reject the influences of Neoplatonism on original Christian theology, they are not on the horns of the dilemmas posed by some of the paradoxes in traditional Christian theology. This is not to say, however, that LDS ethical life and religious thought are free of paradox. LDS perspective tends to harmonize many paradoxes through its view that opposition is necessary in all things and that God and mankind are in the same order of reality but at different stages of knowledge and progression.”⁵

Like metaphor, symbol, parable, and chiasmus, the paradox is but one in a bag of literary tools employed to teach; that is, used to

illustrate, enhance, clarify, and affirm. There are many paradoxes, and forms of paradoxes, including oxymoron throughout the scriptures. The paradox is employed to teach or reemphasize concepts that often, or may otherwise, appear to fly in the face of logic. The paradox, as a literary technique, goes beyond logic. It begins where logic ends. It succeeds where logic fails. But the paradox is more than a mere literary technique. Unlike the metaphor, the symbol, the parable, chiasmus, and other literary tools, the paradox *is* existence; it is not just a *representation* or *approximation* or *evaluation* of certain concepts of *being* gathered together to clarify the whole. Our very existence is a paradox. The universe we inhabit is a paradox. The principles by which we govern our lives are paradoxical. The Plan of Salvation, our agency, the atonement, the very nature of God, are paradoxical not only in concept but in reality. It is my understanding and awe-stricken appreciation of this—the deep and abiding wisdom of the paradox—that patterns and structures my testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and, together with the whisperings of the Spirit, strengthens my grip on the iron rod.

The Divine Paradox

As we give consideration to a few of the remarkable and deeply profound paradoxes that lie within the scriptures, paradoxes given and revealed by divinity, given not only to increase our understanding, not only to assure us of the reality of our existence, but to assure us of the nature of our reality and more importantly the nature of our relationship to the Father and the Son, we can more fully appreciate the principles that lie behind our free agency, the atonement, and eternal life. As we give consideration to the scriptural paradoxes regarding existence,

redemption, and exaltation, we can better comprehend and more fully appreciate what the Lord means when, in Moses 1:39, he tells the ancient prophet, “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”

Such is the Plan of Salvation, with the greater reward of exaltation thrown in—all neatly couched in a series of wonderful paradoxes that enlighten and elucidate. The scriptures are about nothing else, but only about “the work and the glory,” and how the Lord intends to accomplish his end. To some, the Lord’s method of accomplishing his purpose may seem mysterious, and we often refer to the Lord’s “mysterious ways.” But to me his method is simply and remarkably achieved through the ultimate paradox, “the divine paradox,” about which there is nothing mysterious.

For as death hath passed upon all men, to fulfill the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection, and the resurrection must come unto man by reason of the fall....Wherefore, it must needs be an infinite atonement—....

—2 Nephi 9:6-7

In the Divine Paradox—the paradox of existence, agency, and redemption, the paradox of deity and eternal life, the paradox of the Plan—resides the glory of God. And that glory we are told “is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth.” (D&C 93:36.)

* For further explanation and insight into the mechanics of the paradox in mathematics, philosophy, linguistics, and religion, please refer to the “End Notes” chapter by chapter.

Chapter 1

Lehi's Logic: The Paradox of Being

Without Agency We Aren't

RICHARD L. EVANS ONCE SAID, "A person soon learns how little he knows when a child begins to ask questions."¹ Several years ago, my second child, Aaron, then age 5, kept me disarmed and forever in a sweat by asking such questions as, "Dad, why can't I see my eyes?" I would let my tongue limp about in my mouth, all garbled and tied, like a brain-dead aphasiac's, ultimately exasperating him until he lost interest. When, one day, he asked me to tell him again about the "fight in heaven," I felt my tongue limber up and confidently kiss at my lips in preparation for a lesson never too late. Halfway into the story, I realized I was attempting to explain to him the paradox of Satan's Plan to save all mankind which was contrary to the Lord's Plan in which many would go astray and forever be lost. That's when my tongue again thickened up and limped over the words, now hard as pebbles rolling about in my mouth.

I determined that, at age 5, he wasn't quite up to Lehi's exposition in 2 Nephi 2, which is as much about the nature of existence as it is about the agency of man. I supposed I would wait three or four years to tell him why both he and the world exist.

* * *

The Plan of Salvation is developed around two fundamental concepts: 1) the principle of Free Agency, and 2) the Atoning Sacrifice of the Savior. Only by agency and grace can the Father accomplish his work and his glory to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. Without agency, *we* cease to exist.

Within the concept of agency, a multiplicity of paradoxes abound, without any one of which there would be neither god nor mankind. Better the physicist study agency to get to the center of being than to waste his time on the Big Bang.

I could easily have titled this chapter "The Paradox of Agency" or "The Paradox of Opposition" or "The Paradox of the Fall," but Being, I think, more appropriately embraces the three, including itself. Of course, without opposition there would be no agency and without agency there would have been no Fall, but as Lehi argues, without opposition, which determines the "law,"² not only would there be no agency, there would be no existence. 2 Nephi 2:13 lies at the core of his treatise:

And if ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin. If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness. And if there be no righteousness there be no happiness. And if there be no righteousness nor happiness there be no punishment

nor misery. And if these things are not there is no God. And if there is no God we are not, neither the earth; for there could have been no creation of things, *neither to act nor to be acted upon*; wherefore, all things must have vanished away. (Emphasis mine.)

Lehi's Logic

For years I never quite understood this scripture and referred to it as "Lehi's Logic," which I thought was somewhat circular, and then one day, deeply engrossed in this chapter (2 Nephi 2), in a remarkable slant of personal revelation it occurred to me. Nevertheless, second guessing the revelation I'd received, I read the chapter again to verify the accuracy of enlightenment. The elucidation was as simple as if I were Jacob, Lehi's "firstborn in the days of [his] tribulation in the wilderness" (2 Nephi 2:1), sitting at the feet of the aged prophet and hearing the Gospel of Christ in a nutshell. After a brief discussion of justice and mercy (vs. 5-10), Lehi tells his son in verses 11 and 12 that opposition accounts for *everything*. Without "an opposition in all things...righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one....Wherefore, it must needs have been created for a thing of *naught* [my emphasis]; wherefore there would have been no purpose in the end of its creation. Wherefore, this thing [referring back to "all things" as "a compound in one"] must needs destroy the wisdom of God and his eternal purposes, and also the power, and the mercy, and the justice of God."

Such is the deep and abiding profundity that without opposition there is no "law...to answer the ends of the

atonement.” (vs. 10.) Agency fails, there is no God, we are not, and all things vanish away (vs. 13).

Lehi’s exposition in verses 15 through 27 is a study in both paradox and irony. First, he speaks indirectly of the conflicting commandments as represented by “the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other bitter.”³ (vs. 15.) He tells his son that this opposition was given of the Lord God in order that man “should act for himself” by being “enticed by the one or the other.” (vs. 16.) Next he speaks of “an angel of God,” having “fallen from heaven; wherefore, he became a devil, having sought that which was evil before God.” (vs. 17-18.) And that which he sought, we learn from Moses 4:1 and 3, was to “redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost,” together with honor unto himself and to “destroy the agency of man.” Now, a fallen angel, seeking “also the misery of all mankind” (2 Nephi 2:18), he ironically and paradoxically puts into motion the will of the Father, piecing together the elements of the very Plan he opposed.

And what Plan, by choice, did Satan ironically oppose? The Plan of Opposition, thereby attempting to thwart the supremacy of God, subvert the law, and cancel not only the agency but, according to Lehi, the *existence* of man—and more than that the *existence* of God! For, again, as both we and Jacob are told in verse 16, “...if these things [the opposition within them, to act and be acted upon] are not there is no God.” There is a strange and horrible irony in the paradox of Satan’s choice to oppose God’s Plan. The adversary was so taken with the prospect of glory unto himself that by his plan, that “one soul shall not be lost,” he would have cast himself into oblivion—and, of course, by his rebellion, paradoxically, *did*.

~ This Ends the First Part of Chapter 1 ~

End Notes

(Preface Only)

Preface

1. **Author's Note:** There are various types of paradoxes within a variety of disciplines, which include mathematics, philosophy, and linguistics. In mathematics and philosophy, paradox refers to an apparently contradictory conclusion derived from what seems to be a valid premise. Some of the earliest paradoxes in logic hark back to the 5th Century B.C. in Plato and Aristotle's textual references to the writings of Zeno of Elea.

Linguistic or semantic paradoxes depend on the structure of language, and paradox as such is often used as a rhetorical device in epigrams and poetry. Meaning within the "rhetorical" paradox, which appeals to the senses, often supercedes meaning within the "logical" paradox, which appeals to the intellect and has a greater tendency to break down.

Paradoxical problems for theism outside of LDS cannon are largely (though not entirely) irrelevant to any discussion of paradox in the context of LDS scripture. For instance, the critic's complaint that the existence of gratuitous evil makes the existence of a theistic God unlikely is easily resolved in the LDS concept of free agency as a result of Adam's fall, perhaps most succinctly elucidated by Lehi in 2 Nephi 2 when he argues for the necessity of opposition in all things. The critic's view is that if God were all powerful he could eliminate evil, and if he were all good, he would want to, but the Latter-day Saint understands that such a notion is, in fact, a subversion of the Plan of Salvation within which resides the agency of man, and that God, in so doing, would—although paradoxical itself—cease to be God.

2. **Author's Note:** A discussion of the history of the paradox or variations of any approach to paradoxical problems is not only beyond the scope of this book but irrelevant to an understanding of the mechanics of the paradox in scripture. It may be noted, however, that while the paradox is used as a form of "reasoning" in such disciplines as mathematics and philosophy to "prove" something other than that which is perceived, the linguistic paradox goes beyond logic and strikes an undeniable chord of truth somewhere closer to the heart than to the head.

Following are the author's examples of how the "logical" paradox frequently fails:

A Paradox of Zeno. For instance, Zeno of Elea, a Greek mathematician and philosopher of the Eleatic school (c. 570 B.C.), sought to discredit the senses through a series of paradoxical arguments on time and space, arguments that remain, for some, complex intellectual puzzles to this day. One of his famous paradoxes asserts that a runner can never reach his destination because, in order to do so, he must traverse a distance; but he cannot traverse that distance without first traversing half of it, and so on, ad infinitum. Such an argument is intended to demonstrate the logical impossibility of motion and suggest that the sensory perception of arriving at a destination is illusory. Unfortunately, within the "logic" of the paradox lies a questionable premise (or conclusion, depending on how you look at it) and we have a false paradox or little more than an intellectual puzzle. The paradox's logic requiring the runner to get "half way" fails the conclusion that he cannot get anywhere (or vice versa). The paradox, therefore, requires as true that which it is trying to prove false.

Even more than false implication (in the form of “true implies false”) in the paradox, perception itself flies in the face of such logic or reasoning, for it is something more than logic or reasoning within a sound paradox by which we perceive an apparent truth.

Pascal’s Irony. Considered by some to be one of the most brilliant minds in the history of Western civilization, Blaise Pascal, French mathematician, philosopher, and physicist, reasoned in the form of a wager that believing in God was a more rational choice than not believing in God, for “If you win you win everything [salvation]; if you lose you lose nothing.” On the surface “Pascal’s Wager” is a supporting argument for religionists the world round. On closer inspection, however, there is a problem with the wager, and that problem is steeped in irony. Pascal, a 17th Century rationalist, thought that even though *the existence of God cannot be rationally ascertained*, a rational person should at least seek the greater reward and believe in God. Ergo, the problem: As a rationalist how do you purport to *believe* in something that cannot be rationally ascertained? According to the rationalist view, once you give yourself over to belief, you are no longer thinking “rationally” (or logically) but instead you are thinking according to the principle of “faith” (or emotion)—which is the antithesis of rationality. “Rational belief,” when you think about it, is a strange sort of oxymoron. Pascal’s Wager is nothing short of a rationalist arguing for the logic of exercising faith and in the process compromising, if not altogether negating, his own rationalist view. (See Chapter 4, “Alma’s Promise,” for a discussion of the paradox of coming to *know* by *faith*.)

While these are brief examples of the failure of logic when applied to the paradox, in virtually every case the attempt to “argue” a paradox by logic fails, since by its very nature the paradox is unarguable. In the end, a paradox *proves* nothing; it simply elucidates that which is beyond the ability of logic to prove. Such is the beauty of the paradox: that while the perceived principle within is neither logical nor arguable, it is nevertheless true—and sometimes, if we’re lucky, explainable.

3. **Author’s Note:** Certain writers (both LDS and non-LDS) unsympathetic to accepted LDS doctrine and theology have confused and abused the paradox, using it to license and justify their own misunderstandings. A case in point is the bemused assault on gospel doctrine by Margaret and Paul Toscano in their book *Strangers in Paradox: Explorations in Mormon Theology*. An excerpt from Brian M. Hauglid’s review in FARMS Review of Books, Volume 6 Number 2, 1994, p. 252, is insightful:

Strangers in Paradox falls far short of being a useful guide for Latter-day Saints who wish to enrich their understanding of theological issues concerning God and his relationship to us. Instead of exploring theological questions based on the revealed doctrines in the scriptures and the teaching of the living prophets, the authors attempt to justify changing the doctrines, or more accurately, changing our understanding of the nature of God, in order to lobby for changes in Church policy, especially policies related to the sisters of the church.

If understood according to the Lord’s intent and in concert with the Spirit, the paradox can work to enrich testimonies. If not, it’s of little use.

~ END OF PREVIEW / EXCERPT ~
