PROVING SUBCONTRARIES: *IN MEMORIAM* G. EUGENE ENGLAND, 1933–2001

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This essay originally responded to a call in the announced theme for the 2009 Annual Conference of the Association for Mormon Letters: "Proving Contraries." It explicitly honors, as the AML Conference theme implicitly honored, the memory of Eugene England, who first brought that phrase (from a June 1844 letter of Joseph Smith) to the attention of many, if not most or even all members of the LDS literary community. And it attempts to continue and extend some of Gene England's effort to explore the tensions and even to heal some of the divisions in contemporary LDS community and experience by "proving contraries." It consists of two history lessons and an elementary logic lesson, followed by some applications to LDS culture and literature.

History Lesson One: Recent Times

As far as I can tell, it was Gene England—in his October 1980 essay for an AML conjoint meeting with the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association in Denver, "Joseph Smith and the Tragic Quest"—who first introduced some of us to the remark by Joseph Smith that provided the AML 2009 Conference its theme: "By proving contraries, truth is made manifest."[1] I was there to hear Gene's essay, as well as Marden J.

1. Eugene England, "Joseph Smith and the Tragic Quest," in *Dialogues with Myself: Personal Essays on Mormon Experience* (Midvale, Utah: Signature, 1984), 10.

Clark's "Paradox and Tragedy in Mormonism,"[2] and those two essays still seem to me among the indispensable pieces of Mormon literary-critical thought. I still recall how forcibly Joseph Smith's sentence struck me, partly because Gene used it to bring into sharper focus something I'd suggested to him some years earlier, not long after his "Great Books or True Religion?" and my "Digging the Foundation" appeared as parts of a Roundtable on Mormon Literature in *Dialogue,* volume 9, number 4 (Winter 1974; actually published early in 1975). In a letter to Gene, I took issue with the claim (which he did not fully endorse) that "Many have said that Mormonism answers so well so many basic questions and provides such a satisfying way of life for most of its people that there is not sufficient tension or tragedy [to generate great literature]. What I have finally realized," Gene wrote, "is that there is no need to apologize. Religious success is certainly preferable to literary success."[3] In that essay, Gene had sketched some directions toward a nascent Mormon literary aesthetics, and my letter urged him not to overlook Mormon scriptures that do stress tension and at least the potential for tragedy, Lehi's "opposition in all things" (2 Ne. 2:11) first of all. I suggested that "either/or"— as with the "or" in his title, which he acknowledged (in 1974) as an "offensive (and perhaps false) dilemma"[4]—might be too easy or evasive, and that "both/and" could generate all the tension one might wish.

In the preface to his last published essay collection, *Making Peace,* which he described as a "book about ideas and ways of thinking that can help make peace,"[5] Gene wrote:

2. Marden J. Clark, "Paradox and Tragedy in Mormonism," in *Liberating Form* (Salt Lake City: Aspen, 1992), 131–46.

3. England, "Great Books or True Religion? Defining the Mormon Scholar," in *Dialogues with Myself,* 62–63. In 1974 he said "infinitely preferable."

4. England, "Great Books," 63.

5. England, *Making Peace: Personal Essays* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1995), xi.

> During a time of growing wonder at a universe of opposing forces and concepts that seemed to give existence its very tang and solidity, as well as its energy, I learned of Joseph Smith's remarkable statement, "By proving contraries, truth is made manifest." My heart and mind gave full assent. I remembered William Blake's claim that "Without contraries is no progression" and thought again of the teaching in the Book of Mormon about "opposition in all things." Lehi's unique effort to describe the foundations of being took on a new power for me. I began to see all about me, in particle physics and organic evolution, in the history of literary movements and political struggles, in theological debate and the battle of the sexes, evidence that without the enlivening power of contraries, "all things must be a compound in one . . . having no life" (2 Ne 2:13). And I realized the added paradox that often our failure to accept this contrary, oppositional structure of all reality, physical and moral and spiritual, tended to produce much violence, to be a chief impediment to peace.[6]

That "time of growing wonder" when he learned of Joseph Smith's sentence seems to have been sometime between 1975 and 1980, and I think it is reflected poignantly in the essay "Enduring" (written c. 1982), which Gene placed at the end of *Dialogues with Myself*, an evocation of a "mind besieged with woe and wonder."[7]

From 1980 on, Gene often recurred to Joseph Smith's "proving contraries" statement, and more often used its mode of thinking in his essays, joining the Latter-day Saint prophet to the English poet-prophet William Blake's dicta as well. When he published "Joseph Smith and the Tragic Quest" as the first essay in his first collection, *Dialogues with Myself,* he quoted "proving contraries" in his Author's Foreword,[8] and used "oppositional" thinking in several of its essays written between 1975 and 1984: in "Obedience, Integrity, and the Paradox of Selfhood" (given as the AML Presidential Address in October 1980 and gathered as the second essay in *Dialogues*) to urge us to "endure in the struggle required to find [our]

6. England, *Making Peace,* xi..

7. England, "Enduring," in *Dialogues with Myself,* 205.

8. England, *Dialogues,* ix.

true selves in relationships, in the challenge of covenant-making, in the true marriage of the contraries of obedience and integrity";[9] in "How Can God Be Both Good and Powerful?" to address the ancient question posed in that essay's title; in "We Need to Liberate Mormon Men!" to negotiate some of the tensions of male and female; in "Enduring" to endure a world no longer as "safe" as the valley he grew up in:

> Reality is too demanding for me to feel very safe any more in the appalling luxury of my moments of utter skepticism. God's tears in Moses, chapter seven, at which the prophet Enoch wondered, tell me that God has not resolved the mystery of being. But he endures in love. He does not ask me to forgo my integrity by ignoring the mystery or he would not have let Enoch see him weep. But he does not excuse me to forgo my integrity by ignoring the reality which daily catches me up in joy and sorrow and shows me, slowly, subtly, its moral patterns of iron delicacy.[10]

In the title essay of his next collection, *Why the Church Is as True as the Gospel,* Gene used both William Blake's (misquoted: "existence" rather than "progression") and Joseph Smith's dicta on "contraries" to describe how "the Church provides the best *context* for struggling with, working through, enduring, and being redeemed by our responses to those paradoxes and oppositions that give energy and meaning to the universe,"[11] and suggested that "by 'prove' [Joseph Smith] meant not only to demonstrate logically but also to test, to struggle with, and to work out in practical experience."[12] In a later essay in that collection, "The Trouble with Excellence," he wrote that

> Excellence versus humility, striving to save our lives versus finding them through giving, winning the "race" for ourselves versus sacrificing all for others—these are indeed "contraries," horns of a dilemma, poles of

9. England, "Obedience," 36.

10. England, "Enduring," 204.

11. England, "Why the Church Is as True as the Gospel," in *Why the Church Is as True as the Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986), 3–4.

12. England, "Why the Church," 4.

> a paradox. But they are unavoidable parts of a real universe in which there must needs be "opposition in all things" (2 Ne. 2:11) and where we can best learn how to live by thinking through the opposed values and reaching some new, transcendent way of living that preserves them both, despite the conflict.[13]

There Gene sounds closest to Blake, who warned in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that "whoever tries to reconcile [the specific contraries of "the Prolific" and "the Devourer"] seeks to destroy existence."[14] In his third book of "personal essays on Mormon experience," *The Quality of Mercy,* Gene directly quoted Joseph Smith's "proving contraries" only once,[15] in the essay "Learning Mercy in Church," largely reiterating (at some points virtually quoting) what he had said in "Why the Church Is as True as the Gospel." But thinking with contraries plays in other essays there as well, as in "Mercy in Marriage," which ponders "sexual differences"[16] and proposes that "perhaps we *still* don't understand what it means that 'male and female' are alike unto God."[17]

In his last collection, *Making Peace,* although he quoted and discussed "proving contraries" only in the preface, Gene rather obviously tested contraries in several essays: in "On Spectral Evidence, Scapegoating, and False Accusation," where he opposed our tendencies, liberal and conservative alike, to "reduc[e]" others "to partial static version[s]" of themselves;[18] in "Perfection and Progression: Two Ways to Talk about God" to deal with

13. England, "The Trouble with Excellence," in *Why the Church Is as True as the Gospel,* 72.

14. William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,* c. 1790–93, edited by Michael Phillips (Oxford: Bodleian, 2011), plates 16–17.

15. England, "Learning Mercy in Church," in *The Quality of Mercy: Personal Essays on Mormon Experience* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992), 67.

16. England, "Mercy in Marriage," in *The Quality of Mercy,* 90.

17. England, "Mercy in Marriage," 91, echoing 2 Ne. 26:33.

18. England, "On Spectral Evidence, Scapegoating, and False Accusation," in *Making Peace,* 28.

our history of "stark contradiction[s] in authoritative statements about the Mormon concept of God,"[19] from Joseph and Hyrum Smith to Brigham Young and Orson Pratt, to Joseph F. Smith, B. H. Roberts, Joseph Fielding Smith, David O. McKay, and Bruce R. McConkie; in "On Bringing Peace to BYU, with the Help of Brigham Young" by appealing to the founder's capacity for supporting "equal and sometimes conflicting values" and to his conviction that "it is actually necessary for opposite principles to be placed before [us], or this state of being would be no probation,"[20] no way to "prove [us] herewith" (Abr. 3:25); in "Why Utah Mormons Should Become Democrats" to urge the preservation of a vigorous two-party system in accord with the "insight and intention of the First Presidency" in 1891 when they arbitrarily assigned Utah Mormons to the two parties because "The more evenly balanced the parties become, the safer it will be for us in the security of our liberties; and . . . our influence for good will be far greater than it possibly could be were either party overwhelmingly in the majority."[21]

I don't mean to argue that Gene England's career and oeuvre as a Mormon personal and critical essayist were one long playing out of Joseph Smith's "proving contraries." To test that claim would require a close analysis of each essay to discover whether and where and how it enacted the modes of oppositional thinking that Gene found both fruitful and healing, and I have merely marked on a rough map what I see as the most likely places to begin such analysis.

History Lesson Two: Older Times

Joseph Smith's "By proving contraries, truth is made manifest" is actually not a sentence, but an independent clause in the middle of a compound-

19. England, "Perfection and Progression: Two Ways to Talk about God," in *Making Peace,* 43.

20. England, "On Bringing Peace to BYU, with the Help of Brigham Young," in *Making Peace,* 71.

21. England, "Why Utah Mormons Should Become Democrats," in *Making Peace,* 86.

complex sentence that (in the text Gene England consulted and that, till recently, has been the only text most readily available) reads as follows:

> Although all is not gold that shines, any more than every religious creed is sanctioned with the so eternally sure word of prophecy, satisfying all doubt with "Thus saith the Lord;" yet, "by proving contraries," truth is made manifest," and a wise man can search out "old paths," wherein righteous men held communion with Jehovah, and were exalted through obedience.[22]

Joseph Smith was acknowledging receipt of a copy of Israel Daniel Rupp's *He Pasa Ekklesia* (1844), a compilation that, according to its title page, offered "An Original History of the Religious Denominations at Present Existing in the United States Containing Authentic Accounts of their Rise, Progress, Ministers and Lay Members of the Respective Denominations."[23] The book included an article by Joseph Smith on the origins and beliefs of the LDS Church (a version of his own history and the thirteen Articles of Faith as given in the Wentworth letter). Joseph thanked Rupp for the copy of the book, "so valuable a treasure," in which "The design, the propriety, the wisdom of letting every sect tell its own story, and the elegant manner in which the work appears, [had] filled [his] breast with encomiums on it, wishing [Rupp] God speed"; and his letter promised "Your work will be suitably noticed in our papers for your benefit."[24] Rupp was a close contemporary of Joseph Smith, born in 1803 on a Pennsylvania farm, and, like him, had little chance for education; but Rupp had mastered eight languages by age twenty and became a teacher and a prolific local historian.

In this text of Joseph's letter, the phrase "by proving contraries" is enclosed in quotation marks; a closing quotation mark also occurs after "manifest," but in the copy of *History of the Church* volume six that I could

22. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1980), 6:428.

23. I. Daniel Rupp, *He Pasa Ekklesia* (Philadelphia: Humphreys, 1844). Available at https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=CY8_AAAAYAAJ&rdid=book-CY8_AAAAYAAJ&rdot=1.

24. Smith, *History of the Church,* 6:428.

consult, no initial mark signals where a second quoted phrase begins in that clause. Gene England did not indicate, in any of his quotations of the "proving contraries" clause, that the key phrase was thus marked. I don't fault him for that, since without more context than we have, it's hard to tell what Joseph Smith meant by the marks, and they seem merely distracting. In this same sentence, "Thus saith the Lord" is also in quotation marks, for obvious reasons; but so is "old paths," for reasons not immediately obvious.

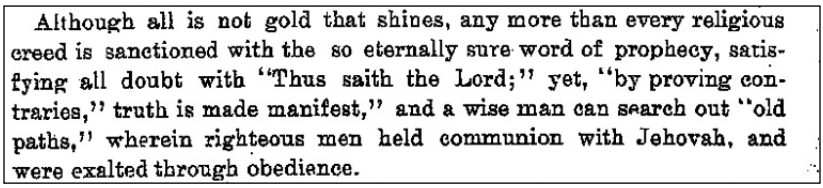
Although all is not gold that shines, any more than every religious creed is sanctioned with the so eternally sure word of prophecy, satisfying all doubt with "Thus saith the Lord;" yet, "by proving contraries," truth is made manifest," and a wise man can search out "old paths," wherein righteous men held communion with Jehovah, and were exalted through obedience.

Figure 1. Excerpt from Letter from Joseph Smith to L. Daniel Rupp—Book on Religious Sects. Nauvoo, Illinois, June 5th, 1844.[25]

In the online Joseph Smith Papers, or in the online (or DVD) Selected Collections from the Archives of the Church, we can consult a scanned facsimile of a handwritten draft of this particular "Mormon letter"; and when we do, we discover that the entire clause, "by proving contraries, truth is made manifest," was enclosed in quotation marks (also that the transcriber for HC vol. 6 introduced a paragraph break, mistook an *I* for an *L* in the addressee line, and omitted *the* and an entire line from the sentence that concerns us).[26]

25. Joseph Smith, Letter to L. Daniel Rupp, Jun. 5, 1844, *History of the Church,* vol. 6., ch. 20 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950). Available at https://byustudies.byu.edu/content/volume-6-chapter-20.

26. Smith to Rupp, Jun. 5, 1844, Selected Collections from the Archives of the Church, MS 55, box 2, folder 8 (Jun. 1, 1844–Jun. 16, 1844), Brigham Young University Library, ldsarch.lib.byu.edu.erl.lib.byu.edu. Full image excerpted in Figure 1 available at: "Letter to Israel Daniel Rupp, 5 June 1844," 1, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-israel-daniel-rupp-5-june-1844/1.

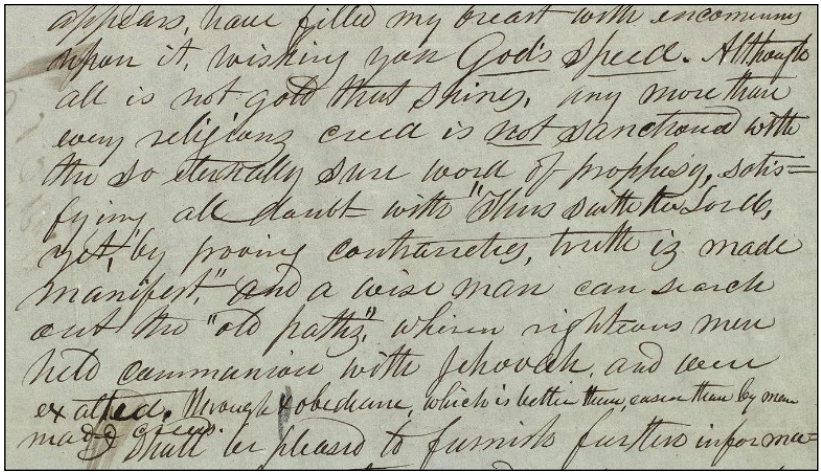

Figure 2

The initial quotation mark is single, the terminal mark double, perhaps a slip of the pen; or part of the initial mark may have overlaid the descender on the letter *g* just above, though this looks very doubtful to me.

But the startling thing is that the word W. W. Phelps wrote down for Joseph Smith was not *contraries* but either *contrarreties* (as the Joseph Smith Papers transcription reads it) or *contrarieties.* The word clearly has two *t*'s, the second followed by the plural *ies*. Some of the other un-dotted *i*'s in the letter, including the one following the second *t* here, resemble some of the *r*'s. *Contrarreties* might be a misspelling, or a phonetic spelling. In any case, the word was not *contraries*, and I read it as *contrarieties.* Which doesn't have as nice a ring and rhythm as *contraries.* But so it is. I'm content to go on with "proving contraries" because I like its sound better, and it matches William Blake's language. But I've lost my innocence in this matter.

Was "proving contraries" or "proving contrarieties" a familiar phrase, a cliché? Or was it a term of art? It could be both; it could have become a cliché by being a term of art. To me it sounds like a term of art in logic or rhetoric or both, and thus a term that Joseph Smith could have learned in the "juvenile debating club" he sometimes attended as an adolescent

in Palmyra, to discuss "some portentous questions of moral or political ethics."[27] (I wonder if historians and biographers have too easily passed over this as a significant rhetorical and logical component of Joseph's education.) Or "proving contrarieties" might have been a term used in the later School of the Elders or School of the Prophets.

Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language* has no separate entry for the plural *contrarieties*, but defines *contrariety* with two senses, plus examples of usage: "1. Opposition in fact, essence, quality or principle; repugnance. The expedition failed by means of a contrariety of winds. There is a contrariety in the nature of virtue and vice; of love and hatred; of truth and falsehood. Among men of the same profession, we find a contrariety of opinions"; and "2. Inconsistency; quality or position destructive of its opposite. How can these contrarieties agree."[28] In this second sense and its usage example, *contrarieties* seems to mean about the same thing as *contraries*; and this may well be the sense and usage of *contrarieties* in Joseph Smith's letter to Rupp. Webster defines the plural noun *contraries* solely as "In logic, propositions which destroy each other, but of which the falsehood of one does not establish the truth of the other."[29] The entry for *contraries* begins with the cross-reference "[See Contrary]"; and for *contrary* (as a noun) Webster gives only two senses, the second of which is "A proposition contrary to another, or a fact contrary to what is alledged."[30] Unquestionably, then, Joseph Smith could have known the term *contraries* in its specific logical sense, and that could affect his understanding and use of *contrarieties*.

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27. Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 37–38.

28. *American Dictionary of the English Language,* 1828 ed., s.v. "contrariety," http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/contrariety.

29. *American Dictionary,* s.v. "contraries," http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/contraries.

30. *American Dictionary,* s.v. "contrary," http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/Contrary.

The case is similar with *proving* or *prove*. Webster cites *proving* only as a present participle ("ppr.") meaning "Trying; ascertaining; evincing; experiencing";[31] but defines *prove* as a transitive verb with a series of senses (each with illustrative examples):

> 1. To try; to ascertain some unknown quality or truth by an experiment, or by a test or standard. [. . .] 2. To evince, establish or ascertain as truth, reality or fact, by testimony or other evidence. The plaintiff in a suit, must prove the truth of his declaration; the prosecutor must prove his charges against the accused. [Joseph Smith had ample experience with "contraries" in this kind of "proving."] 3. To evince truth by argument, induction or reasoning; to deduce certain conclusions from propositions that are true or admitted. [. . .] 4. To ascertain the genuineness or validity of; to verify; as, to prove a will. 5. To experience; to try by suffering or encountering; to gain certain knowledge by the operation of something on ourselves, or by some act of our own. [. . .] 6. In arithmetic, to show, evince or ascertain the correctness of any operation or result. [. . .] 7. To try; to examine. Prove your own selves. 2 Cor. 13.[32]

Reading Webster, it's not hard to guess where Gene England found a warrant for the claim that by "prove" Joseph Smith "meant not only to demonstrate logically but also to test, to struggle with, and to work out in practical experience."

I learn from Gideon Burton's *Silva Rhetoricae* website that the rhetorical figure *contrarium* means the juxtaposition of "two opposing statements (= antithesis) in such a way as to prove the one from the other";[33] and that, as a "topic of invention" in rhetoric, "contraries" means to consider "opposite or incompatible things that are of the same kind [. . .]. Because contraries occur in pairs and exclude one another, they are useful in arguments because one can establish one's case indirectly,

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31. *American Dictionary,* s.v. "proving," http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/proving.

32. *American Dictionary,* s.v. "prove," http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/prove.

33. *Silva Rhetoricae*, "contrarium," http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Figures/C/CONTRARIUM.HTM.

proving one's own assertion by discrediting the contrary."[34] Joseph Smith might have learned something of "proving contraries" in this way in that "juvenile debating club." But in logic such an argument would not be valid, since contraries cannot both be true but may both be false.

Elementary Logic Lesson

Here, a brief lesson in the elementary logic of categorical propositions may help. I learned these things as a BYU undergraduate in a beginning logic course from Chauncey Riddle, and have "proved" their usefulness over and over since then. Categorical propositions occur in four forms (where S and P stand for subject and predicate terms): universal affirmative (All S is P), universal negative (No S is P), particular affirmative (Some S is P), and particular negative (Some S is not P). These four forms are traditionally designated, respectively, by the letters A, E, I, and O (supposedly from the vowels in the Latin verbs *AffIrmo* and *nEgO*: "I affirm"; "I deny"). Their formal relations in logic are graphically represented in the "square of opposition," which is traditionally traced back to Aristotle's *Organon*. Draw a square in the air. Mark its four corners starting at the upper left and ending at the lower right: A, E, I, O. The A (All S is P) and E (No S is P) propositions are "contraries," and the relation between them is "contrariety": as Webster's definition of "contraries" implied, they cannot both be true but may both be false; indicate this with arrows pointing both ways on the (upper horizontal) A–E side of the square. The relation between the A and I and between the E and O propositions is "subimplication": if A is true (All S is P), so is I (Some S is P); if E is true (No S is P), so is O (Some S is not P). But this is a one-way relation, and it is not the case that if I is true so is A, or if O is true, so is E (this is the formal fallacy we commit when we generalize from *Some*—one or a few or even many—to *All* members of a category, as in stereotyping, vilifying, or demonizing those who differ from us or whom we fear or oppose); indicate this one-way relation

34. *Silva Rhetoricae,* "Relationship," http://rhetoric.byu.edu.

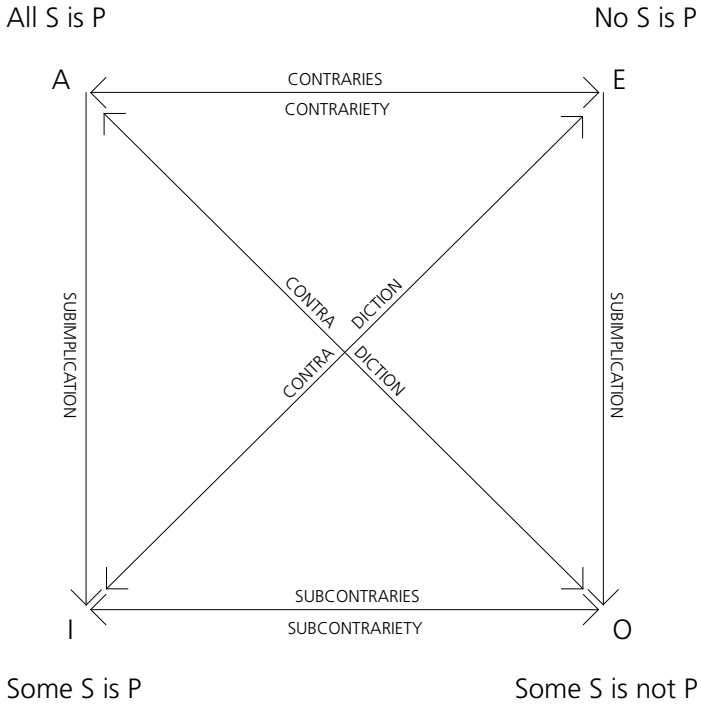

Figure 3. The square of opposition.

with arrows pointing only down on the (vertical) A–I and E–O sides of the square. The I and O propositions are "subcontraries" and their relation is called "subcontrariety," meaning that both may be true (Some S is P, Some S is not P), but both cannot be false. Indicate this with arrows pointing both ways on the (lower horizontal) I–O side of the square. Now draw the diagonals of the square, A–O and E–I, with arrows pointing both ways along both of these diagonals. The A and O propositions and the E and I propositions are "contradictories" and their relation is "contradiction": if A is true, O must be false, and vice-versa; if E is true, I must be false, and vice-versa. From this you can see why the subcontraries I and O cannot both be false: if I is false, E must be true; if O is false, A must be true; but if both are false, that results in "contraries" which cannot both be true.

From the square of opposition it should also be easy to see why the rhetorical "topic of invention" called "contraries" will not yield a valid argument: to disprove or discredit an A or an E proposition will not prove its contrary, which may also be false. So I doubt that "by proving contrarieties, truth is made manifest" can refer to that rhetorical strategy. It *might* refer to it; but it is not logically the case that if I can prove one of a pair of "contraries" false I have thereby proved its contrary true; if I prove No S is P false, I have not proved All S is P true. I doubt that "proving contraries" or "contrarieties" in this sense could make much truth "manifest," though it might help.

But truth might be "made manifest" by "proving contrarieties" in the sense of testing either or both of a pair of contrary propositions against the actual world by "material" rather than by "formal" criticism: given a proposition of the form All S is P, if I can "materially" show that in fact, in actual existence, Some S is not P, I thereby prove that All S is P is false. The same applies to No S is P and Some S is P. "All Mormons are opponents of same-sex marriage"? Here is one Mormon (and "some" means "at least one though not all") who does not oppose same-sex marriage. "No Mormons are in favor of gun control"? Here is one Mormon who does favor gun control. The examples are made-up, of course, yet such universal, all-or-none claims are not all that far-fetched in my experience of Mormon conversations on controversial topics.

Contraries as universals (All S is P and No S is P) look like "words of power" (see Moses 1:32, 35; 2:5) because they make all-encompassing claims. But it should be clear that, although Some S is P and Some S is not P look like "weak things" (1 Cor. 1:27) by comparison, materially verified subcontraries, in their contradictory relationships to opposed contraries (across the diagonals A–O and E–I), have power to "confound the things which are mighty" (1 Cor. 1:27), to expose the falsehood of universal affirmatives and universal negatives. If I show materially that Some S is P, that disproves No S is P; if I show materially that Some S is not P, that disproves All S is P. In this sense it does seem fairly clear that "by proving contrarieties"—that is, by testing either or both of a

pair of contraries against the actual world of my experience—"truth is made manifest"—at least in the negative sense that the falsehood of one or another universal has been shown. But also in the positive sense that I have verified—shown the material truth of—one or both of the subcontraries. Truth is indeed "made manifest" when I recognize such subcontrary truths. Maybe about as much truth as a mortal human being can attain, or bear, in the mortal world.

This is a rather narrowly limited and "technical" reading of Joseph Smith's remark, and does not begin to exhaust the readings that Gene England gave it. Yet it does seem that the logic of subcontraries is the logic of a good deal of our mortal experience; that we live in a world where a lot of true propositions should take the forms Some S is P and Some S is not P. That is not a small thing to learn during our mortal sojourn. Perhaps it is a modicum of the truth that might make us free; it might help us to become more just and merciful.

Some Implications and Applications, Cultural and Literary

Maybe we all—sometimes, or some of us all of the time—hanker for universals, for All S is P and No S is P. Perhaps for the assurance or security they seem to offer as "absolutes" in a contingent and chancy world, or for their apparent justification of our bias, our dismissal, our violence—listen to any pair of quarreling spouses flinging "You always" and "You never" at one another. The world of contraries, which "destroy" one another though both may be false, looks to me like a world at war, or a world playing out melodramas, power struggles. The world of subcontraries—Some S is P and Some S is not P—looks less warlike, maybe less melodramatic, since I and O logically can both be true, can coexist, and these also (if materially verified) are "absolute truths." (What if contrary I and You thought of ourselves, analogously, as I and O, subcontrary? Could we get along?) I do think the logic of subcontraries is the logic of a lot of our actual experience—Some but not All of it.

For there are, of course, a good many universal affirmatives and universal negatives. All "what goes up" is "what must come down"—at

least if what goes up does not achieve escape velocity or magically levitate (even then, it likely will "come down" somewhere, sometime). All human beings are moral agents (however impaired or constrained by circumstance). All motorists who exceed the posted speed limit are guilty of a misdemeanor—whether they are caught or not, and regardless of whether their speed caused no harm but only offended the majesty or dignity of the law. No man-made vehicle can achieve, much less exceed, the speed of light—unless (as in space fantasies) it has warp drive, hyperdrive, or what-have-you. No physical action can occur without an equal and opposite reaction—unless it's a push or a pull by a magically endowed superhero. No one who has not passed the bar exam can legally practice law. "There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him" (Mark 7:15). A lot of our true universals are scientific (at least within certain domains of "hard science") or juridical; some are definitional or stipulative. No irrational number can be expressed as the ratio of two whole numbers. The prosodic term "caesura" never applies to pauses at the ends of lines but only to pauses within lines. Every human child (so far) has two parents (somewhere).

Some universals, juridical in form, are ecclesiastical. For a long time in the LDS Church, no man of black African descent could hold the priesthood; after June 8, 1978, all worthy male members of the Church may hold the priesthood. No non-tithe payer can hold a temple recommend. No woman can hold the priesthood. Obviously, juridical universals, since we enact them (or most of them), are subject to amendment or ad hoc suspension. Indeed even the juridical universals enacted by God appear subject to amendment or suspension—by God, the agent who enacted them: to Moses and Israel, "Thou shalt not kill" (Ex. 20:13); to Nephi, "Slay him" (1 Ne. 4:12).

With a little attention, we can hear subcontrary language in the official discourse of the LDS community. In the October 2008 General Conference, Elder Quentin L. Cook remarked, "We know from the scriptures that some trials are for our good and are suited for our own personal development. We also know that the rain falls on the just and the unjust.

It is also true that every cloud we see doesn't result in rain."[35] For the first of these three sentences, Elder Cook cited D&C 122:7: "know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good." The first universal claim in that verse looks definitional: whatever befalls us will, by definition, "give [us] experience." But Elder Cook's more cautiously subcontrary "some trials" surely reflects an experiential awareness that not all experience necessarily does us "good," or at least we do not always manage to make "good" of it. He may have had in mind the conditional language of an earlier portion of the letter from Liberty Jail: "if thou endure it well" (D&C 121:8). The "if" acknowledges that sometimes some of us might not be able, or might not choose, to "endure it well."

In June 1829, according to David Whitmer's much later *Address to All Believers in Christ* (1887), when Joseph Smith had obtained the copyright for the Book of Mormon but could not yet raise funds for the publication and Hyrum Smith urged him to sell the copyright, the prophet used his seer stone to learn that if Hiram Page and Oliver Cowdery would go to Toronto, someone there would buy the copyright. The two men made the trip but came back empty-handed, and according to Whitmer, Joseph Smith remarked, "Some revelations are of God, some are of man, and some are of the devil."[36] (Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery include this anecdote of non-canonical subcontrary prophetic discourse in their biography of Emma Smith; Richard Bushman does not include it in his more recent Joseph Smith biography. Some scholars trust David Whitmer's account and some do not.)

Still, LDS scripture does include some striking instances of subcontrary language, the language of "Some but not All." "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. To some is given one, and to some is given another, that all may be profited thereby" (D&C 46:11–12).

35. Quentin L. Cook, "Hope Ya Know, We Had a Hard Time," Oct. 2008, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2008/10/hope-ya-know-we-had-a-hard-time?lang=eng.

36. Quoted in Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith* (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 30.

These verses from an 1831 revelation initiate a long list of gifts given to "some" and to "others" (13–25), a long series of particular statements, which closes with a universal: "And all these gifts come from God, for the benefit of the children of God" (26). In similar language, revelations given through Joseph Smith one and two years later make a subcontrary statement about faith itself: "And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom" (D&C 88:118; 109:7). Some in the Church have—or are given—faith, some not. And any or all can seek to learn "out of the best books words of wisdom." The community depends for its life on gifts, but no one has all the gifts; some have one, others have others, and all may nourish the community.

Within the church and its culture, some universals, usually held uncritically, might be called tribal presumptions. There's a good example in Doug Thayer's late novel *The Tree House.* When the young protagonist Harris Thatcher serves the first part of his LDS mission in postwar Germany, he and his German companion Elder Sturmer board in Giessen with a middle-aged non-member and non-religious German couple, the Meyers, a retired colonel and his well-educated wife who lost two young sons in the war. Over the months Harris lives in the Meyers' household, he finds, mostly during evening conversations with Frau Meyer that were occasions to practice his German, that "She had opened his mind as no other person ever had." And when he is to be transferred, he reflects that "He had come to love Mrs. Meyer. And perhaps he and Elder Sturmer had helped a little bit to ease the loss of her own two sons. Perhaps."[37] Later, riding the train from mission headquarters in Frankfurt to his new assignment in Hamburg, watching out the window as he passes through Giessen, something occurs to him: "He'd always thought you had to be religious to be good, but he now knew this was not true."[38] The logic of Harris's reflection on his experience goes something like this: I believed that all good people are religious people (All S is P), but I've learned that Mrs. Meyer is a good person and is not religious (Some S is not P); thus

37. Douglas H. Thayer, *The Tree House* (Provo, Utah: Zarahemla, 2008), 166.

38. Thayer, *The Tree House,* 171.

my previous belief, my "always thought" (as a universal claim), is proven by experience not to be true (materially falsified). One actual instance of a good person who is not religious disproves the universal claim (Harris's tribal presumption) that all good people are religious people. But of course both subcontraries can be true, and are, as Harris might have learned from some of his experiences growing up in Provo as well as some of his experiences in Germany: some good people are religious people; some good people are not religious people. Insofar as we may regard *The Tree House* as a coming-of-age novel or Bildungsroman, a moment like his recognition on the train to Hamburg is a modest but important increment in Harris's "getting of wisdom" or "understanding," and it might go toward making him a better missionary and a better Christian. "Might": not certainly will, but "perhaps": in the contingent chancy world that novels normally represent, the world of *subcontraries* where agents are free to act, there are no ironclad guarantees.

Literature—I'm fairly confident I can say, especially of literature since the rise of the novel or (interestingly, about the same time as the Restoration of the Gospel) the Romantic poets or the invention of the short story—tends to particularize, to be "particularistic" or just plain particular, and even particular in a fairly strict logical sense. The stories it tells are, in the words Flannery O'Connor used to paraphrase her neighbor down the road, about "how some specific folks *will* do, *will* do in spite of everything."[39] That is, if you will allow a theological pun, literature's "scandal of particularity." And that is why literature sometimes scandalizes some folks, some Mormon folks in particular, because some of us folks live in the tribal presumption that literature, as too many of us, Some but not All, have learned in school, is "universal." Indeed literary works are "universalizable," but some folks have misunderstood how this works, and so they suppose that Emma Bovary is not just Mme. Bovary but Everywoman, and Huck Finn not just "yours truly, Huck Finn" but Everyboy, or at least every American boy. They've learned to misread literature by translating or "uplifting" its particulars into "universals." By supposing

39. Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose* (New York: Farrar, 1977), 90.

that particular characters somehow "stand for" All this or No that, they commit the formal fallacy I mentioned earlier: they "generalize" from a logical particular to, or toward, a logical universal. They "superimplicate." So some folks might think that Harris Thatcher is Every Mormon Boy who gets drafted and goes to fight in a dirty unnecessary war against a rather spectral enemy (no less dangerous because of that enemy's spectral projection of its enemy). Or that the catastrophically failing young temple marriage in "Thanksgiving," the first story in Angela Hallstrom's novel-in-stories *Bound on Earth* (2008), is an emblem, or more precisely a synecdoche, of the author's judgment as to the most likely outcome of All temple marriages. And so on.

Some—all too many but not All—Mormon readers misread, all too often but not Always, in just this way. And they project a "specter" of the writer they misread in this way: he or she must not, cannot, be a real or authentic or orthodox or true or mainstream Mormon, the way I of course am. Some writers know that some—a few too many—members of their tribe do this, and some writers, when they know their work is likely to provoke such judgments, preemptively distance themselves from the Church. They "go inactive" or "apostatize" (Greek for "stand away") from it, often as a necessary insulation if they are to go on writing at all. Sometimes they have heard official or quasi-official warnings—if B continues to write this kind of fiction, or if C uses that kind of language in his plays, he will no longer, etc.—and heeded them. Writers and readers alike are struggling, and in such cases failing, to live well in the very difficult tensions of "proving contraries" or "contrarieties" within their tribe, and writers and readers alike may be making the difficulty more difficult by standing on contraries where subcontraries would offer better ground, and space for justice and mercy to meet and work together as they do in the creative redemptive economy of God.

Mormons of course are not the only tribe among whom such things happen. Read Philip Roth's long-ago (1963) essay "Writing About Jews" for his account of how some more-or-less official spokesmen of his tribe

responded to his first (and National Book Award-winning, when the writer was just twenty-six) book of fiction, *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959) and its stories about some Jews, and his complex, writerly, subcontrarian response to that: "The story is called 'Epstein' because Epstein, not the Jews, is the subject . . . ."[40] But back here at home, read Margaret Young's introduction to her second book of short stories, fourth book of fiction, *Love Chains* (1997), an essay I've thought too anxiously placed at the front of that book, or included in it at all, though I know, as Margaret knows and knew, just why she felt she had to write that essay titled "Sharks! Or, You Mean You Hold a Temple Recommend and You Wrote That?" "By nature," Margaret wrote, "we are in muddy waters. Though we may avoid dangers by keeping resolutely in shallow areas, the leap of faith implies risk and depth."[41] I suspect she remembers, and hopes we will remember, that "deep water [was] what" Joseph Smith was "wont to swim in" (D&C 127:2). Near the end of the essay she remarks sadly, "I have seen several friends leave the church because they couldn't deal with emergent ambiguities and were strangled by either/or dilemmas."[42] (I would gloss Margaret's "either/or dilemmas" as contraries: All vs. None.) And at the end she acknowledges, "So, though I believe in the Mormon vision, my fiction will always happen at the place where the vision collides with earthly, earthy reality—usually within the hearts of my characters," and declares her hope that her fiction "will suggest not only fear but grace."[43] (And here I would gloss "where the vision collides with earthly, earthy reality" as "proving contraries" by testing them materially, in experience.)

Mormon readers condemning their writers and artists (some wanting to see them "burn in hell," as I know one member of a Mormon audi-

40. Philip Roth, "Writing about Jews," in *Reading Myself and Others* (New York: Farrar, 1975), 140.

41. Margaret Young, "Sharks! Or, You Mean You Hold a Temple Recommend and You Wrote That?" in *Love Chains* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1997), ix.

42. Young, "Sharks!," xiv.

43. Young, "Sharks!," xv.

ence momentarily damned the filmmaker Richard Dutcher, then later apologized), or writers and artists leaving the Church to elude murderous either/or dilemmas: such things, I persist in believing, need not be, though I know we cannot always, perhaps cannot ever, entirely escape them in a contingent and subcontrary world of oppositions that "needs must be" if there is to be a world at all and if we are to be at all. We must endure them, must endure them as best we can—if possible, better than we have endured them so far. If we are indeed a "people of paradox" as Terryl Givens called us in a book's title[44] (echoing the American historian Michael Kammen?), let us live the paradoxes as well—as justly and mercifully—as we can. In better words than I can write right now, let me give Gene England the last or latest word, for now:

> Life in this universe is full of polarities and is made full by them. We struggle with them, complain about them, even try sometimes to destroy them with dogmatism or self-righteousness or a retreat into the innocence that is only ignorance, a return to the Garden of Eden where there is deceptive ease and clarity but no salvation. [. . .] Whatever it means that we will eventually see "face to face," *now* we can see only "through a glass, darkly (1 Corinthians 13:12), and we had better make the best of it.[45]

44. Terryl Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). Note that Kammen's *People of Paradox: An Inquiry Concerning the Origins of American Civilization* (New York: Knopf, 1972) won the 1973 Pulitzer Prize in history.

45. England, "Why the Church Is as True as the Gospel," in *Why the Church Is as True as the Gospel,* 3.

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