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Title Paradigms Crossed

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Abstract *Review of New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology* (1993), edited by Brent Lee Metcalfe.

Brent Lee Metcalfe, ed., *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993. xiv + 446 pp., no index. \$26.95.

Reviewed by Kevin Christensen

Paradigms Crossed

In the sciences the [paradigm] testing situation never consists, as puzzle-solving does, simply in the comparison of a single paradigm with nature. Instead, testing occurs as part of the competition between two rival paradigms for the allegiance of the scientific community.¹

This hefty volume of essays attacks the historicity of the Book of Mormon. To justify their claims, the authors cite apparent anachronisms and historical implausibilities and criticize historicist Latter-day Saint writers.² Whereas the usual clergy-backed anti-Mormon volume depends on shallow reading and recycled arguments, this book attempts close readings and new arguments provided by cultural insiders. Some of these authors reserve grounds for belief in the spiritual value of Mormonism, but most of the book reads like a post mortem on an anonymous cadaver—we get lots of grisly details, but no life, no light, and no hope. However, in contrast to the dismal view of the Book of Mormon offered in

¹ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 145.

² To be fair, Melodie Moench Charles and Deanne Matheny avoid direct comment on the historicity of the Book of Mormon in their contributions, and at times they give notice to alternate theories. (Other authors in the volume refer to Matheny's critique of John Sorenson as though she had disproved the Book of Mormon; see, for example, Hutchinson [p. 11].) Mark Thomas tries to conclude his essay in an open-ended manner.

New Approaches, other perspectives continue to affirm that the subject not only lives, but provides essential light and hope.

To shift to the metaphor used in Alma 32, most of the *New Approaches* authors blame the poor harvest on the seed (that is, the Book of Mormon). I propose to look at the nature of the soil in which these authors plant the seed, the care taken for the seed's nourishment, the patience and desires evidenced by the particular approaches taken, and comparisons with other approaches that report a more impressive harvest.

I intend to show that the conclusions of these authors depend on highly selective methods, narrow perspectives, and brittle background expectations. We shall also observe that the rivalry between prophets and skeptics, as developed in *New Approaches*, has a long history. That is, while the packaging and specific applications are relatively new, the approach is ancient.

I should briefly summarize *New Approaches*. It consists of ten essays which, according to the editor's preface, attempt "to expand appreciation³ of Mormon scripture through critical analysis" (p. x). The first essay in *New Approaches*, "The Word of God Is Enough," by Anthony Hutchinson, begins by saying that "Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints should confess in faith that the Book of Mormon is the word of God but also abandon claims that it is a historical record of the ancient peoples of the Americas" (p. 1). In "Book of Mormon Christology," Melodie Moench Charles argues that modern Mormonism does not follow the Book of Mormon's concept of God. Mark Thomas's essay, "A Rhetorical Approach to the Book of Mormon," compares Nephite sacramental prayers with nineteenth-century controversies and concludes that "the eucharistic prayers themselves are in the form of a post-Reformation epiclesis containing a covenant" (p. 77).

Two essays devote themselves to criticizing the work of believing scholars. Deanne G. Matheny's "Does the Shoe Fit? A

³ Compare the definition of "appreciation" from the *World Book Dictionary* (Chicago: Doubleday and Company, 1981), 101, with the contents of *New Approaches* for some insight into the editor's intent: "Appreciate: 1. the quality or condition of being thankful for; gratefulness; approval. 2. the fact of valuing highly; sympathetic understanding. 3. an estimate of the value or quality of something. 4. favorable criticism. 5. a rise in value."

Critique of the Limited Tehuantepec Geography” argues against the plausibility of Mesoamerican correlations proposed by F. Richard Hauck and John L. Sorenson. Edward H. Ashment’s “‘A Record in the Language of My Father’: Evidence of Ancient Egyptian and Hebrew in the Book of Mormon” criticizes the work of several Latter-day Saint apologists, and claims that there is “no direct evidence to support the historical claims of the Book of Mormon” (p. 374).

The rest of the essays expressly depict the Book of Mormon as nineteenth-century fiction. The essay “Anti-Universalist Rhetoric in the Book of Mormon,” by Dan Vogel, argues that the application of rhetorical criticism, while it did not have “the primary goal” (p. 47) of investigating the historicity of the Book of Mormon, nevertheless raises questions about it. Stan Larson’s essay, “The Historicity of the Matthean Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi,” concludes that “there is no evidence to substantiate the view that the Book of Mormon records a real visit by the resurrected Jesus to the place called Bountiful in the Book of Mormon” (p. 133). David P. Wright’s essay, “‘In Plain Terms That We May Understand’: Joseph Smith’s Transformation of Hebrews in Alma 12–13,” claims that Joseph Smith borrowed themes from Hebrews to create the Melchizedek material in Alma 13, and suggests that to understand the scriptures, we should adopt the critical method, which generates critical conclusions (p. 213). John Kunich’s “Multiply Exceedingly: Book of Mormon Population Sizes” argues against the historicity of the Book of Mormon based on his reading of the population demographics. Finally, the editor caps the book with his own contribution, “The Priority of Mosiah: A Prelude to Book of Mormon Exegesis,” which depicts “Smith as the narrative’s chief designer” (p. 433).

At times the *New Approaches* authors’ observations may be interesting and provocative, and some of their criticisms merit response and consideration. FARMS has already provided formidable replies to each of these essays, in the form of a 566-page *Review*.⁴ At times, my essay supplements the previous FARMS

⁴ See the entire issue of *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994). Stephen Thompson reviewed both *New Approaches* and the FARMS response in “‘Critical’ Book of Mormon Scholarship,” *Dialogue* 27/4 (Winter 1994): 197–206. Thompson sees *New Approaches* as a “piece of generally solid

response, and occasionally draws upon it for illustrations. But even while addressing specific issues, I am most interested in illuminating the general structure of the ongoing debate about the Book of Mormon. And because this debate structure is illuminated by the Book of Mormon, particularly by Alma 32, I hope to make a real contribution to our appreciation of Latter-day Saint scripture.

My comments are structured not to provide a systematic response to each author, but rather to illustrate a pattern by which believing Mormons (particularly nonspecialists) can deal constructively with this kind of book. I argue that the paradigm of the Book of Mormon as a nineteenth-century fiction does not provide a better alternative for Mormons.

My response involves three themes:

1. The nature of paradigms and paradigm debate.⁵
2. How limits on human perspective—such as temporality, selectivity, subjectivity, and context—function to exaggerate the weight of the arguments in these essays.
3. Concluding thoughts on the enterprise.

scholarship which contributes to a better understanding of the nature and origin of this book of scripture" (ibid., 197). He agrees that *New Approaches* has flaws, points out a few in Hutchinson, Charles, and Ashment, and concedes that the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 6/1* addresses other flaws, but he provides no illustrations of the FARMS contribution. Why not? His major objections to the FARMS response depend heavily on an appeal to secular consensus, that is, on the priority of dominant paradigms. He provides a few technical criticisms of Sorenson, Gee, Welch, and Tanner, takes aim at Anderson's paradigm of the New Testament, and criticizes *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 6/1* for tone. The complaints about tone are ironic, considering Thompson's blanket assertion that FARMS authors lack freedom.

⁵ My discussion follows Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* and Ian Barbour's *Myths, Models, and Paradigms* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), which examines the discussion generated by Kuhn's book and applies Kuhn's observations to religious experience. Elsewhere I have observed that Alma 32 expresses an epistemology identical to Kuhn's (*Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 2* [1990]: 215–19). This essay treats the subject in greater detail.

Section 1

Paradigms and Paradigm Debate

Paradigms differ in more than substance, for they are directed not only to nature but also back upon the science that produced them. They are the source of the methods, problem-field, and standards of solution accepted by any mature scientific community at any given time.⁶

Opponents in the debates about Mormon history and scripture typically criticize each other for having preconceptions and methods that influence their approach to the evidence.⁷ But merely to point out an opponent's assumptions, though it raises issues, neither disproves the opposition's case, nor settles the case for the defense. The current debate needs discussion of the means by which we decide why one set of assumptions and methods should be preferred over another. The assumptions and methods of each group of scholars derive from their respective paradigms. Thomas Kuhn's work describes not only the nature of paradigms, but the means by which one scientific paradigm supplants another.

For Kuhn, scientific paradigms are defined by "standard examples of scientific work that embody a set of conceptual, methodological and metaphysical assumptions."⁸ In the sciences, according to Kuhn, such works as Aristotle's *Physica*, Newton's *Principia* and *Opticks*, and Franklin's *Electricity* define "the legitimate problems and methods of a research field."⁹ They rep-

⁶ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 103.

⁷ For example, compare Gary Novak's essay "Naturalistic Assumptions and the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30/3 (Summer 1990): 23-40, with Anthony Hutchinson, "The Word of God Is Enough: The Book of Mormon as Nineteenth Century Scripture," 10, and Edward Ashment, "'A Record in the Language of My Father': Evidence of Ancient Egyptian and Hebrew in the Book of Mormon," 374. Or consider the essays in George D. Smith's *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), or the letters columns in *Dialogue* and *Sunstone* from issue to issue, and various reviews in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*.

⁸ Barbour, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms*, 8.

⁹ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 10.

resent unprecedented achievements that attract researchers away from competing theoretical frameworks.

1. Paradigms *unify* a scientific community around “a group-licensed way of seeing,”¹⁰ a shared set of standards and rules for scientific practice.¹¹

2. Additionally, these paradigms are *extensible*, mapping the known in satisfying detail, but “sufficiently open-ended to leave all sorts of problems for the redefined group of practitioners to resolve.”¹²

3. Finally, paradigms provide the *background* of expectation against which anomaly appears.¹³

Kuhn notes that the “more precise and far-reaching a paradigm is, the more sensitive an indicator it provides of anomaly and hence an occasion for paradigm change.”¹⁴ Thus we need to pay close attention to background expectations, especially those background expectations held or attacked as if they were creeds.

For example, consider David Whitmer’s background expectations as he objects to the changes in the Book of Commandments: “As if God had changed his mind after giving his word. No, brethren! God does not change and work in any such manner as this.”¹⁵

Whitmer clearly outlines the premise that underlies his distress over the changes, a premise that is precise and far reaching and therefore highly sensitive to anomaly. But at this point, we need to invoke what I call the “Mote-Eye” rule (from Matthew 7), and ask whether Whitmer is, in this instance, seeing clearly. How would Whitmer’s premise explain the story of Abraham’s arrested sacrifice of Isaac? Also, notice the variant wording of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 compared to the wording in Deuteronomy 5. Then compare these differences in what Whitmer would

¹⁰ Ibid., 189.

¹¹ Kuhn notes that scientific communities without shared paradigms tend to display chronic debate over fundamentals, *ibid.*, 48.

¹² Ibid., 10.

¹³ Ibid., 65.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, quoted in Karl Sandberg, “Modes of Belief: David Whitmer, B. H. Roberts, and Werner Heisenberg,” *Sunstone* 12/5 (September 1988): 11.

regard as "written in stone" with the changes in the Doctrine and Covenants.¹⁶

Also, contrast Whitmer's premise with the formula, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, . . . but I say unto you," used by Jesus several times in Matthew 5:19-48, and Joseph Smith's remark: "a man would command his son to dig potatoes and saddle his horse, but before he had done either he would tell him to do something else. This is all considered right; but as soon as the Lord gives a commandment and revokes that decree and commands something else, then the Prophet is considered fallen."¹⁷

Clearly, Whitmer's rigid premise cannot account for these conspicuous examples of divine and prophetic behavior. If Whitmer had accepted these particular examples as paradigmatic, and built his premises from these observations, he could have arrived at a more tolerant and robust set of background expectations. The Mote-Eye rule shows that on this point, however attractive the premise, however sincere his belief, and however logical his argument from that belief, Whitmer was not seeing clearly.

Joseph Smith's visions and the Book of Mormon performed a paradigm-defining function as "standard examples" and "unprecedented achievements" that attracted a community of believers to Mormonism. And in Book of Mormon studies, Hugh Nibley's efforts for the Near Eastern side and John Sorenson's efforts for the Mesoamerican side have defined paradigms for the most significant groups of believing researchers today.

Metcalfe, by concentrating these efforts in a single volume and by including attacks on historicist scholars (such as Nibley, Sorenson, Welch, Tvedtnes, and others), obviously intends that *New Approaches* should provide this kind of paradigm-defining example for modern students of the Book of Mormon. Hence, one goal of the project is to attract scholars away from the kind of

¹⁶ Discussed in Robert J. Woodford, "How the Revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants Were Received and Compiled," *Ensign* 15 (January 1985): 26-33, and Melvin J. Peterson, "Preparing Early Revelations for Publication," *Ensign* 15 (February 1985): 14-21; also compare Jeremiah 36:28, 32, wherein after the king burns a written revelation, the prophet writes "all the former words" and "added besides unto them, many like words."

¹⁷ Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake: Deseret Book, 1973), 194.

work that FARMS produces and towards a secular approach to scripture.

The Limits of Verification and Falsification

The proponents of competing paradigms are always at least slightly at cross purposes. Neither side will grant all the non-empirical assumptions that the other needs in order to make its case. . . . The competition between paradigms is not the sort of battle that can be resolved by proofs.¹⁸

Much paper is wasted over the issue of whether this or that point has or has not been proven. Any academic claim that conclusions derive from direct observation of facts (or the lack thereof) should be tempered by the recognition that "all data are theory-laden."¹⁹ As Nibley observes, "Things that appear unlikely, impossible, or paradoxical from one point of view often make perfectly good sense from another."²⁰ The notion of proof only makes sense within a given paradigm. In comparing paradigms, we confront the limits of verification and falsification.

Issues for Paradigm Verification

Paradigms cannot be *verified* for two reasons:

1. *Future discoveries may conflict with present theory.* For example, in her essay in *New Approaches*, Melodie Moench Charles comments that "the Qumran documents . . . show no evidence of detailed prophecies [*sic*] mentioning Jesus or matching his life or mission" (p. 93 n. 22). I suspect that Ms. Charles com-

¹⁸ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 148; see Daniel C. Peterson, "Text and Context," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 525: "It seems to me that the dispute between defenders of the Book of Mormon and the traditional truth claims of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, on the one hand, and those who would revise or redefine those truth claims, on the other, is as much a clash of opposing world views as a quibble over this or that piece of evidence."

¹⁹ N. R. Hansen quoted in Barbour, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms*, 95.

²⁰ Hugh Nibley, *Old Testament and Related Studies* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1986), 65.

pleted her essay before the release of the latest Qumran fragments that John Tvedtnes refers to as “recently released fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls” that “support the view of the Book of Mormon that a knowledge of a savior-messiah was had in ancient Israel.”²¹ This example supports some specific claims of the Book of Mormon, but we should acknowledge that sometimes the turn of circumstance has obliged defenders of the faith to change their arguments. Even so, such examples as the Aston’s *In the Footsteps of Lehi*²² and John Sorenson’s work on the Mesoamerican setting of the Book of Mormon provide examples to show that such updating can be enlightening rather than disillusioning.

2. *Another theory may explain present evidence equally well.* Consider the implications of the famous drawing of the Old/Young woman in figure 1. Because the artist creates unresolvable ambiguities, we can interpret the drawing in two very different ways. The drawing compels us to awaken to the possibility that anything that we observe can be understood in a different way. My choice of title for this essay provides another example; in this case, two words, *Paradigms Crossed*, suggest multiple meanings that complement, rather than contradict, one another. That is not to say that any interpretation is equally valid, either for the picture or for my title—each consists of specific evidence that must be explained. But more than one interpretation may account for the same evidence. In the case of the picture, an observer who sees *only one possibility demonstrates either perceptual or imaginative blindness*. Some critics may denigrate the more attractive possibility, perhaps because they have been disappointed in the past, or perhaps because lasting beauty is too much to hope for. But by doing so, they demonstrate ideology rather than perception.

In *New Approaches*, Mark Thomas, less dogmatic than most in *New Approaches*, kindly acknowledges three possible ways to account for his findings (p. 77). Melodie Moench Charles also makes a notable effort to highlight alternate understandings of

²¹ John Tvedtnes, review of Wesley P. Walters, *The Use of the Old Testament in the Book of Mormon*, in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 231.

²² Warren and Michaela Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi: New Evidence for Lehi’s Journey across Arabia to Bountiful* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994).



Figure 1. Old woman or young lady?

some issues (pp. 94–95). On the other hand, Edward Ashment knows that certain biblical paraphrases recur in clusters in the Book of Mormon text because Joseph Smith repeated those phrases while they were “fresh in his mind” (pp. 368–69). Of course, the clustered phrases could just as easily recur for a Nephi or a Mosiah while fresh on their minds. Ashment’s choice of words clearly demonstrates how data become “theory-laden.”

Issues for Paradigm Falsification

If paradigms cannot be verified, can they be *falsified*?

In practice, as Ian Barbour observes, paradigms resist falsification because “a network of theories and observations is always

tested together. Any particular hypothesis can be maintained by rejecting or adjusting other auxiliary hypotheses.”²³ Some adjustments to such auxiliary hypotheses strengthen the overall paradigm. For example, Kepler adjusted the assumptions of the Copernican theory of planetary motion by arguing for elliptical orbits rather than circular orbits. The rival Ptolemaic theory explained otherwise anomalous planetary motions by surmising epicycles. While the assumption of epicycles preserved the usefulness of the Ptolemaic theory for several generations, comparison with Kepler’s assumptions makes it plain that not all adjustments are created equal. Whereas Kepler’s adjustments led to his generally applicable laws of motion, the *ad hoc* notion of epicycles applied only to particular problems and had little justification other than necessity. The course of the Copernican Revolution shows that the “accumulation of anomalies” or of “ad hoc modifications having no independent theoretical basis cannot be tolerated indefinitely. An accepted theory is overthrown not primarily by discordant data but by an alternative theory.”²⁴

The antihistoricists tend to resist any adjustments in target hypotheses concerning Book of Mormon historicity,²⁵ the priority of “traditional” views of geography and cultures,²⁶ and potential language translation and text transmission factors.²⁷ This

²³ Barbour, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms*, 99.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁵ For example, according to Hutchinson, the Book of Mormon’s authority “evaporates as soon as the book’s absolute ancientness is compromised in the least degree” (p. 12).

²⁶ Note how John Kunich attempts to fend off Sorenson and Nibley by appealing to B. H. Roberts (pp. 260–61). Kunich dismisses John Sorenson’s “When Lehi’s Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1 (Fall 1992): 1–34, as “imaginative musings.” Also, note how Deanne G. Matheny cites Dan Vogel’s irrelevant observation that “it is absolutely clear that Joseph Smith and the early Mormons associated the Book of Mormon with the Moundbuilder myth” (p. 271). My review of Dan Vogel’s *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon* in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 2 (1990): 214–57, argues that the Mound Builder myth contributed to the misreading of the Book of Mormon by the early Saints, but that the Book of Mormon diverges from the Mound Builder myth in profound ways.

²⁷ For example, Stan Larson (p. 132) insists that “The Book of Mormon cannot be exempted from such textual criticism by emphasizing that translation inevitably introduces elements from the translator’s environment.”

resistance to adjustments in auxiliary assumptions about the Book of Mormon makes for an easier, stationary target and artificially adds weight to the criticisms these authors make.

This is why Joseph Smith opposed creeds, not because they are false teachings,²⁸ but because “creeds set up stakes, and say, ‘Hitherto thou shalt come, and no further’; which I cannot subscribe to.”²⁹ The message of the First Vision is not that a true creed had come to replace the false ones, but that the heavens had opened. You don’t need to worship at a cistern when you’ve got a fountain (see Jeremiah 2:13). Creeds tend to create rigid background expectations which become “abominable” by promoting static authoritarianism that resists further light and knowledge.³⁰ This is not to say that we should bow without resistance to every wind of doctrine that happens to blow by (Ephesians 4:11–16), but that resistance to new ideas should be just as carefully considered as acceptance of such (Acts 10:9–28). Too often, creeds buy present conformity (as when the Inquisitors came to chat with Galileo about astronomy, torture, and correct thinking) with the coin of future faith (such as those for whom the Galileo incident becomes the defining myth of the relationship between science and religion).³¹ Creeds make for spiritual vulnerability in

²⁸ “It dont [*sic*] prove that a man is not a good man because he believes false doctrine”; Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center Monograph, 1980), 183–84.

²⁹ *TPJS*, 327.

³⁰ See Jeremiah 17:5–13; also Luke 5:37–39; John 7:38; 2 Nephi 28:29–30; D&C 1:24–28. When creeds are intact in any community, whether scientific, political, or religious, the question of questions becomes “Do you preach the orthodox religion?”

³¹ Kuhn points out that the history of science includes many instances of intolerance and resistance to new theories among scientists. The point with regard to the Galileo incident is that it dramatizes tensions in a paradigm debate, not necessarily an essential relation between science and religion. Notice that the religious figures in the trial of Galileo and in the Scopes Trial do not truly represent Mantic thinking; that is, the issue was not between Sophic science and Mantic revelation, but between Sophic science and traditional authority and interpretation; see Hugh W. Nibley, “Three Shrines: Mantic, Sophic, and Sophistic,” and “Paths That Stray: Some Notes on the Sophic and Mantic,” in *The Ancient State: The Rulers and the Ruled* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 311–478.

those whose cisterns are too brittle to change shape and too fragile to take shocks.³²

In *New Approaches*, for example, while replacing sound methodology with rhetorical judo, Stan Larson makes a creed of the pure falsification hypothesis by quoting Hugh Nibley as saying the following:

We can never prove absolutely that the Book of Mormon is what it claims to be; but any serious proven fault in the work would at once condemn it. If I assume the Book of Mormon to be fraudulent, then whatever is correct in it is merely a lucky coincidence, devoid of any real significance. But if I assume that it is true, then any suspicious passage is highly significant and casts suspicion on the whole thing, no matter how much of it is right. (p. 133)³³

Immediately after this quotation, Larson narrows this claim of pure *falsification* to the historical claims for 3 Nephi 12–14 (p. 133). He then turns his argument against the reality of the visit of the resurrected Jesus to Bountiful on grounds of there being no *verification* (*ibid.*), having just disqualified 3 Nephi as evidence by claiming that “Smith copied the KJV blindly, not showing awareness of translation problems and errors in the KJV” (p. 132).

Consider the care with which Larson makes his case up to that point, and which he subsequently continues in his appendix, and notice the crucial lapse here, where any decisive significance for his observations must rest. In 1953, Nibley’s argument illustrated the notion of falsification as practiced in textual criticism. At the time, Nibley compared falsification to the problem of identifying a counterfeit bill, wherein the nature of an authentic bill is well defined. But at this point the methodological parallel to testing the Book of Mormon breaks down. For falsification to work perfectly in the case of a counterfeit bill, the qualities of an authentic bill must be fully known. But the qualities of an authentically historic

³² See Jeremiah 2:13 on the problems with cisterns, and compare Luke 5:37–39 for the parable of the wine bottles.

³³ Citing Hugh Nibley, “New Approaches to Book of Mormon Study: Part 1, Some Standard Tests,” *The Improvement Era* 56 (November 1953): 831.

Book of Mormon, translated by inspiration, are nowhere near as well defined as those of an authentic bill.

This limit in the logic of falsification, especially in the case of general theories—that the requisite knowledge of authenticity is always incomplete—underlies the editorial change that Larson alludes to when he says that “all but the first clause has been deleted” (p. 133) in *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*.³⁴

Looking to the 1989 version, we find the following adjustment to Nibley’s argument, highlighting the differences from the 1953 original as quoted by Larson:

*Thus, while we can never prove absolutely that the Book of Mormon is what it claims to be, we are justified in the outset in assuming that it is what it claims to be. If one assumes that it is true, its features at least become testable.*³⁵

The change is strictly in line with the practical limits of falsification, as noted by Kuhn and Barbour, as well as in keeping with Nibley’s more representative argument that “It is not enough to show . . . that there are mistakes in the Book of Mormon, for all humans make mistakes; what they must explain is how the ‘author’ of the book happened to get so many things right.”³⁶

If we drop Larson’s weak notion of falsification and start asking the sorts of questions that should be asked during a paradigm debate, the significance of his evidence dwindles abruptly. For example, are the problems that Larson describes as the domain of textual criticism, those nuances regarding “the same distinctive addition, peculiar error, or the same alternate reading” (p. 129), really the most significant problems to have solved? Can such questions even be addressed without sure knowledge of the parameters of an “inspired” translation?

As is typical for *New Approaches*, Larson ignores significant matters in which the Book of Mormon gets it right. His theory of “blindness” and “plagiarism” accomplishes nothing to explain

³⁴ Hugh Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), 56, emphasis added.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Hugh W. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 122.

the insights of the 3 Nephi text that John Welch, Hugh Nibley, Richard L. Anderson, and others discuss.³⁷

As should be obvious in reading his eight examples, most of the differences have little or no significance for meaning (pp. 121–27).³⁸ Larson's case depends on the questionable claim that the Book of Mormon, purportedly an "inspired" (not an academic) English translation of an ancient New World text, should take us back to the best available Greek text of an Aramaic original: "Where the Book of Mormon could offer a fresh translation directly from the valuable fourth-century inscription of a first-century document, one finds a reaction to the late and corrupted text of the KJV" (p. 132).

However, the academic definition of translation current in Joseph's day in the 1798 *Encyclopedia Britannica* gave the three "fundamental rules for translations" as: "1. That the translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original. 2. That the style and manner of the original should be preserved in the translation. 3. That the translation should have all the ease of the original composition."³⁹ Joseph Smith is on record as describing an admittedly imperfect translation as "sufficiently

³⁷ Compare John W. Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 91–112, on such matters as the absence of antipharisaical, antigentile, and anti-Pauline elements and the restoration of temple context; Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 407–34, on the parallels to the forty-day literature in general and to a specific text; Richard L. Anderson, "Imitation Gospels and Christ's Book of Mormon Ministry," in *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter Day Saints*, ed. C. Wilfred Griggs (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1986), 53–107, on contrasts with pseudo-gospels and parallels to the "peshet" teaching; Donald Parry, *The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1992), for distinctive poetic forms; and Christensen, review of Vogel, *Indian Origins*, 247–56, and Kevin Christensen, "'Nigh unto Death': NDE Research and the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/1 (Spring 1993): 1–20, on the authentic near-death behavior and "Year Rite" patterns that supplement Welch.

³⁸ Compare the reviews by John Tvedtnes and John W. Welch in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 8–50, 145–86. See Welch for a discussion of the one change that makes a significant difference, the *without a cause* present in the King James Version of Matthew 5:22 and absent in the Book of Mormon 3 Nephi 12:22.

³⁹ Quoted by D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), 151.

plain to suit my purpose as it stands" (D&C 128:18). According to the definition of *translation* active in the nineteenth century, the "blindness" to Old World manuscript nuance that Larson belabors does not matter.

In effect, Larson rests his case on differences which do not apply to translation by nineteenth-century standards, appealing instead to expectations that he imposes based on his twentieth-century training. He makes a creed of his academic training and refuses to make adjustments in his expectations for the Book of Mormon.

Confronting Self-Reference in Paradigm Debate

To the extent . . . that two scientific schools disagree about what is a problem and what is a solution, they will inevitably talk through each other when debating the relative merits of their respective paradigms. In the partially circular arguments that regularly result, each paradigm will be shown to satisfy more or less the criteria that it dictates for itself and to fall short of a few of those dictated by its opponent.⁴⁰

Critics and defenders of the Book of Mormon often appeal to facts. But as we have seen, during paradigm testing it pays to be skeptical of appeals to the "plain facts," because theory influences observation with the result that all data are to some degree theory-laden. Ian Barbour insists on three points that must be accepted by all concerned (if opposing sides expect to communicate at all).

1. Although proponents of rival theories inevitably talk through each other to a degree, adherents "of rival theories can seek a common core of overlap . . . to which both can retreat."⁴¹

Notice, however, that this "retreat" to a common core of overlap is done as an aid to communication, not as a prerequisite for seeing truth. Joseph Smith talked about how even God adapts himself to our capacity to understand.⁴² That does not mean that

⁴⁰ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 109–10.

⁴¹ Barbour, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms*, 113.

⁴² *TPJS*, 162.

knowledge of truth is circumscribed by our ability to find common ground and consensus. It simply means that when addressing a particular audience, if you expect to communicate, you might have to retreat from certain preferred, even useful and possibly true, assumptions. On the other hand, apart from the problem of communicating our beliefs, our ability to find further truths depends on our willingness to risk certain assumptions and explore their possibilities (for example, John 7:16–17; 8:31–32; Alma 32). We do not need to retreat from our preferred assumptions when doing our research, or living our lives, or in communicating with audiences that share those assumptions.

2. Comprehensive theories are highly resistant to falsification, but observation exerts some control over theories.⁴³

3. There are no rules for choice between paradigms but there are criteria of assessment independent of particular paradigms.⁴⁴

In comparing general theories (such as Newton's and Einstein's physics, or different Book of Mormon geographies), neither of which is proven or provable because neither "solves all the problems it defines,"⁴⁵ scientists can only ask which of the two theories better describes nature,⁴⁶ and which problems are more significant to have solved.⁴⁷

In making a paradigm choice in religious matters (such as between Mormonism and atheism, or historical and environmental views of the Book of Mormon), Barbour argues that the decision is more subjective than in the hard sciences, but this difference involves the degree, not the kind, of subjective valuations. Regarding faith decisions, Barbour remarks that "There are no *proofs*, but there are good *reasons* for judgments which are not simply matters of personal taste or individual preference."⁴⁸

43 Barbour, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms*, 113.

44 *Ibid.*

45 Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 110.

46 *Ibid.*, 147; cf. Alma 32:34–35.

47 *Ibid.*, 110; cf. Alma 32:27.

48 Barbour, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms*, 146.

Values Applied in Evaluating Paradigms

The resort to shared values rather than to shared rules governing individual choice may be the community's way of distributing risk and assuring the long-term success of its enterprise.⁴⁹

Kuhn demonstrates that choice between paradigms depends largely on the application of values, rather than the application of rules.⁵⁰ Whereas rules would determine the choice, values can only constrain it. As Kuhn emphasizes, these values can be applied differently by people who agree on them. The most important values that Kuhn and Barbour identify include the following:

- Accuracy of Key Predictions
- Comprehensiveness and Coherence
- Fruitfulness
- Simplicity and Aesthetics
- Future Promise

Observe that Alma asks for those who will experiment, even with "no more than desire to believe," to apply these same values until they can "give place to a portion of my words" (Alma 32:27).

Other values influence theory choice, such as a teacher's nationality, or prior reputation, and various social and biographical experiences.⁵¹ Even though these sorts of things have less to do with what is real, they do function as randomizing or constraining factors for individuals within a group. My discussion concentrates on the more significant values described by Kuhn and Alma.

Accuracy of Key Predictions (cf. Alma 32:26–27, 35)

Probably the single most prevalent claim advanced by proponents of a new paradigm is that they can solve the problems that have led the old one to a crisis. . . . Claims of this sort . . . succeed if the new paradigm

⁴⁹ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 186.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 153–59, 185.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 153.

displays a quantitative precision strikingly better than its older competitor.⁵²

Kuhn suggests that the accuracy of key predictions is not a static objective measure but:

1. comparative between competing paradigms and nature,
2. relative to the importance the community assigns to the problems that each paradigm solves or fails to solve, and
3. weighted by the degree of precision attained by each theory.

Each of the *New Approaches* writers attempts to elevate his or her pet concern to this “key” problem status. For Metcalfe, the key problem involves nuances of the Book of Mormon text as considered in light of the “Mosiah first” theory of translation. For Wright, the problem is the apparent anachronistic relation between Alma 13 and Hebrews. For Kunich, the problem is Book of Mormon population statistics. For Vogel, the problem involves parallels between nineteenth-century debates about universal salvation and Alma’s discourse to Corianton about restoration. But we do not need to accept their conclusions regarding such problems at face value. We should instead ask: What makes an anomaly “that normal science [or faith] sees as a puzzle” into what “can be seen from another viewpoint as a counterinstance and thus as a source of crisis?”⁵³ There is no comprehensive answer. (Part of what makes any issue “key” involves the door that you intend to open.) But Kuhn does highlight three issues:

1. Issues for Fundamental Generalizations

Sometimes an anomaly will clearly call into question explicit and fundamental generalizations of the paradigm.⁵⁴

⁵² Ibid., 153–54. Alma encourages an “experiment” regarding key issues for his audience (where to worship, and how to know whether to believe him; Alma 32:5, 26), predicts the results of an experiment in spirituality (Alma 32:27), leads them through that experiment, and remarks, “Is this not real? . . . It is discernible” (Alma 32:35).

⁵³ Kuhn, Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 79.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 79.

Think about how the “problem of evil” poses such an obstacle for theologies which presume an absolute omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent God. According to Antony Flew, the problem of evil is “perhaps the most powerful of all skeptical arguments,” one that appeals to “the clearest and most direct minds, striking straight and decisively to the heart of the matter.”⁵⁵ McClosky adds, “We must conclude from the existence of evil that there cannot be an omnipotent, benevolent God.”⁵⁶

For Mormons, this “most powerful of skeptical arguments” has no power. Why? Because we conceive of Deity as being surrounded by intelligences, elements, and conditions which he did not create from nothing (D&C 93:29; Abraham 3:15–28). Non-Mormon theologians such as Alfred North Whitehead and William James have advocated similar ideas under the headings of Process Theology and Finitism.⁵⁷ Discussing Whitehead’s process model, Barbour writes:

If the classical ideas of omnipotence and predestination are given up, God is exonerated of responsibility for natural evil. . . . Suffering is inevitable in a world of beings with conflicting goals. Pain is part of the price of consciousness and intensity of feeling. In an evolutionary world, struggle is integral to the realization of greater value.⁵⁸

Finitism, whether expressed as Mormonism or as Process Theology, resolves a host of troubling paradoxes.⁵⁹ Those who resist

⁵⁵ See essays by H. J. McClosky, “God and Evil” (1960), and Antony Flew, “Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom” (1955), reprinted in *Critiques of God*, ed. Peter Angeles (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1976), 203–37.

⁵⁶ McClosky, in *ibid.*, 223.

⁵⁷ Sterling McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1965), 105–6, discusses the different approaches taken to arrive at the model—that is, philosophical analysis versus Joseph’s unargued, commonsense pronouncements.

⁵⁸ Barbour, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms*, 168–69.

⁵⁹ See discussions in *ibid.*, 161–70; McMurrin, *Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion*, 101–9; Blake Ostler, “The Mormon Concept of God,” *Dialogue* 17/2 (Summer 1984): 65–93; and Garland E. Tickemyer, “Joseph Smith and Process Theology,” *Dialogue* 17/3 (Autumn 1984): 75–86; cf. also Floyd

the implications of Finitism do so on the skeptical side, because they want to preserve the power of the "best" skeptical argument, and on the believing side because they refuse to sacrifice a belief in omnipotence in spite of the theological quandaries that it drags along.

Similar issues regarding an author's controlling premises and resistance to potential solutions abound in *New Approaches*. For example, John Kunich frets at length about Book of Mormon population issues and assumes that Lehi's and Mulek's peoples must supply all North and South American populations. It says something for Kunich's infatuation with the population problem that he goes on for twenty-nine pages before even attempting to validate his starting assumptions, and even then, he ignores several contrary arguments. Ironically, he concludes: "Our study must be honest, open, . . . and not limited by preconceived conclusions" (p. 265).

What Kunich sees as a roadblock to plausibility, Sorenson sees as a doorway to a new understanding.⁶⁰ Rather than stepping through the doorway, Kunich labors to save the problem from the solution. Kunich's defense amounts to appealing to the authority of B. H. Roberts (p. 261), without considering the basis for the opinions Roberts expressed,⁶¹ providing some weak readings of a few scriptures (pp. 261-64), and concocting some unfulfilled conditions for plausibility (pp. 262-64).

Sorenson's reading of the prophecies regarding "other nations" is far superior to Kunich's (p. 261).⁶² In support of his belief that the Book of Mormon cannot account for non-Lehite/

Ross, "Process Philosophy and Mormon Thought" *Sunstone* 7/1 (January-February 1982): 17-25, with a reply by Sterling McMurrin, 25-27.

⁶⁰ See Sorenson, "When Lehi's Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?" 1-34; cf. also the superb essay by James E. Smith, "Nephi's Descendants? Historical Demography and the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 255-96.

⁶¹ At least for the purposes of his *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, Elder Roberts assumed that the Book of Mormon described a hemispheric geography, Jaredite extinction, and no other migrations besides the Lehite and Mulekite. Cf. John W. Welch, "Answering B. H. Roberts's Questions" (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1985), 41 pp.

⁶² Sorenson, "When Lehi's Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?" 6-8.

Mulekite populations in the Americas, Kunich quotes 2 Nephi 1:8–9, “It is wisdom that this land should be kept as yet from the knowledge of other nations; for behold, many nations would overrun the land.”

What is the extent of Lehi’s reference to the land in this passage? John Tvedtnes says that “In the Bible, the word *land* most often refers to the land occupied by the Israelites.”⁶³ A recent article by Russell Ball shows that the Book of Mormon usage of the terms *the land*, and even *the whole earth*, is often very localized.⁶⁴

Who and where are the other nations? In *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, Sorenson wrote that “Most Latter-day Saint readers have supposed that the ‘other nations’ were the European ‘Gentiles’ (1 Nephi 13:1–3) who overran the land after Columbus’s discovery, but does it make sense that the fate prophesied by Lehi would be delayed until 1,100 years after Cumorah?”⁶⁵

Lehi’s promise that his children would possess the land unmolested was conditional on their keeping the commandments (2 Nephi 1:9). The next verses say that “when . . . they shall dwindle in unbelief” (not “long afterwards,” but “when”), the Lord “will bring other nations . . . and he will take away from them the lands of their possessions, and he will cause them to be scattered and smitten. Yea, *as one generation passeth to another*, there shall be bloodsheds” (2 Nephi 1:10–12).

Second Nephi 5:2–5 reports that soon after the death of Lehi—the passing of a generation—Nephi’s brothers plotted against his own life. Nephi and those he called “his people” fled the land. Despite the report that those who initially left “were those who believed” in God (2 Nephi 5:6), such passages as 2 Nephi 32:7 and 2 Nephi 33:1–3 suggest strongly that Nephi’s people had problems of their own. For example, Jacob reports on

⁶³ See Tvedtnes’s review in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, 28.

⁶⁴ See Russell Ball, “Three Days of Darkness among the Nephites,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/1 (1993): 115–19.

⁶⁵ John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985), 84. Also, Sorenson, “When Lehi’s Party Arrived, Did They Find Others There?” 7.

the necessity for "diligent" labor among them on the part of the prophets (Jacob 1:7) even before Jacob 2:15 describes the beginning of extreme tendencies. Prior to the departure of Nephi's people, the Lamanites had already acted in a role as "a scourge to [Nephi's people], to stir them up in remembrance of me" (2 Nephi 5:25). Although neither Nephi nor Jacob provides details, Jacob 1:10 describes Nephi as having "wielded the sword of Laban" in defense of his people. Thus we have no record of the conditions for blessing being fully kept, and significant information suggesting that the covenant curse was in effect almost from the time of the death of Lehi. That is, immediately after the death of Lehi (the passing of that generation), we see the loss of lands and scattering (2 Nephi 5:5), and smiting and bloodsheds (2 Nephi 5:25, 34, Jacob 1:10). What about the "other nations"? Alerted by the work of Sorenson and others, we have only to look with eyes that see.

Other than to assert that the Jaredites became extinct (pp. 261, 264), Kunich has never dealt with Nibley's arguments in favor of Jaredite survivors.⁶⁶

What does the Book of Mormon mean by "destroyed"? The word is to be taken, as are so many other key words in the book, in its primary and original sense: "To unbuild; to separate violently into its constituent parts; to break up the structure." To destroy is to wreck the structure, not to annihilate the parts.⁶⁷

Consider Kunich's requirement that the Lehtes win "total domination over a host of people" (p. 262). Actually, all that plausibility requires is a population influx over time sufficient to contribute to population growth.

Kunich calls for a detailed account of the "discovery and absorption of the natives" (p. 262). A key example of Kunich's limited imagination and careless reading comes in the phrase "If the Nephite encounter [actually, it was a Mulekite encounter, see Omni 1:21] with a single Jaredite survivor, *Coriantumr*, was suffi-

⁶⁶ See Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 237-63. Also see Mosiah 8:12, in which Ammon seeks "knowledge of a remnant of the people who have been destroyed."

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 239.

ciently important to warrant inclusion in the sacred record . . .” (p. 264, emphasis added). Perhaps the Nephite record keepers found Coriantumr sufficiently important both because he was royalty and because he was mentioned on an engraved stone that they obtained from Zarahemla’s people (Omni 1:21), and on the twenty-four plates (Ether 12–15). The Nephite record keepers found Zarahemla sufficiently important because he was descended from Zedekiah, another royal line mentioned in relation to prophecy on their own sacred records (Omni 1:14). Sorenson’s article gathers considerable evidence that others were around, not all of them royalty and connected with individuals named in the scriptures, and therefore not “sufficiently important” for detailed discussion with respect to genre and narrator priorities (1 Nephi 19:6).

Add to Sorenson’s recent work the following observations:

Yea, the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me [Lehi], and to my children forever, and *also all those* who should be led out of other countries. (2 Nephi 1:5)

Notice that from the start, possession of the promised land is not just conditional, as we have seen, but also nonexclusive. Note also that there is no requirement that the “other countries” be located in the Old World.

Before explaining about the covenant for the land, Lehi reminds his children that, besides themselves, the land contains “all those who should be led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord” (2 Nephi 1:5). This remark comes before any reported contact with the Mulekites or the several indications of Jaredite remnants. Why does Lehi make this point about others being led to the land? He very likely knew about them. Nephi’s vision of the promised land, granted before the ocean voyage, may refer to these others:

And it came to pass that the angel said unto me: Look, and behold thy seed, and also the seed of thy brethren. And I looked and beheld the land of promise; *and I beheld multitudes of people*, even as it were in number as many as the sands of the sea. (1 Nephi 12:1)

Reading this passage as describing non-Lehite multitudes existing in the New World before the voyage makes Lehi's remarks about "other nations" (2 Nephi 1:8, 11) in relation to the covenant curse more meaningful. Lehi taught that a law cannot function without an attached punishment (2 Nephi 2:13), and if the "other nations" referred to in the promised land covenant would not arrive until Columbus's voyage, how would the covenant curse have any immediate significance? It makes sense to suppose that from the beginning Lehi knows that his people are not alone, and he wants his sons to be sobered by the fact. An immediate expectation of other nations on the part of Nephi and Lehi, possibly even interaction with small groups of natives early on (who could signify other nations without representing such), makes the whole story more consistent and meaningful.

I, Nephi, did take my family, and also Zoram and his family, and Sam, mine elder brother and his family, and Jacob and Joseph, my younger brethren, and also my sisters, *and all those who would go with me.* (2 Nephi 5:6; cf. 5:14)

Again, the passage can easily be understood to include native populations, friendly to the new arrivals. Because the focus of the record is deliberately exclusionary, we need to avoid setting unreasonable conditions when we confront the ambiguity inherent in references to "others" at the start of the Lehite experience in the New World.

And all those who were with me did take upon them to call themselves the people of Nephi. . . .

And if my people desire to know the more particular part of the history of my people, they must search mine other plates. (2 Nephi 5:9, 33)

I see plausible indications for mixing populations from the very beginning of the Lehite migration. Kunich's insistence on a *Robinson Crusoe* level of detail belongs to another genre of writing. This next passage makes more sense if we assume native populations with different cultural backgrounds.

Many of my people . . . know not concerning the manner of prophesying among the Jews.

For I, Nephi have not taught them many things concerning the manner of the Jews. (2 Nephi 25:1-2)

Sam, Zoram, Jacob, Joseph, their families, and several of the women mentioned in 2 Nephi 5:6 certainly had a predominance of experience in Jewish culture, as well as belief in and personal experience with the revelations given by Lehi and Nephi, which came in the Jewish modes. Nephi says that he has “not taught [his] children after the manner of the Jews” (verse 6), but that exclusion to his children does not restrict the implications in verse 1, which clearly refers to cultural ignorance among “many” of his people. Notice that Nephi emphasizes that he has “made mention to my children [not necessarily all his people] concerning the judgments of God . . . according to all which Isaiah hath spoken.” We may have different levels of instruction. The preexistence of native populations with alternative cultural backgrounds seems to be a reasonable way to account for an ignorance of the manner of Jewish prophecy, other Jewish manners, skepticism about the gospel, and a reluctance to fully embrace Nephi’s teachings. Hutchinson protests Sorenson’s “adoptionist” theology (p. 11), which is necessary to reconcile some traditional understandings of the extent of promised blessings among indigenous New World peoples, but such a notion is scriptural.

As many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord. (2 Nephi 30:2)

Kunich protests that if these others were around that “Certainly . . . their religious conversion . . . [and] the religion centered nature of Nephite society” (p. 263) requires that the Book of Mormon provide an account of a mass conversion. But “Nephite” society often is only a simplified term for dealing with a complex social group, not just one extended family of palefaces that attend the same church.⁶⁸ And far from securing a “mass conversion,” Nephi very early refers to his “people” as being “stiffnecked” (2 Nephi 25:28), and mourns the “unbelief, and

⁶⁸ See Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting*, 54.

the wickedness, and the ignorance, and the stiffneckedness of men" (2 Nephi 32:7). Such a complaint makes more sense if the people involved included locals who resisted the kind of mass conversion that Kunich views as an implausible necessity.

2. *Anomaly Related to Specific Practical Applications*

An anomaly without apparent fundamental import may evoke crisis if the applications that it inhibits have a particular practical importance.⁶⁹

Stan Larson describes the "again" at the end of 3 Nephi 14:2 as being unsupported by ancient Old World manuscripts of Matthew 7:2. He says that "Welch downplays the difference among the variants at Matthew 7:2 by saying that the difference is 'negligible,' but it is often such fine distinctions that are clues in textual criticism" (p. 123).

That is, it is Larson's training in textual criticism that determines the significance of the "again" cited here and the other variants he cites as examples. For any specialist, however, the danger exists of the loss of perspective, the temptation to treat the world like a nail because your tool is a hammer. The applicability of the tool depends not on its availability, but on the situation at hand. If Joseph's "inspired" translation does not suit the tool, or if the tool itself has design problems,⁷⁰ the best contribution Larson could make is to show us what not to expect from an inspired translation. Other tools and studies tell us things about 3 Nephi that contradict Larson's "blindness"-and-"plagiarism" hypothesis (p. 132).

Other frustrated "practical applications" that have been pressed into service as tests of Joseph Smith's prophetic call involve such things as frustrated business dealings, like the failure of the Kirtland Bank during the Panic of 1837 that led many to

⁶⁹ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 82.

⁷⁰ See Royal Skousen, "Critical Methodology and the Text of the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 125: "The hollowness of New Testament textual criticism becomes fully apparent when we realize that virtually all the specific readings in the reconstructed New Testament text are nonfalsifiable and based upon assumptions that are contradicted by established examples of manuscript copying."

reject him, or the sort of collapsed pyramid scheme that occasionally captures headlines in the Utah newspapers. They can involve personal conflicts with individuals, such as that between Abner Cole and Joseph Smith when Cole attempted to publish the Book of Mormon in his newspaper.⁷¹ They can involve conflicts growing out of complex social issues, such as church and state conflicts in Utah over prayer in schools or seminary released time, or various feminist and academic issues. They can grow from struggles with personal sexuality, or from the pain of victimization in such matters. The danger in all of these situations comes from attempts to base ultimate truth and commitment decisions on such peripheral issues. None of it has anything to do with the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. While complex social issues should not be oversimplified and feelings in such matters should not be trivialized (hearts can die, pierced with deep wounds), it is still essential to think through which issues are fundamental for the faith, and which are peripheral.

3. *Research Puzzles That Currently Resist Solution*

The development of normal science may transform an anomaly that had previously only been a vexation into a source of crisis.⁷²

B. H. Roberts's *Studies of the Book of Mormon*⁷³ presents a number of research problems that puzzled Elder Roberts in his reading of the text in comparison to scientific opinion in the 1920s. With the passage of time, most of these puzzles have found solutions.⁷⁴ John Kunich's essay quotes Roberts in *New Approaches* (p. 261), but ignores Welch's paper, which dealt with all the points that Kunich tries to establish by using Roberts.

Deanne Matheny's essay in *New Approaches* critiques John Sorenson's and F. Richard Hauck's work on Book of Mormon

⁷¹ Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 96.

⁷² Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 82.

⁷³ B. H. Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

⁷⁴ See John W. Welch, "Finding Answers to B. H. Roberts's Questions and 'An Unparallel.'" "

geography with respect to puzzles about “metallurgy, tents, plants, animals, and sites” (p. 320) that she does not regard as solved. For example, she claims that those in favor of Sorenson’s model must “argue that the directionality system is not what the plain meaning of the terms would suggest because otherwise the model will not work” (p. 279). Sorenson responds that “She has failed to grasp the significance of my extensive data showing that Mesoamerican and all other ancient directional systems were constructed on different cultural principles than ours or that Nephite direction usage can be reasonably interpreted in light of what we know from antiquity.”⁷⁵

Solving puzzles is the business of normal science. But on this point, Matheny and Sorenson do not operate in the same paradigm. Their understandings of what constitutes a problem and what constitutes a solution are different. Some of the disagreement has to do with different bodies of knowledge with which they work (such as Sorenson’s evidence for tents, which Matheny overlooked); some with different basic assumptions, notably Matheny’s idea that there is such a thing as “the plain meaning of the words” (p. 321); and some with their different evaluations of the Book of Mormon’s “fit” (Matheny discusses only problems, no solutions); Sorenson sees a considerable fit despite open issues—he questions her “dominant concern with ‘problems’ ” and her neglect of “the sizable body of cultural information in the Book of Mormon which patently agrees with Mesoamerican culture.”⁷⁶

When confronted by different conclusions about such research puzzles during the ongoing paradigm debate, the best way to get perspective is to start asking all the questions that apply to a paradigm debate. Rather than focusing on a single problem, or the opinion of a particular authority figure, ask, Which paradigm is better? Which problems are more significant to have solved?

The Book of Mormon itself claims that the key problem to have solved is testimony (Moroni 10:3–5), but even with that settled, your knowledge is “not perfect” (Alma 32:36). Similarly,

⁷⁵ John L. Sorenson, “Viva Zapato! Hurray for the Shoe!” in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 299–300.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 318.

Kuhn states that a new paradigm "has seldom solved more than a few of the problems that confront it, and most of these solutions are still far from perfect."⁷⁷ Kuhn refers to the existence of unsolved problems in any research paradigm as providing the "essential tension"⁷⁸ that surrounds all inquiry. Scientists must be able to "tolerate crisis" in order to work on unsolved problems.⁷⁹ "If a paradigm is ever to triumph it must gain some first supporters, men [and women] who will develop it to the point where hardheaded arguments can be produced and multiplied."⁸⁰ Likewise, Alma determines that you must "nourish the word . . . by your faith with great diligence, and with patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof" (Alma 32:41).

Comprehensiveness and Coherence (Alma 32:34)

The new paradigm must promise to preserve a relatively large part of the concrete problem-solving ability that has accrued to science through its predecessors.⁸¹

The scientist aims at the comprehensive unification of separate laws, the systematic interrelation of theories, the portrayal of underlying similarities in apparently diverse phenomena.⁸²

One of the most persuasive aspects of Einstein's theory was that it seemed to contain Newton's theory as a special case. That is, it not only explained anomalies in Newton's physics, but it also explained why the old paradigm had been as successful as it was.

⁷⁷ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 156.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁸² Barbour, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms*, 92. Notice that Alma starts with a recognition of his audience's current beliefs, and addresses key concerns (Alma 32:5, 9), adds to their understanding, following implications and making connections, and then says that through the word "your understanding doth begin to be enlightened, and your mind doth begin to expand" (Alma 32:34).

Here, the authors in the Metcalfe volume fall short. By and large, they do not explain the successes of the historicist paradigm.⁸³

Metcalfe's own essay provides a good example of this. He writes about King Benjamin's oration as though it were a nineteenth-century revival, claiming that "the apex of the narrative . . . depends . . . fundamentally on a nonbiblical pattern contemporary with Smith" (p. 421 n. 31). He sees the four-step pattern as "(1) Revival Gathering (Mosiah 2); (2) Guilt-Ridden Falling Exercise (4:1-2a); (3) Petition for Spiritual Emancipation (v. 2b); and (4) Christological Absolution and Emotional Ecstasy (v. 3)" (ibid.).

Metcalfe then remarks that "some have attempted to assert comparisons between Lehite religious awakenings and ancient Hebrew rituals" (p. 421 n. 31), referring to, but neglecting the strengths of, valuable studies by Welch, Nibley, Ostler, Ricks, and Tvedtnes,⁸⁴ and ignoring other studies such as those by Welch on the farewell address form⁸⁵ and on the complex interwoven chias-

⁸³ The closest that the *New Approaches* essays come to admitting that anything exists to support the Book of Mormon are David Wright's acknowledgment that the Book of Mormon contains "notable matters of style" and unidentified "striking parallels" to antiquity, and Ed Ashment's claim that the lack of "direct evidence" has compelled Mormon apologists to argue from "parallels" (p. 374). While they do not constitute proof, don't the elaborate parallels deserve an explanation? On the other hand, if the question is, "How well do the apologists explain the successes of *New Approaches*?" the answer can be found by listening in on the ongoing discussion.

⁸⁴ See John W. Welch, "King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals" (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1985); Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 295-310; Blake Ostler, "The Book of Mormon as an Expansion of an Ancient Source," *Dialogue* 20 (Spring 1987): 66-123. Stephen D. Ricks, "The Treaty-Covenant Pattern in King Benjamin's Address (Mosiah 1-6)," *BYU Studies* 24 (Spring 1984): 151-62, John Tvedtnes, "King Benjamin's Speech as a Feast of Tabernacles," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2:197-237.

⁸⁵ John W. Welch and Daryl R. Hague, "Benjamin's Speech: A Classic Ancient Farewell Address," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 120-22.

tic structures,⁸⁶ and Thomasson on kingship.⁸⁷ He defends the priority of his reading by asserting that nineteenth-century camp meetings were modeled after the Israelite Feast of Tabernacles. He also leaves us to wonder why the ancient studies provide a far more comprehensive set of parallels to the ancient convocations than does comparison with the nineteenth-century sources. Nibley's chapter alone, "Old World Ritual in the New World" in *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, includes a thirty-six-step pattern, versus a four-step pattern in Metcalfe.⁸⁸

Reluctant to confront directly the undeniably more comprehensive account by "traditionalists," Metcalfe shifts his ground and anchors his account to a "key" anomaly, claiming that traditionalists need to show "neophytes of any culture B.C.E." experiencing a "'revival' conversion."⁸⁹ This begs the question of

⁸⁶ John W. Welch, "A Study Relating Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon to Chiasmus in the Old Testament, Ugaritic Epics, Homer, and Selected Greek and Latin Authors" (M. A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1970).

⁸⁷ Gordon C. Thomasson, "The Complex Symbolism and Symbolic Complex of Kingship in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/1 (1993): 21-38.

⁸⁸ Welch, "King Benjamin's Speech," 25 n. 42, summarizes Nibley's points as:

the proclamation, transfer of kingship, assembly around the temple, taking a census, bringing firstlings and offerings, giving thanks for deliverance, dwelling in tents around the temple, the king speaking from a tower, the call or *silentium* and teaching of the mysteries, hailing the king, homage by the people to the king (which Benjamin rejects), cleansing from sin, acclaiming the king, recounting the story of creation, the king's ritual farewell and descent into the underworld (which Benjamin refers to as a literal event soon to occur), choirs, ensuring succession to the throne, promises of peace and prosperity, the preservation of records, God preserving his people, promises of never-ending happiness, divination of the future, a day of judgment, falling to the ground before the king, seeing all men as equals, the closing acclamation, making of a covenant, receipt of a new name, begetting of the human race, concern about standing in the proper place, having a seal, recording names in a register, appointing priests to remind people of their covenant, and dismissal.

⁸⁹ Interested parties might gain useful perspectives on "revival conversion" from the discussion of rebirth in Stanislav and Christina Grof, *Beyond Death: The Gates of Consciousness* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 23-31.

whether “‘revival’ conversion” is an appropriate description of the Mosiah account, sidesteps serious consideration of the more comprehensive studies assembled by FARMS, and ignores the potential effect of translation factors on the language used.⁹⁰

Fruitfulness (Alma 32:36–41)

Particularly persuasive arguments can be developed if the new paradigm permits the prediction of phenomena that had been entirely unsuspected while the old one prevailed.⁹¹

Despite Hutchinson’s attempt to discredit Sorenson for assuming historicity (p. 10),⁹² there are sound methodological reasons for making historicist assumptions. The most obvious reason is, if you do not risk the assumption, you don’t do the work. If you don’t do the work, you don’t see the fruit. A survey of the classic examples of “fruitfulness” in Book of Mormon study should include, among other things, John Welch’s discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon and Allen Christenson’s subsequent discovery of the form in Mayan texts.⁹³ Neither discovery, of course, proves historicity, but nevertheless both discoveries represent phenomena consistent with historicity which any successful theory must eventually account for. Both discoveries represent phenomena that no one but a believer would ever look for. Regardless of the assumptions that provoked the work, such discoveries should be considered with due respect by any accounting of the Book of Mormon.

In *New Approaches*, the findings offered by Metcalfe on nuances of a Mosiah-first translation, Dan Vogel on anti-Universalist rhetoric, and Mark Thomas on the forms of the sacramental covenant purport to be consistent with a nineteenth-century

⁹⁰ Even Melodie Moench Charles refers to Nibley’s and Ostler’s discussions of possible translation factors (94–95).

⁹¹ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 154.

⁹² Ashment makes the same argument (p. 374).

⁹³ John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 10, 1969, 69–84. See Allen J. Christenson, “Chiasmus in Helaman 6:7–13,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 230–35.

origin. This represents the skeptic's side of the "fruitfulness" process.

With rival schools of thought offering the fruits of their labors, we are faced with contradictory findings. As individuals, we have to weigh the significance according to the various values under consideration in this article. Only David Wright among the contributors to *New Approaches* ever alludes to the need to weigh contrary findings. (In a footnote he refers to "some striking coincidences between elements of the ancient world and some notable matters of . . . style" [p. 165 n. 2], but he regards them as less "key" than his anachronisms. I would prefer that he identified what even he concedes is so striking and notable so that I could get a better idea of how he operates the balance scale.)

However, in my view, theories which assume historicity have the advantage when I must weigh contrary findings. As a modern translation of an ancient prophetic document, the Book of Mormon can easily accommodate various translation and transmission factors. The ancient world contains more unknowns than the nineteenth century, and therefore, conclusions regarding what existed in the distant past must be more tentative. We need only consider the revolution in biblical studies subsequent to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the more recent revolutions in Mesoamerican studies pertaining to the decipherment of the Maya glyphs, and the recognition of the prevalence of war in Mayan culture. Such revolutionary events in scholarship leave us room to expect further enlightening discoveries. The view of the Book of Mormon as a nineteenth-century document has much more to explain in order to accommodate the presence of ancient-seeming aspects. Given the unusual circumstances of its origins, why should there be something, and not nothing?

Simplicity and Aesthetics (Alma 32:28, 42)

Simplicity is sought both as a practical advantage and as an intellectual ideal. This includes not only simplicity of mathematical form, conceptual simplicity, and a

minimum of independent assumptions, but also an aesthetic element.⁹⁴

Consider two simple descriptions of how the Book of Mormon came to be. Joseph Smith provided one:

Moroni, who deposited the plates in a hill in Manchester, Ontario County, New York, being dead and raised again therefrom, appeared unto me, and told me where they were, and gave me directions how to obtain them. I obtained them, and the Urim and Thummim with them, by the means of which I translated the plates; and thus came the Book of Mormon.⁹⁵

In *New Approaches*, Larson offers “plagiarism” (p. 132) as a simple explanation of the similarity between the King James Version and 3 Nephi 12–14. Unfortunately for Larson, this initial simplicity begins to grow extra heads as soon as we consider the kind of subtle nuances in 3 Nephi 12–14 that John Welch discusses in his chapter on “The Differences between the Sermons” in *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount*.

Although, to the casual observer, most of them seem insignificant or meddlesome, a closer examination shows that most are quite meaningful and subtle. The differences are consistent with the introduction of the Sermon into Nephite culture, with its covenant-making context, and with dating the text to a time before when the suspected factional alterations or additions were made to the Sermon on the Mount.⁹⁶

And as soon as we move to the surrounding context of the sermon in 3 Nephi, we get extra arms and legs that “plagiarism” does nothing to explain. If Joseph worked blindly, why the complex parallels to ancient year-rites, the accurate details of catastrophic earthquakes and volcanoes, the inclusion of the Hebrew *peshet* teaching, and the themes of the early Christian forty-day and *descensus* literatures? If Joseph plagiarized, where did he get

⁹⁴ Barbour, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms*, 92. Alma talks about the word being good, delicious, precious, sweet, and pure.

⁹⁵ *TPJS*, 119.

⁹⁶ Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple*, 112.

the stuff? Even apart from the weakness of its explanation, the moral implications of Larson's use of the word "plagiarism" deserve reconsideration in light of the lack of nineteenth-century standards of citation,⁹⁷ as well as the lack of a citation standard within the scriptures. Does it bother Larson that none of the New Testament citations of Old Testament prophets specifically mentions the Septuagint translators, whose effort the authors obviously quoted?

For aesthetics and the Book of Mormon, recall that Alexander Campbell, on February 7, 1831, claimed that "It has not one good sentence in it, save the profanation [*sic*] of those sentences quoted from the oracles of the living God."⁹⁸ If that were so, we should not encounter Donald Parry's *The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted According to Parallelistic Patterns*, or other literary studies of the Book of Mormon by Eugene England, John Welch, Angela Crowell, Donald Parry, Alan Goff, Bruce Jorgenson, and Richard Rust, all of which highlight the aesthetic sophistication and beauty of the Book of Mormon. The recent volume on *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*⁹⁹ adds more weight for the naysayers to carry.

In *New Approaches*, Anthony Hutchinson attempts to argue against the notion of historicity on aesthetic grounds. That is, he paints an ugly picture of what a historic Book of Mormon does, and implies that a nineteenth-century Book of Mormon is somehow more attractive. Hutchinson relates the historicity of the Book of Mormon to "authoritarian approaches to church governance" (p. 17).¹⁰⁰ The frontispiece of the book makes an appeal to aes-

⁹⁷ See Dean Jessee, "Has Mormon History Been Deliberately Falsified?" Mormon Miscellaneous pamphlet No. 2.

⁹⁸ Quoted in Francis Kirkham, *A New Witness for Christ in America*, vol. 1, 4th ed. (Salt Lake City: Utah Printing, 1967), 297.

⁹⁹ *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Salt Lake: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994).

¹⁰⁰ Doctrine and Covenants Section 20 sets out the rules for Church governance and the standards for Church membership. As an explanation of authoritarian personality types, which are neither exclusive to nor excluded from the Latter-day Saint Church, I would suggest the wonderfully enlightening books on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI™), such as Otto Kroeger and Janet Thuessen, *Type Talk* (New York: Delta Books, 1988); David Keirse and Marilyn

thetics by claiming that the message of the Book of Mormon can “sometimes be obscured by polemical use of the book as a proof-text for elitist and institutional agendas over personal religious experience.”¹⁰¹ Hutchinson prefers that we no longer use the Book of Mormon “as an apologetic argument or sign of the uniqueness of Mormonism and warrant of its authority and truthfulness” (p. 1). He claims that “maintaining Book of Mormon antiquity” supports such un-Christian-like behaviors as “absolute religious certainty” (p. 14; cf. Alma 32:35–36) and such fundamentalist ideas as “inerrancy” (cf. Title Page, 1 Nephi 19:6, and so forth),¹⁰² “literalism” (cf. 2 Nephi 11:2–4; Moses 6:63), support of “authoritarianism” (cf. Alma 30:7, 11; D&C 121:41, 43), and “false certitude, self satisfaction in one’s own sectarian advantage” (p. 15; cf. Alma 31:12–30).

Bates, *Please Understand Me* (Del Mar, CA: Prometheus, 1984); Sandra Hirsh and Jean Kummerow, *Life Types* (New York: Warner, 1989); and Isabel B. Myers, *Gifts Differing* (Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologist’s Press, 1980). MBTI measures preferences (akin to handedness) for Extraversion or Introversion, for gathering information through Sensing or Intuition, for deciding based on Thinking or Feeling, for living with Judgment or Perception. Pay special attention to the contrast in values between the ESTJ (13% of the population, and a large majority of the managers) and INTJ and INTP types (about 1% each, but highly concentrated in academia). Indeed, to me it seems that the tensions between institutional leaders and academics often involve type preference issues, and that a common recognition of this notion could do much to improve communication strategies in both directions, reduce tensions, and increase appreciation of the “gifts differing” (cf. Romans 12:4–8).

¹⁰¹ *New Approaches* itself is a polemical proof-text for the elitist agendas of the authors and publishers. Were I to simply bear my testimony in response, that is, to pit my personal religious experience over their footnotes and degrees, would that deter Mr. Metcalfe and company from their intent?

¹⁰² Hutchinson’s charge of “inerrancy” makes no sense in terms of Mormon scripture and tradition. In *New Approaches*, Hutchinson (an allusion, p. 11), Kunich (citing Roberts, p. 261), and Matheny (p. 270) at various times appeal to tradition or authorities to stabilize the target and thereby defend their arguments. In a recent article, “The Continuing Journey,” in *Sunstone* 16/5 (July 1993): 13, David Wright complains that “Sorenson and his readers need not put much stock in Joseph’s views about geography: a prophet’s words that tradition values are set aside with relative ease.” This complaint is ironic because Wright is arguing that we make a far more profound adjustment. Why retain some of Joseph’s speculative views about geography while rejecting the historicity of the Book of Mormon?

You can find such attitudes among the Mormons, and become obsessed with them if you like, but as the references I've added show, Hutchinson commits a lamentable misdiagnosis in perceiving the Book of Mormon as causing what it plainly attempts to cure. He would do well to read Eric Hoffer's classic *The True Believer*, which describes eruptions of rigid and dogmatic individuals among various secular and religious groups all through history.¹⁰³ For the negative results of their attitudes we cannot scapegoat the Book of Mormon, but must look to other causes. In the end, Hutchinson's attempt to paint belief in historicity as aesthetically unpleasant fails for me because his painting is inaccurate.

Future Promise (Alma 32:41)

The issue is which paradigm should in the future guide research on problems many of which neither competitor can yet claim to resolve completely. A decision between alternate ways of practicing science is called for, and in the circumstances that decision must be based less on past achievement than on future promise. . . . A decision of that kind can only be made on faith.¹⁰⁴

The disagreements about the Book of Mormon represented by *New Approaches* and the FARMS response is not just between rival groups of scholars, but between competing world views. The issues are: Which community, if any, has authority? Should prophets take their license for seeing from the community of secular scholars? Must we have secular academia's permission to

¹⁰³ Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951). The strength of the "True Believer" mode is the zeal such persons possess, with an accompanying willingness to sacrifice all things, if necessary, for the cause. Hoffer claims that no mass movement ever succeeded without such people. The weaknesses of the mode derive from its rigidity, the tendency to polarized thinking, and brittle background expectations. True believers can demonstrate what Joseph Smith referred to as a zeal that is not according to knowledge. A number of the most vocal critics of the Church are former true believers, who, when their too-brittle faith shatters, become true antibelievers.

¹⁰⁴ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 157–58.

believe? Is personal spiritual experience valid? Can we ignore scholarly and scientific opinion and survive as a faith? Can a believer apply the tools of scholarship in the service of faith? What kind of faith should we have? Should we take seriously the Book of Mormon as a testament of Christ? Where do we go to exercise our faith in Christ most appropriately? What, if anything, in this life deserves our commitment? Where is the greatest future promise?

From the beginnings of Mormonism, the Book of Mormon has always been the defining phenomenon that both sets us apart and holds us together. So it comes as a surprise that Hutchinson denounces the notion of the Book of Mormon as “a sign of the uniqueness of Mormonism and warrant of its authority and truthfulness” (p. 1). Hutchinson seems troubled by the notion of “prophets who know not only God’s will but also know the past, [and] the future” (p. 14). Never mind that Book of Mormon prophets, especially Alma, take care to remind the reader that they do not know everything that God does, and that they are often left to their own reasoning and opinions (for example, Alma 7:8). Hutchinson complains that a historic Book of Mormon “supports the authority of” prophets in the believing community (and I agree), that such authority is necessarily authoritarian (but I disagree), and that those who support those authorities relieve themselves of “responsibility for decisions and for heeding the voice of Jesus” (p. 15, and here I disagree completely). The best quotes on the topic of individual responsibility and Church authority come from Joseph Smith and Brigham Young.

We deem it a just principle . . . that all men are created equal, that all have the privilege of thinking for themselves upon all matters relative to conscience. Consequently, then, we are not disposed, had we the power, to deprive any one of exercising that free independence of mind which heaven has so graciously bestowed upon the human family as one of its choicest gifts.¹⁰⁵

I do not wish any Latter-day Saint in this world, nor in heaven, to be satisfied with anything I do, unless the

¹⁰⁵ *TPJS*, 49.

Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, the spirit of revelation, makes them satisfied.¹⁰⁶

How often has it been taught that if you depend entirely upon the voice, judgment and sagacity of those appointed to lead you, and neglect to enjoy the Spirit for yourselves, how easily you may be led into error, and finally be cast off to the left hand?¹⁰⁷

Hutchinson depicts Mormonism as something that is closed, rigid, and unpromising if it retains belief in the Book of Mormon. I see Mormonism as open-ended, flexible (if frustrating at times), and promising because of the Book of Mormon. He could cite anecdotes to support his view, as I can to support mine. But which of our examples should be paradigmatic? It is rather like asking which story about King David most clearly illustrates the principles of faith and righteousness—that with Goliath, or that with Bathsheba? If you really know what the gospel is, both stories have their time and place.

The rivalry between prophets and skeptics as developed in *New Approaches* has a long history. The Book of Mormon gives us in Alma 30 the enlightening debate with Korihor. In *The Ancient State*, Nibley's essays on the Sophic and Mantic provide an expansive perspective, especially with his discussion of *Oedipus Rex* and the trial of Socrates, and the lengthy notes comparing modern and ancient arguments, showing the timelessness of certain issues.¹⁰⁸ In *The World and the Prophets*, Nibley showed the transition from Mantic revelation to Sophic scholasticism in early Christianity.¹⁰⁹ Daniel Peterson calls our attention to similar

¹⁰⁶ JD 3:45.

¹⁰⁷ JD 8:59; for contrast in leadership styles, see an article by Carl Sagan in *Parade Magazine* (7 February 1988): 6, in which he quotes Rudolf Hess from 30 June 1934: "One man remains beyond all criticism, and that is the Führer. This is because everyone senses and knows: He is always right, and he will always be right. The National Socialism of us all is anchored in uncritical loyalty, in a surrender to the Führer."

¹⁰⁸ Nibley, *The Ancient State*, 311–478.

¹⁰⁹ Hugh W. Nibley, *The World and the Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987).

rivalry and transition in Islam.¹¹⁰ Contemporary with Joseph Smith, Ralph Waldo Emerson in his surrender to academia falls into the same pattern—literalism sundered by contemporary scholarship,¹¹¹ and then the unhappy seeker turning to mysticism¹¹² and philosophy in order to salvage some meaning in life.¹¹³ In England, just before Joseph Smith's time, the visionary English poet William Blake (who had occasion to consider the worth of his personal religious experiences as set against the arguments of such Enlightenment figures as Thomas Paine and the Godwins) provided his view of the same rivalry:

Obey thou the Words of the Inspired Man! . . .
 The Negation is the Spectre, the Reasoning Power in
 Man. . . .
 To cast off the idiot Questioner who is always question-
 ing.
 But never capable of answering; who sits with a sly grin
 Silently plotting when to question, like a thief in a cave;
 Who publishes doubt & calls it knowledge; whose Sci-
 ence is Despair,
 Whose pretense to knowledge is Envy: whose whole
 Science is
 To Destroy the wisdom of ages to gratify ravenous
 Envy.¹¹⁴

Given such historical precedents, I don't see much future promise in siding with the Sophic skeptics. But then, what does the

¹¹⁰ Daniel Peterson, "Introduction," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): lxiv n. 162.

¹¹¹ Carl Bode and Malcolm Cowley, ed., *The Portable Emerson* (New York: Viking, 1981), 600–601.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 11.

¹¹³ Note the about-face in "Threnody," *ibid.*, especially 661–63. I should say that I regard Emerson as an inspired teacher. Indeed, comparing Joseph Smith and Emerson is extremely rewarding. I denote such seeking by Emerson, or anyone else, as a "salvage operation" to recognize the sense of loss and disillusion that precedes his effort and periodically haunts him; I do not demean what he found in his searching. But, despite the light you can get from Emerson and his valid inspirations, you don't get Doctrine and Covenants 1.

¹¹⁴ William Blake, "Milton," in *Blake's Poetry and Designs* (New York: Norton, 1979), 303–4 (plate 40, lines 29, 34; plate 41, lines 12–17).

study of Book of Mormon historicity provide that is more promising than study of the Book of Mormon as fraud or inspired fiction? For me, light and urgency.

First consider the issue of light. Hutchinson calls for us to “stop talking about the Book of Mormon’s antiquity and begin reading its stories, considering how early Mormons would have understood them and relating their context to our own” (p. 17). I agree that study of how the early Mormons understood the text is important, and I do agree with Ms. Charles that they often understood the text differently than we do. That said, in my experience, current study of the Book of Mormon’s antiquity has often revealed how early Mormons misunderstood the stories; while we need to respect their understandings, we should not feel bound to them.

Inasmuch as they erred it might be made known; And inasmuch as they sought wisdom they might be instructed. . . . And inasmuch as they were humble they might be made strong, and blessed from on high, and receive knowledge from time to time. (D&C 1:25–28)

Talk about antiquity provides a far greater sense of immediacy and urgency when it comes time to liken the stories to ourselves. For example, it is one thing to consider the notion of your own death in the abstract, as an inspired fiction. But when death confronts you personally in history and becomes a literal presence in your life, when the thief places a gun against your head and for the third time asks for something you cannot give, or when your doctor says, “We need to cut,” or when your car begins to slide, or a solemn voice on the telephone makes the announcement that a loved one has seen his or her last mortal moment, death takes on an entirely different face—immediate, urgent, and demanding a response. One’s value system undergoes a sudden shock. In my experience, in those moments when the Book of Mormon gains in historic plausibility, it conveys this kind of immediacy and urgency (as Alma says, “Is this not real?”), demanding a personal response.

Potentially, of course, someone who sees the Book of Mormon as inspired fiction, even as a myth (in the sense of a myth as a transcendent story—not as a falsehood), should be able to provide

an illuminating reading by focusing on teachings, the vivid relevance of the stories, or the sublime literary aspects. The truth of the parables of Jesus does not depend on their historicity, but on their resonance in the life of the listener. While it has nothing to do with history, Shakespeare's *King Lear* hits me with such a profound urgency that I must consider it an inspired work.¹¹⁵ In some questions of biblical historicity, as with the Jonah story, to fret about the dimensions of the whale's throat is to miss the point entirely and bury the immediate relevance of the story in trivia.¹¹⁶ And consider the mileage Joseph Campbell gets by likening various myths to crucial issues that arise in the course of our lives. But when a Joseph Campbell or Shakespeare or Jesus has the skill and insight to inject a myth, a scriptural story, a play, or a parable into your personal history, the stories cease to be pure fiction because they literalize around your experience. Symbols cease to be mere abstractions when they connect to your own history.¹¹⁷ In such cases, the stories provide both light and urgency.

But, as it happens, only Dan Vogel in the Metcalfe volume actually looks at a story "considering how the early Mormons would have understood" it. However, his intent is not to bring any sense of immediacy and relevance, but to make the text seem remote and abstract, to show the Book of Mormon as merely a reflection of obscure theological debates about dead issues, hold-

¹¹⁵ See Eugene England's marvelous "Shakespeare and the At Onement of Jesus Christ," in *Why the Church Is as True as the Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 31–51. Although England argues that "the scene at the end of act 4, where Lear and Cordelia reach full at onement . . . is the play's true climax, a spiritual fulfillment and redemption that transcends the agonizing losses of the final act" (ibid., 42–43). Professor Birenbaum at San Jose State University taught me to see Lear's transformed character shining through the losses of the final act as the heart of a daring theodicy. If indeed, "Ripeness is all," then when Lear has lost everything *earthly*, we should be forced by the tragic outcome to consider whether what has become of Lear matters nearly as much as what he has become. He lost the world, but what has he gained? In a subsequent essay, England offers insights on the profound significance of Lear's final words. See Eugene England, *The Quality of Mercy* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992), 10.

¹¹⁶ See the insightful reading by LeGrande Davies, "Jonah: Testimony of the Resurrection," in *Isaiah and the Prophets*, ed. Monte Nyman (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1984), 88–104.

¹¹⁷ Even Nephi recommends that his readers "liken" the scriptures to themselves. See 2 Nephi 11:2.

ing no more interest today than does the ancient debate about the number of angels that could dance on the head of a pin. If I accepted Vogel's conclusions at face value, I'd find the Book of Mormon less relevant, less meaningful, less urgent. *New Approaches* offers less, not more. The urgency, the light, the life, and the attendant future promise are lacking.

The fruit that Hutchinson offers is the chance to see scripture as "stopgap medicines that help us endure a sometimes painful condition, . . . raise our sensitivity and desire to serve, help us to find moral courage within ourselves, and make some sense, however fleeting, of our lives."¹¹⁸ I find such patently entropic fruit unappetizing and unpromising.

In contrast to Hutchinson's "stop-gap medicine," Alma offers up a fruit that swells the soul, enlightens the understanding, expands the mind, and is therefore real and discernible, precious and sweet above all that is sweet, and ultimately able to fill us so that we neither hunger nor thirst (Alma 32:34-42).

Section 2 Limits to Perspective

Reason, or the ratio of all we have already known, is not
the same that it shall be when we know more.¹¹⁹

We have discussed the "criteria of assessment" for paradigms, and noted that they do not provide rules for choice, but function as values. As values, such criteria can be applied differently by people who agree on them. The difference in application comes from four specific limits on human perspective. I'll discuss these limits and provide examples of how they function for several of the authors in *New Approaches*. Although I introduce each issue under a separate heading, all four limits interact with each other and function simultaneously.

¹¹⁸ Anthony Hutchinson, "A Mormon Midrash? LDS Creation Narratives Reconsidered," *Dialogue* 21/4 (Winter 1988): 70. For my response, see Kevin Christensen, "New Wine and New Bottles: Scriptural Scholarship as Sacrament," *Dialogue* 24/3 (Fall 1991): 121-29.

¹¹⁹ William Blake, "There Is No Natural Religion," in *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, 15, punctuation added.

I cannot disprove every claim that these authors make, but I can show that their conclusions, like everyone else's, *always* involve issues of temporality, selectivity, subjectivity, and context. This is important because the key illusion that Sophic minds want to sell is that they have reached their conclusions with complete objectivity, that they have faced things as they really are, and that we would all be better off if we deferred to them in all things. The Sophic illusion is designed to shame those who would otherwise hold to their iron rods and liahonas. It supposes that paradigms drive only an opponent's science, scholarship, values, or beliefs; that one's own view is pristine, unfiltered, objective, and certain. The secular version of this illusion is heady and intoxicating, but it is only the pride of the world and is therefore without foundation. The same illusion has its counterpart in religious life, and the Book of Mormon relates the story of the Rameumptom (Alma 31) as a cautionary tale for the Saints. With the passing of time, such pride must always fall.

Temporality

All is as one day with God, and time only is measured unto men. (Alma 40:8)

And I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do. (1 Nephi 4:6)

I perceive that ye are weak, that ye cannot understand all my words. . . .

Therefore, go ye . . . and ponder upon the things which I have said . . . and prepare your minds for the morrow. (3 Nephi 17:2-3)

We are *time bound*. The historical context in which we live makes a difference in the availability of information and the conceptual frameworks upon which we must base our judgments. Remember that in one of the first attacks on the Book of Mormon, Alexander Campbell protested the account of the Nephites building a temple away from Jerusalem. Nibley's "Howlers in the Book of Mormon" gives several examples of how this and other similar problems have been rendered obsolete by subsequent dis-

coveries.¹²⁰ More recently, the discovery of the name of Abraham in Egyptian texts contemporary with the Joseph Smith papyri has thrown open doors that critics had thought fully barred for over a hundred years.¹²¹

But temporality limits our perspective in ways other than the mere availability of information. We require time to discover, absorb, and evaluate knowledge and experience. In a very literal sense the knowledge we gain over time changes what we see.

Looking at a contour map, the student sees lines on a paper, the cartographer a picture of a terrain. Looking at a bubble-chamber photograph, the student sees confused and broken lines, the physicist a record of familiar subnuclear events. Only after a number of such transformations does the student become an inhabitant of the scientist's world, seeing what the scientist sees and responding as the scientist does.¹²²

I am delighted with the way Nibley began his talk, "The Book of Mormon: Forty Years After," reminding us that even after decades of close study, more preparation and another reading can provide "a new book."¹²³ It is important to remember (as Melodie Moench Charles notes) that the early Saints often read the Book of Mormon differently than we do,¹²⁴ just so long as we remember that different is not necessarily better. Sorenson's work on internal geography provides a solid example of this point. For all the old opinions about Book of Mormon geography that have

¹²⁰ Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 243–58.

¹²¹ John Gee, "References to Abraham Found in Two Egyptian Texts," *Insights* (September 1991): 1, 3; John Gee, "Abraham in Ancient Egyptian Texts," *Ensign* 22 (July 1992): 60–62.

¹²² Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 111; cf. also James Burke, *The Day the Universe Changed* (London: British Broadcasting, 1985), 309, which includes several provocative examples. It is also worth contemplating the fascinating 3D illusions in the *Magic Eyes* books from N. E. Thing Enterprises.

¹²³ Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 533.

¹²⁴ See Grant Underwood, "The Earliest Reference Guides to the Book of Mormon: Windows into the Past," *Journal of Mormon History* 12 (1985): 68–89, and Grant Underwood, "Book of Mormon Usage in Early LDS Theology," *Dialogue* 17 (August 1984): 34–74.

been quoted to counter Sorenson, no one has resurrected any rigorous Book of Mormon research that upholds those opinions. The evidence suggests that they supposed they understood and did not ask.

Until John Welch's work, no one saw the temple in the Book of Mormon,¹²⁵ and many scholars considered the lack to be prime evidence for a lack of continuity in Mormon teachings between the early Saints and the Nauvoo era. Welch's observations, in this case, utterly reverse the *significance* of the former arguments, making the Nauvoo era a culmination of the original promise of the Book of Mormon, rather than a break from its teachings.

Led by a new paradigm, scientists adopt new instruments and look in new places. Even more important, during revolutions scientists see new and different things when looking with familiar instruments in places they have looked before.¹²⁶

Kuhn's chapter on "The Invisibility of Revolutions" would have provided a better context for understanding the issue that Charles calls "presentism" in the Church, a tendency to project current beliefs into older times. In her *New Approaches* essay, Ms. Charles reminds us that not only did the earlier Saints sometimes read the scriptures differently than we do, but that our texts often do not account for such shifts in historical perspective. However, Kuhn shows that each paradigm shift, whether in science, or religion, brings to the rewriting of history an insistent conceptual reframing and associated pedagogical imperatives.¹²⁷ So, when considering the notion that Mormon understandings change, we should do so in light of the way *all histories* adjust to accommodate a new understanding. This process has been recognized so recently that exploration of how to write histories that account for such "reframing" has just begun. And each history that is written may in turn be subject to a subsequent reframing. For example, how will the New Mormon history accommodate John Welch's

¹²⁵ Cf. Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple*.

¹²⁶ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 111.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 136-43.

work on the significance and centrality of the temple in the Book of Mormon when it discusses the development of the temple in Latter-day Saint history?

Where Ms. Charles describes the common notion among Mormons that "God would not permit righteous people who desire to know the truth to seriously misunderstand" (p. 103), we ought to realize that such reasoning, however compelling, has no empirical support. After all, Jeremiah, certainly a righteous person and earnest seeker, could ask the Lord, "wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail?" (Jeremiah 15:18). The book of Job raises the issue of a righteous man misunderstanding God, as does the Gethsemane story in the New Testament, speaking of Peter. In the Book of Mormon, 3 Nephi 15:18-24 describes the issue of the "other sheep" and says that the Old World disciples misunderstood. Doctrine and Covenants 1:24-28 describes the prophets as involved in an open-ended process of learning, going from "their weakness, after the manner of their language," and suggests that "inasmuch as they erred, it might be made known; and inasmuch as they sought wisdom, they might be instructed." The Book of Mormon prophets insist that the scriptures include both the inspiration of God and human weakness. Our ability to obtain light from the scriptures (as from the Church) is related to our capacity to accept the divine inspiration without condemning the human weakness, trusting the Lord to make weak things strong (Ether 12:27) in his own due time.

Furthermore, when Ms. Charles discusses the biblical beliefs at the time of Christ and before, she should consider the possibility that the same "presentism" that she sees in Latter-day Saint accounts could have also been operating in the same invisible way in the composition of the Bible as we have it, just as "presentism" must operate in the current scholastic interpretation of the Bible. Eugene Seach's monograph *Ancient Texts and Mormonism*¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Eugene Seach, *Ancient Texts and Mormonism* (Sandy, UT: Mormon Miscellaneous, 1983); his unpublished *A Great Mystery* contains much more information. Publication is long overdue. Also see J. Philip Schaeling, "The Western Text of the Book of Acts: A Mirror of the Doctrinal Struggles in the Early Christian Church" in C. Wilfred Griggs, ed., *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1986), 155-72.

explores evidence for the notion that the Bible texts periodically underwent this same kind of conceptual overhaul, a Mosaic Reform and a Deuteronomic Reform, which involved deliberate harmonizing of texts to accord with changing doctrinal understandings. A biblical text that has changed over time, and that is understood differently at different times, does not provide a completely objective standard for comparison.

Regarding how each individual deals with the ways that temporality affects our approach to crisis issues, whether this or that aspect of the scriptures, or this or that issue in Latter-day Saint society, looks implausible or undesirable, the scriptures provide a comforting promise with regard to the resolution of the crisis.

And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them. (Ether 12:27; cf. Isaiah 54:14–17)

If anyone finds the current case against the Book of Mormon to be personally troubling, he or she should try to gain a little perspective by considering how poorly prior attacks have fared with the passage of time.¹²⁹ While you wait for resolution on one issue, you can always occupy yourself with another that seems more immediately promising.

Selectivity

“[One] of the most self-evident characteristics of the conscious mind [is that] the mind attends to one thing at a time.” . . . *Why* the mind chooses to focus on one object to the seclusion of all others remains a mystery. But one thing is clear: the blocked-out signals are the

¹²⁹ See, for example, Francis Kirkham, *A New Witness for Christ in America*, vol. 2 (Independence: Zion Printing and Publishing, 1951); Lester Bush, “The Spaulding Theory Then and Now,” FARMS reprint, 1977; Welch, “Answering B. H. Roberts’s Questions.”

unwanted ones, and the ones we favor are our “deliberate choices.”¹³⁰

The very writing of a paper is a matter of selection and emphasis. Some of the arguments in *New Approaches*, such as Ashment’s discussion of translation issues, I do not select for emphasis because I don’t know anything about languages. Some issues I pass over for a lack of interest, time, or resources; some because I don’t have a good answer yet, and some because better qualified people have already responded.¹³¹ Even though everyone’s picture of the Book of Mormon depends on a considerable selectivity, any believer can compare what he or she finds to be of greatest value in the Book of Mormon and in supportive scholarship with what the *New Approaches* authors select for emphasis. In comparing such different selections, we can make inferences about why we see what we see.

For example, when Hutchinson sets out to discredit Nibley, he selects for consideration four pages of Nibley’s work on names from *Since Cumorah*, and of that four pages, he tries to emphasize as representative something Nibley threw in “just for fun” (p. 9). Hutchinson paints a picture of “Nibleyesque labor” with “dictionaries, concordances, and lexica,” and “taking any language in any dialect in any time” in order to make parallels. The picture is not meant to inspire confidence, of course. But how accurate is the picture? Nibley reports that his labor included consultation with William Albright, the great biblical scholar and archaeologist, and Klaus Baer, Nibley’s instructor in Chicago.¹³² That doesn’t make him right on every occasion, but it suggests to me that Nibley acts more responsibly than Hutchinson would have us imagine.

Ashment is more ambitious than Hutchinson, targeting Nibley’s best work on names, and also going after various authors who have written on Hebraisms. Regarding Ashment’s critique of

¹³⁰ Hugh W. Nibley, “Zeal without Knowledge,” in *Approaching Zion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), 63–64, partially citing Nigel Calder, *The Mind of Man* (London: British Broadcasting, 1970), 25.

¹³¹ See *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994).

¹³² See Hugh W. Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Semester 2* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1993), 422.

these authors, I do not see the issue as crucially decisive. As a non-specialist, my best response is to give things time, to watch the course of the ongoing discussion, and not to lose sight of the big picture.¹³³

However, right away, even a nonspecialist can notice some telling things about Ashment's selectivity. He does not choose to confront Book of Mormon evidence of Hebrew poetic forms, prophetic forms, ritual practices, law, and imagery, all of which are more interesting and meaningful than the nuances of grammar and less subjective than philology. When confronting the word-print studies, he first goes after Larson, Rencher, and Layton, spending two pages attacking their assumptions, and then moves to dispose of John Hilton's work, almost as an afterthought, by claiming that Hilton has made the same assumptions (pp. 372–74). Hilton's work had superseded the efforts of the Rencher group, and involved significant effort to deal with most of the assumptions that Ashment criticizes. With regards to Hilton, Ashment's selectivity, insinuation, and silence are examples of rhetorical sleight of hand. When Ashment says "No documents of known attribution exist outside of the text of the Book of Mormon for any of the disputed authors" (p. 372), he fails to acknowledge that according to the Spalding Theory, the Rigdon theory, or the Cowdery theory, Joseph Smith himself is one of the disputed authors.

In dealing with stylistic features of the text, Ashment frequently cites biblical precedents for Book of Mormon phrases, but he never raises the issue of the degree to which the biblical phrases are formulaic, sometimes dependent on nonbiblical sources or conceptual precedents. In criticizing John Welch's suggestion that the phrase cluster "Lord God Omnipotent" was distinctive to King Benjamin's speech, Ashment explains it all by pointing out that the phrase first occurs in the Bible in Revelation 19:6,¹³⁴ and says "the distribution of the phrase suggests that Smith used the

¹³³ See essays by John Tvedtnes, John Gee, and Royal Skousen, in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 8–144.

¹³⁴ It has many conceptual precedents elsewhere. For example, under "God," the Cambridge Bible Dictionary in my Latter-day Saint edition of the scriptures says that very early on, a common title for deity is "El Shaddai" which is translated as "God Almighty."

idiom frequently while it was fresh in his mind" (p. 368). Ashment cites a "potpourri" chapter in Welch's *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, neglecting Welch's much more challenging and comprehensive treatment of ritual and literary issues regarding the distribution of the same phrase in the 1985 FARMS paper, "King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals."¹³⁵ In light of the context provided in the 1985 paper, Ashment's glib "fresh in his mind" assertion explains little or nothing about the composition of Mosiah. He strains at a gnat-sized phrase while swallowing the camel-sized complexities of the context.

Hugh Nibley's response to Ashment's effort in *Sunstone*¹³⁶ still strikes me as appropriate with respect to the issue of selectivity in his own or anyone's work. Nibley said, "There are lots of things that Brother Ashment pointed out that I should have noticed; but I notice I could point out lots of things that he has not noticed."¹³⁷ The recognition of our inevitable selectivity should lead to a degree of tentativeness and tolerance in the community and greater awareness of the question, "Which problems are more significant to have solved?"

Subjectivity

For the things which some men esteem to be of great worth, both to the body and soul, others set at naught and trample under their feet. (1 Nephi 19:7)

Our perception of proportion and significance is *subjective*, relative to emotion and preconception, desire and fear. I find it striking that all the arguments given by scriptural people who rejected the prophets reflect measures taken against either fear (that is, submission to preconceptions—something "perfect" not to be challenged) or desire (emotional ideals, and not to be threat-

¹³⁵ See especially 33–36. The same material appears in Welch's "The Temple in the Book of Mormon," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 357–59.

¹³⁶ Edward H. Ashment, "The Book of Abraham Facsimiles: A Reappraisal," *Sunstone* 4/5–6 (December 1979): 33–48.

¹³⁷ Hugh W. Nibley, "The Facsimiles of the Book of Abraham: A Response," *Sunstone* 4/5–6 (December 1979): 51.

ened).¹³⁸ Betty Edwards points out that the effects of fear and desire are built into our perceptions.

Most of us tend to see parts of a form hierarchically. The parts that are *important* (that is, provide a lot of information), or the parts that we *decide* are larger, or the parts we think *should be* larger, we *see* as larger than they actually are. Conversely, parts that are *unimportant*, or that we *decide* are smaller, or that we think *should be* smaller, we *see* as being smaller than they actually are.¹³⁹

Which current problems or solutions demonstrate the course to take in the future? The questions you ask shape your answers. If you say of Joseph Smith, "Is his inspiration perfect?" and, therefore, promising in light of your present capacity to judge that inspiration, you have also arranged to make the appearance of imperfection decisive. If you say, "Is his inspiration ideal?" and, therefore, promising in light of your current desires, you have also arranged to make your wants decisive. But if you say, "Is his inspiration real?" you begin to participate in the way Alma recommends. You can start with a single seed, and the first sign of growth and life is enough to show the future promise, in spite of any imperfections you see or frustrations you may have.

While those who accepted the biblical prophets often experienced the same conflicting fears and desires as those who rejected the prophets (for example, see John 6 and 9), the difference in perception comes in a willingness to challenge what one fears by both experiment and faith (Alma 32, Matthew 7, and John 9) and a willingness to risk one's desire by saying "thy will be done" even while honestly expressing one's urgent protests. Some discoveries, like new wine, must be placed in new bottles to preserve them. Those who refuse the new wine, who refuse the test and

¹³⁸ In other words, resistance to truth always reduces to, "It's not what I think" or "It's not what I want"; see also Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 140. Fear and Desire are the two guardians of the Buddhist temple; the Buddha has to move through them to achieve enlightenment.

¹³⁹ Betty Edwards, *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, rev. ed. (Los Angeles: Tarcher, 1989), 134.

insist the old is better, forego any chance of escaping the bounds of their traditions. Those who fear to test their traditions may never come to comprehend their true value.

The *New Approaches* authors take care to inflate the significance of their studies, and to play down the studies by historicists, just as their opponents take care to do the opposite. I've already described how Larson's perspective falls from his training, and how Kunich labors to inflate his problem. David Wright remarks that the best rational historicist response to the apparent anachronistic relation between Alma 13 and Hebrews 7 involves a hypothetical common source. He then argues against such a common source based on a list of improbabilities for such a text (pp. 204–7). My initial response, which served until John Welch and John Tvedtnes got around to providing a broader range of comparisons involving other Melchizedek sources,¹⁴⁰ is that the Book of Mormon itself is remarkably improbable, much more improbable as it stands, than the requisite common text.

Arguing against the historicity of the text, Wright says, "Logical—even theological—consistency indicates that it is unlikely that these chapters [Alma 13] would be [Joseph Smith's] composition while others would be ancient" (p. 207). As it happens, the same logic functions in the other direction in challenges such as Nibley's: "It would have been quite as impossible for the most learned man alive in 1830 to have written the book as it was for Joseph Smith. And whoever would account for the Book of Mormon by any theory suggested so far—save one—must completely rule out the first forty pages."¹⁴¹ And so we cannot avoid the larger picture that we summon when we ask the paradigm question, "Which problems are more significant to have solved?"

In spite of the various problems that the *New Approaches* authors seize upon to celebrate, none have provided a comprehensive and coherent explanation of the Book of Mormon as a strictly contemporary text. No such explanation exists. Compared to the problems that a historic Book of Mormon solves, are the unsolved problems that important? Believers can assume that any

¹⁴⁰ See essays by Welch and Tvedtnes, in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, 145–86, 8–50.

¹⁴¹ Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 123.

current puzzles can be solved eventually, that all truth will fit into one great whole.

Context

There is none other people that understand the things which were spoken unto the Jews like unto them, save it be that they are taught after the manner of the things of the Jews. (2 Nephi 25:5)

Whatever we observe takes meaning from the *context* in which it appears. A single word may be understood differently depending on its placement in a sentence, on the culture in which it is written, and the intellectual and spiritual background the reader brings. Yet *New Approaches* contains recurring assertions about the “plain meaning of the text” (pp. 10, 264, 279, 321, with only Thomas offering a serious caution about misinterpretation, p. 55). This should set off alarm bells in the reader’s mind because there is no such thing as the plain meaning of the text. As S. I. Hayakawa puts it, “To a mouse, cheese is cheese. That is why mousetraps work.”¹⁴² Context can transform meaning enough to make the difference between life and death.¹⁴³

I have experienced many transformations in “plain meaning” through an enhanced context. The transformation of “plain meaning” in Doctrine and Covenants 19 should be a classic example for Mormons:

Nevertheless, it is not written that there shall be no end to this torment, but it is written *endless torment*, . . .
 . . . for Endless is my name. Wherefore— . . .

¹⁴² A recurring theme in S. I. Hayakawa, *Language in Thought and Action*, 4th ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978); contrast Hutchinson (p. 10). “The question arises, when is a cow not a cow, when is north not north?” What we see here is a mousetrap at work.

¹⁴³ “Derrida gives as an example of undecidability Plato’s frequent presentation of writing as a drug, *pharmakon*. The Greek word can mean either ‘poison’ or ‘cure’ and, as with a drug, which way is taken (translated) makes a lot of difference.” Madran Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Post-modernism*, 2nd ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 52.

Endless punishment is God's punishment. (D&C
19:6, 10, 12)

Matthew 13:13–18 illuminates the discussion of context, both for the form and the content. Just as the usual prose format hides a distinct poetic form, the theme suggests that familiar stories and everyday content can conceal hidden meanings.

Therefore speak I to them in *parables*:

Because they seeing *see* not; and hearing they *hear* not, neither do they understand.

And in them is fulfilled the *prophecy* of Esaias, which saith,

By hearing ye shall *hear*, and shall not understand;
and seeing ye shall *see*, and shall not perceive:

For this people's *heart* is waxed gross,

And their *ears* are dull of *hearing*,

And their *eyes* they have closed;

lest at any time they should *see*

with their *eyes*,

And *hear* with their *ears*,

And should understand with their *heart*, and
should be converted, and I should heal them.

But blessed are your eyes for they *see*, and your ears,
for they *hear*. . . .

Many *prophets* and righteous men

Have desired to *see* those things which ye see; and have not
seen them; and to *hear* those things which ye hear and have
not heard them.

Hear ye therefore the *parable* of the sower.

Notice the urgent recommendation to the disciples to truly hear the parable of the sower. Regarding this key parable, Jesus remarked, "Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?" (Mark 4:13). The most obvious message of the parable of the sower is that the same seeds (words) can produce vastly different yields depending on the soil in which they are planted.

Isaiah's formulaic warning about having "eyes, but not seeing," should temper any reliance on one final "plain meaning of the text." But Isaiah's oft-quoted warning becomes more mean-

ingful only as you pass through the experience of repeatedly having a familiar text transformed¹⁴⁴ and sometimes retransformed by various contexts. In another essay, I illustrated this experience of transformation of meaning by comparing a documentary reading of the Noah story¹⁴⁵ with the amazing unitary reading in Isaac M. Kikawada and Arthur Quinn's *Before Abraham Was*.¹⁴⁶ In this paper I've cited the transformation wrought by John W. Welch's temple reading of 3 Nephi. And there have been many others making striking contributions.¹⁴⁷

Those who have experienced such transformations can better appreciate Ian Barbour's observation that a paradigm "makes a difference not only in one's attitudes and behavior but in the way one sees the world. One may notice and value features of individual and corporate life which one otherwise might have overlooked."¹⁴⁸ Theory influences both the selection and the significance of the data—*anomaly appears, with resistance, against a background of expectation*.¹⁴⁹

Returning to the Book of Mormon, consider the implications of the Egyptian context that Nibley provides regarding the phrase "white and delightsome" and the contrary "dark and loath-

¹⁴⁴ Some of my personal favorites include Jolene E. Rockwood, "The Redemption of Eve," in *Sisters in Spirit*, ed., Maureen U. Beecher and Lavina F. Anderson (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple*; Hugh W. Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 243, on Jacob's embrace. Hugh W. Nibley's "The Three Facsimiles from the Book of Abraham" (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1985), 53–56, for me transformed the book of Abraham cosmology. He notices, among other things, that an ancient name for Canopus was Kalb).

¹⁴⁵ Richard E. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 54–59.

¹⁴⁶ Isaac M. Kikawada and Arthur Quinn, *Before Abraham Was* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989); cf. Kevin Christensen, "A Response to David Wright on Historical Criticism," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/1 (1994): 74–93.

¹⁴⁷ Other examples that transform familiar texts in mind-expanding ways should include such things as England on "Shakespeare and the At Onement of Jesus Christ,"; Truman Madsen, "The Olive Press," in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree*, 1–10; Nibley on Pharaoh's curse in Abraham 3:22–27 as due to his matrilineal descent from Noah, not his race, a key reading in *Abraham in Egypt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 133–36, 188–90.

¹⁴⁸ Barbour, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms*, 56.

¹⁴⁹ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 64.

some.”¹⁵⁰ In *New Approaches*, John Kunich claims that “since the Nephites are consistently described as ‘white,’ there could have been little intermarriage between Nephites and the darker skinned inhabitants” (p. 263). The Egyptian context transforms the “plain” meaning of the text, removing racial implications and substituting cultural and moral implications. This cultural context is completely absent, not just in Kunich’s paper, but also in Rodney Turner’s attempt at a definitive essay, “The Lamanite Mark.”¹⁵¹

Hutchinson warns against the danger in “ridding the text of its plain meaning” (p. 10). When I consider the profound implications that a context like Nibley’s has for context-free efforts by believers, such as Turner’s essay, and then consider that Hutchinson wants us to “stop talking about the Book of Mormon’s antiquity” (p. 17), I conclude that opponents of historicity may be robbing us of the plain meaning of the text by denying us access to the most illuminating contexts.¹⁵²

For example, consider Dan Vogel’s effort to treat the Book of Mormon in light of “Anti-Universalist Rhetoric” (pp. 21–52). Of all the things Dan Vogel could have selected to mention about my response to a previous book, he selects only one point of mine to criticize (this time, at least)—a point I confess I made rather weakly, regarding his identification of Corianton as a Universalist. At the time I had made no background reading in Universalism, but was skeptical of Vogel’s certitude and grounds for such an identification as a comprehensive explanation. Vogel builds his entire article for *New Approaches* on an identity between contemporary debates about Universalism and the Book of Mormon. Having recently done some reading about Universalism, I now

¹⁵⁰ Hugh W. Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Semester I* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1993), 15, 185–86, 436. Also compare the equivalence of “pure” and “white” in Daniel 12:10, and the change from “white” to “pure” in various editions of 2 Nephi 30:6.

¹⁵¹ Rodney Turner, “The Lamanite Mark,” in *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989), 133–57.

¹⁵² Compare Sorenson’s remarks in *An Ancient American Setting*, 355. As a believer, he seeks not proof, but greater understanding.

better understand the grounds for his identification, but remain skeptical with respect to the comprehensive explanation.

In my previous review, I noted that Vogel is highly selective, partial to closed-system comparisons, and that he tends to resolve textual and historical ambiguity towards whatever appears to discredit the Book of Mormon.¹⁵³ Dan Peterson¹⁵⁴ and Grant Underwood¹⁵⁵ have observed the same tendencies in their responses to his other works.

It seems a good strategy to deal with Vogel by moving to open up the historical comparisons (in this case to biblical precedents) and to note certain oddities in the Book of Mormon text that other research has brought to light and that present problems for his argument.

The key points in Vogel's comparison of anti-Universalist rhetoric with the Book of Mormon involve the contemporary parallels to various of Alma's teachings to Corianton, and parallels to the stories about Nehor and his followers. Indeed, nearly contemporary with the translation of the Book of Mormon, the big buzz within Universalist circles came to be called "The Restorationist Controversy." Consider the following points in judging the significance of Vogel's parallels.

Universalism was not a phenomenon confined to Joseph Smith's time. Vogel does notify the reader that the notion of universal salvation has had a long history, and that some of the key figures in the modern movement based their teachings in part on writings they found in Origen and 1 Clement (both of whom spent a lot of their days in the library).¹⁵⁶ The Universalists and their

¹⁵³ See Kevin Christensen, review of Dan Vogel, *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon*, in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 2 (1990): 214–57.

¹⁵⁴ Daniel C. Peterson, "Notes on Gadianton Masonry," in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 174–224.

¹⁵⁵ Grant Underwood, review of Dan Vogel, *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism*, in *BYU Studies* 30/1 (Winter 1990): 120–26.

¹⁵⁶ Ernest Cassera, ed., *Universalism in America: A Documentary History* (Boston: Beacon, 1961), 141–42. Also see Martin S. Tanner, "Is There Anti-Universalist Rhetoric in the Book of Mormon?" *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, 6/1 1994, pp 418–33. Stephen Thompson takes issue with Tanner's reading of an Egyptian passage, in *Dialogue* 27/4, 204.

critics were biblically oriented people who debated Bible issues in a vernacular heavily influenced by Bible language. Bible language is, in turn, heavily formulaic, with authors widely separated in time freely quoting and paraphrasing each other. The Bible is, among other things, a history of people saying the kinds of things people say, and doing the kinds of things people do. Because of this, even after thousands of years, even across many cultural gaps, we find many of the stories comprehensible and relevant.

For example, in introducing the reader to rhetorical criticism, Vogel quotes Leland Griffen on the “crystallization of fundamental issues . . . [and] a time, very likely, when invention runs dry, when both aggressor and defendant rhetoricians tend to repeat their stock of argument and appeal” (pp. 22–23). Nibley’s essays on the Sophic and Mantic should serve as powerful notice of just how far back certain stock arguments can go and how constant they can remain.¹⁵⁷

Vogel cites “Nephi’s characterization of a latter-day group with the motto, ‘eat, drink, and be merry’ (p. 29) as typical anti-Universalist rhetoric,” and in this case Vogel includes references to 1 Kings 4:20; Ecclesiastes 8:15; Isaiah 22:13; Luke 12:19; and 1 Corinthians 15:32. The attitude is an ancient one (I believe it appears in Gilgamesh),¹⁵⁸ but Vogel nevertheless wants us to see it as a distinctive feature of Universalists as perceived by their opponents during Joseph Smith’s time.

Vogel reminds us that even the earliest Latter-day Saint commentaries on the Book of Mormon called Nehor a Universalist, “likening” what they saw to themselves. Yet nothing that Nehor does in the Book of Mormon would seem unusual to Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel, all of whom vent considerable anger against rival teachers, particularly those who preached for profit.

I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an
horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies:

¹⁵⁷ Nibley, *The Ancient State*, 311–478.

¹⁵⁸ In the Assyrian version, Siduri says: “O Gilgamesh, fill your belly, make merry day and night, make each day a festival of joy. Dance and play day and night” in *Semitic Mythology: The Mythology of All Races*, vol. 5 (Boston: Jones, 1994), 234–69.

they strengthen also the hands of the evildoers that none doth return from his wickedness. . . .

They say still unto them that despise me, The Lord hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you. (Jeremiah 23:14, 17; cf. Isaiah 1; Jeremiah 7:8–9; 11:8; 18:8–12, 20; 21:8, 14; Ezekiel 7:3; 11:21; 13:22; 18:21–32).

Likewise, little or nothing in Corianton's arguments and behavior seems out of place in his immediate Hebrew heritage. The story of Eli's sons reported in 1 Samuel 2:22–25 provides a good example.

Vogel cites the Jezebel in Revelation 2:20–30 in comparison to Corianton's Isabel (p. 37 n. 14). This is because Dan Peterson, in his "Notes on Gadianton Masonry," had speculated on connections between the name *Isabel* and the Jezebel in 1 Kings.¹⁵⁹ The urge to compare Alma's Isabel to the Jezebel in Revelation, rather than the one in 1 Kings, does show Vogel's preference for even the appearance of an anachronistic borrowing, even when a viable alternative exists. Notice that Vogel bypasses comment on my citation of Nibley's observation that "Isabel was the name of the Patroness of Harlots in the religion of the Phoenicians."¹⁶⁰ Nibley's suggestion has implications for the issue of whether "Universalist" provides a comprehensive and coherent label for Corianton, or whether he fits an ancient context better. Corianton's public apostasy and his participation in the sexual rites of a pagan cult would involve a system of beliefs and practices that diverges dramatically from Universalism. Also recall Sorenson's observation that Mesoamerica "contained a religious system comparable in important ways to that of the Canaanites. The religious ideals and behavior transmitted by the continuing Mesoamerican population would resonate with the naturalistic,

¹⁵⁹ Peterson, "Notes on Gadianton Masonry," 215–16 n. 22. Peterson's article skewers another of Vogel's attempts at an environmental account—in that case, an argument that the term "secret combinations" referred exclusively to Masons.

¹⁶⁰ Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 542; also Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon: Semester 2*, 468.

Baalist elements in the minds and lives of the less faithful in Lehi's and Mulek's groups."¹⁶¹

In denouncing Corianton's involvement, Alma uses the term "abominable" in a manner entirely consistent with Jeremiah 2:7–8, 4:1, 8:12, and Ezekiel 16, where the Old World prophets fought against the Baalist practices.

Vogel says that the Book of Mormon argument (2 Nephi 2) that "fear of punishment is a motive for obedience to both civil and divine law . . . makes the same point that one Methodist made in 1820" (p. 33). This point, of course, is also very ancient and very biblical. Deuteronomy says, "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing if you obey the commandments . . . and a curse if ye will not obey" (Deuteronomy 11:26–28). Vogel's point about whether the Lord would save people in their sins or from their sins (pp. 34–35) likewise involves prevalent biblical themes (Jeremiah 7:5–15, 21:14; Ezekiel 18, 33).

In response to my doubt that Universalism was behind Corianton's concern about foreknowledge of Christ's coming¹⁶² and his worry about the resurrection, Vogel remarks ambiguously that "Universalists were heterodox in their theology" and "Many Universalists in Joseph Smith's day were also Unitarians" (p. 37 n. 15). Actually, Cassera's *Universalism in America* quotes Abner Kneeland in 1833 as saying that "Universalists believe in the resurrection of the dead."¹⁶³

Vogel's most imposing parallels involve the nineteenth-century arguments about restoration, given that Alma lectures Corianton at length on the same topic. Nevertheless, Alma's teachings about "restoration" recall biblical themes and fit comfortably with the Old World background (Exodus 21:23–24; Deuteronomy 11:26–28; Jeremiah 2:19; 17:10; Ezekiel 18:21–30).¹⁶⁴ Vogel's Universalists focused on a restitution passage in

¹⁶¹ Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting*, 218.

¹⁶² Note that Isaiah spends much effort trying to convince Israel about God's foreknowledge (Isaiah 41:22; 46:10; 48:3–6), which suggests that some people doubted God's foreknowledge.

¹⁶³ Cassera, *Universalism in America*, 166.

¹⁶⁴ Note that Alma expresses himself in poetic forms common to ancient Israel, but unusual among the modes of discourse in Joseph Smith's day; Parry, *The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted*.

Acts 3:21 (p. 40), but the Acts passage parallels Isaiah 1:26, which does use the word “restore.”

Alma’s emphasis on restoration is not only biblical, but also consistent with the reports of the Life Review (or Encounter with Deeds) reported in near-death experiences throughout history.¹⁶⁵ One of the early Universalist teachers in England (Dr. George de Benneville 1703–1793, born to French Huguenot parents) based some of his ideas on what a modern researcher would immediately call a near-death account.¹⁶⁶ However, neither the Universalists nor their critics (other than Mormons) cared to resolve the issues by referring to a contemporary revelation (as Alma does). Impressed and challenged by the Deist thinkers, the dominant Universalist teachers based their arguments on Reason.¹⁶⁷

Vogel’s main argument requires that we see Alma as using anti-Universalist rhetoric against Corianton in relation to the main anti-Universalist issue regarding the endless duration of future punishment for mortal sin. Yet, Alma’s own teachings plainly affirm the notion of temporally limited punishment. Alma’s own “eternal torment” (Mosiah 27:29) in an “everlasting burning” (Mosiah 27:28), when encircled about by the “everlasting chains of death,” lasted for three days (Alma 36:16, 18).¹⁶⁸ Likewise, Zeezrom experiences “the pains of hell” (Alma 14:6) for a limited time.

Vogel claims that the Book of Mormon argues for a doctrine of endless duration since punishment is “as eternal as the life of the soul” (Alma 42:16; p. 44). Yet this passage can be understood as referring to the existence of just punishment and blessing through eternity, rather than the infinite and endless application of such.

Vogel cites *Book of Mormon* references (pp. 36, 45) that indicate the wicked “shall go away into everlasting fire . . . and their torment is as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever and has no end” (2 Nephi

¹⁶⁵ See Christensen, “Nigh unto Death,” 14–17.

¹⁶⁶ Cassera, *Universalism in America*, 7, 53–54.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 6, 8.

¹⁶⁸ Christensen, “Nigh unto Death,” 6–7; also consider Doctrine and Covenants 19.

9:16).¹⁶⁹ Vogel quotes Hosea Ballou's Universalist argument against traditional interpretations to the effect that "the never ending fire was 'a state of great trouble of mind, in consequence of conscientious guilt'" (p. 45). Vogel fails to observe that Alma agrees and makes it very clear that the imagery symbolizes the torment that comes from a personal sense of guilt (Alma 12:14–15; 36:17; also Jacob 6:9; Mosiah 3:25).

Ironically, Vogel pits Alma against Elhanan Winchester (1751–1797), the leader of the "Restorationist" faction of Universalism, who opposed Murray's radical Universalism (p. 42). But rather than being anti-Universalist, Alma's teachings seem more consistent with Winchester's restorationist position. Some parallels should be natural because both Alma and Winchester draw on biblical precedents. Additionally, Winchester had been influenced by Benneville's near-death vision, which again would tend to supply certain parallels to Alma.

The lens provided by Vogel's anti-Universalist context creates the misreadings here. At the beginning of his essay, Vogel had claimed that he would "discuss the Book of Mormon in its nineteenth century context without necessarily making conclusions about its historicity" (p. 21). Further, he reasoned that the "question of the Book of Mormon's historicity becomes secondary when the rhetorical critic seeks to understand the book's message to its first readers" (*ibid.*). However, by neglecting the ancient context and the biblical backgrounds, Vogel draws unjustified conclusions about the historicity of the Book of Mormon. Because he has not examined the ancient context, he has no grounds for demonstrating that his data are significant, and he can provide no comparison to show that his paradigm is better. By forcing the text into the context of the nineteenth-century anti-

¹⁶⁹ Note too that the imagery is neither original nor unique to Revelation 20; cf. Christensen, review of Vogel, *Indian Origins*, 244–45; also Deuteronomy 2:23. Likewise, the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:1–31) has deep roots in older literature (see Blake Ostler, "Abraham: An Egyptian Connection" [Provo, UT: FARMS, 1981], 3–4) and in the physical landscapes (Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 46). For hellish imagery in general, see Stanislav and Christina Grof, *Beyond Death: The Gates of Consciousness* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980).

Universalist debate, he frequently misreads the message, and undercuts the significance of the text for modern readers.

Perspectives in Summary

Postmodern criticism has been fond of pointing out that, due to the uncertain relationship between the symbols of language and the things signified, the dependence of logical arguments on paradigmatic metaphors, and the existence of "opposition in all things," any reading of any text can be deconstructed, and the deconstruction can be deconstructed *ad infinitum*.¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, despite some extreme post-Modern assertions, some readings are obviously better than others. The existence of better readings—indeed, I suspect, the existence of communication—ultimately falls not to any *determining* factors in language, but to the operation of the same basic *constraints* on meaning that Kuhn identifies as operating in the sciences, and that Alma depicts as supporting faith. And if you take such ideals as "accuracy of key predictions," "comprehensiveness and coherence," "simplicity and aesthetics," and "fruitfulness" and use them to guide your selectivity, subjectivity, and temporality, what you obtain should be a progressively better context, and a better reading, although never a final or exhaustive meaning. That is why Alma takes pains to remark that even when you have a testimony, your knowledge is not perfect, and you must continue nourishing the seed (Alma 32:29, 38).

Section 3

Concluding Thoughts on the Enterprise

To be accepted as a paradigm, a theory must seem better than its competitors, but it need not, and in fact, it never does, explain all the facts with which it may be confronted.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Sadrap, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Post-Modernism*, 50–54.

¹⁷¹ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 17–18.

If any and every failure to fit were ground for theory rejection, all theories ought to be rejected at all times.¹⁷²

Several years ago, as we discussed our very different reactions to our explorations in Latter-day Saint controversies, a friend of mine of shattered faith asked, “How can you know what you know, and believe what you believe?”

Several of the *New Approaches* authors describe the problems they confront in terms of an array of facts that somehow speak for themselves. For example, Hutchinson talks about an “evidence-despising stubborn support of Book of Mormon antiquity” (p. 15). My argument is that, contrary to what Hutchinson imagines, at issue are not self-evident facts, but paradigms. John Welch illustrates this as part of his response to David Wright’s essay in *New Approaches*:

My article, entitled the “Melchizedek Material in Alma 13:13–19,” covers much of the same ground, works with virtually the same texts, cites and analyzes almost the same scholarly literature pertaining to Melchizedek, but reaches a much different conclusion.¹⁷³

Alma would say, at issue are not the words, but the soil in which you plant the seed. Alma makes an important comparison between people who want proof so that they will simply and finally “know,” and those who are content to work with “cause to believe” (see Alma 32:18–21). Ashment claims that, in the absence of “direct evidence,” apologists argue from parallels (p. 374). Ashment is correct in observing that parallels do not constitute proof, and most believing scholars agree. But we are justified in seeing the parallels, such as the Hebrew festival patterns in Mosiah, as “cause to believe.”

For someone content to find “cause to believe” from a variety of criteria, and across a range of experience, the process can be open-ended and self-correcting. After all, once the seed begins to grow, it never retains its initial form. The important things are the light that provides vital life energy, a rich soil in which to

¹⁷² Ibid., 146.

¹⁷³ Welch, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1, 169.

grow, protection from predation, resistance to choking weeds, sufficient water to quench thirst, and patience to endure through the seasons and attain the future promise.

For those who demand to simply and finally “know” a thing with respect to a static set of assumptions, the situation is different. Alma illustrates the two great dangers by preceding his discourse on faith with the stories of Korihor (Alma 30), the skeptic who requires proof on his own terms, and the Zoramites (Alma 31), the worldly true believers for whom all things have been decided beforehand in terms of group membership and election.

How do we choose a paradigm? What is the process of conversion? The questions are the same, and Alma 32 conveys the same essential answer for spiritual life that Kuhn does for the growth of science, with the recognition that religious life calls for a higher degree of personal involvement than does science.¹⁷⁴ We perform a successful experiment regarding key concerns, and further investigation enlightens and expands our minds. We make connections between fragmented experiences and knowledge, and move toward unity and order in our lives. We step inside a belief system, nourish it with great care, with diligence and with patience, and in doing so, we see things that we never would have seen otherwise. We pronounce the experience delicious and beautiful. We admit to imperfect knowledge, and yet, on the basis of what we have experienced thus far, find cause to believe the future promise that the system holds out for us.

What can go wrong? Why might an investigator reject a true and living faith? Alma 32 again describes the situation.

But if ye neglect the tree, and take no thought for its nourishment, behold it will not get any root; and when the heat of the sun cometh and scorcheth it, because it hath no root it withers away, and ye pluck it up and cast it out.

Now, this is not because the seed was not good, neither is it because the fruit thereof would not be desirable; but it is because your ground is barren, and ye will not nourish the tree, therefore ye cannot have the fruit thereof. (Alma 32:38–39)

¹⁷⁴ Barbour, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms*, 134–37.

The heat of the sun, in Book of Mormon study, would be frustrated expectations and desires. The barren ground would correspond to invalid assumptions, faulty methods, inadequate knowledge. Because our knowledge is not yet perfect, we should expect some frustration from time to time. We can always try another approach on a more promising plot of soil, adding needed nourishment through personal repentance, including deeper study, or wait for the rain of further discovery.

Does *New Approaches* offer alternative paradigms of faith within Mormonism that could serve as a viable "distribution of risks" for some Saints, or as a means of communicating the worth of the scripture to outsiders? I have a few friends in the Church who have been impressed by the sorts of arguments presented in *New Approaches* but who remain committed to the faith. The message of the Book of Mormon is sufficiently relevant to contemporary life that it should be possible for someone to read it for the purpose of "likening it to ourselves" without being concerned about historicity. Lessons regarding wealth and charity, peace and war, crime and government, faith and doubt can be profitably likened to contemporary life without reference to the ancient context. The text of the Book of Mormon is sufficiently rich that it offers all sorts of poetic forms to explore, archetypal imagery to investigate, stories to analyze, and complex themes to unravel. For instance, the truth value of the epistemology in Alma 32 is independent of historicity. Such matters could be profitably studied by people who do not believe Book of Mormon historicity, but who do have a desire to appreciate our scripture. There is much to appreciate, and I would have been gratified to encounter such appreciation from whatever source. But of such matters, offered up so we could learn to be more wise than the Book of Mormon peoples, *New Approaches* provides little. Taken as a whole, *New Approaches* does not come as an alternative view that distributes risk within the faith. With all due respect to those contributors who do keep the faith, the book overall has been designed to provide an escape from that faith.

Kuhn says that the choice "between competing paradigms proves to be a choice between incompatible modes of community

life.”¹⁷⁵ This choice between different modes of community life is exactly what Hutchinson and Wright suggest for the Mormons. We are to go from being a community defined by belief in the Book of Mormon to one defined by adherence to “the critical method.” Rather than accept Joseph Smith as a “standard example” whose life embodies a paradigmatic set of methods and assumptions, we are to examine the work and personal example of certain critical scholars whose paradigms they find compelling (Wright, p. 212). If a paradigm is a “group-licensed way of seeing,” they want us to apply for a license administered by another group.

John Gee made some important remarks on the process of “conversion” to the critical paradigm: “‘This conversion marked by the acceptance of the historical critical method’ is expected by professors at many graduate schools, who believe ‘that after only two weeks in the program, all our doctoral students would assent’ to its assumptions and methods.”¹⁷⁶ Gee remarks that “Not all Mormon graduate students in the Near East Studies Program [in Berkeley] have ‘converted’: while Wright and Firmage may have ‘converted’; Stephen Ricks and I have not.”¹⁷⁷

Again, what makes the difference? This cannot be simply a matter of facing facts. Conversion in either direction always involves the issues we’ve been discussing in this essay, that is, which examples do you accept as paradigmatic, and why?

I do not think that you have to believe in the historicity of the Book of Mormon to find it valuable and inspired, nor do I think that you must believe in the historicity in the Book of Mormon to be a Mormon, nor that belief alone suffices to make you a good person, nor that disbelief makes you a bad person. It should be possible to critique a particular reading or approach to the Book of Mormon without necessarily depreciating the Book of Mormon as scripture. But while a range of factors in our spiritual lives can

¹⁷⁵ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 94.

¹⁷⁶ John Gee, “La Trahison des Clercs: On the Language and Translation of the Book of Mormon” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 59 n. 23, quoting Jon D. Levenson, “The Bible: Unexamined Commitments of Criticism,” *First Things* 30 (February 1993): 24–25.

¹⁷⁷ John Gee, “La Trahison des Clercs,” 49 n. 23.

serve to sustain individual commitment to a community, we must recognize that it is the Book of Mormon that defines this community.

Every community celebrates and re-enacts particular historical events which are crucial to its corporate identity and its vision of reality.¹⁷⁸

“What distinguished Mormonism,” writes Richard Bushman, “was not so much the Gospel Mormons taught, which in many respects resembled other Christians’ teachings, but what they believed had happened—to Joseph Smith, to Book of Mormon characters, and to Moses and Enoch [and later to the pioneers, during their archetypal exodus to the west]. . . . The core of Mormon belief was a conviction about actual events. . . . Mormonism was history, not philosophy.”¹⁷⁹

The historicity of the Book of Mormon is just one aspect of our religious experience, but as the keystone of the faith, it takes the predominant role in defining the community. Questions regarding the historicity of the Book of Mormon deal with how much the Mormon community possesses that is above and beyond that which is available elsewhere. This is how Doctrine and Covenants 1:30 expresses it, defining the Latter-day Saint charter not in terms of exclusive truth and virtue, but in terms of key distinctions (D&C 1:22–23, 29–30), whose validity is signified by the Book of Mormon.

Questions regarding the historicity of the Book of Mormon, then, involve the key issue in paradigm debate: that is, whether our community provides *better* descriptions of the divine nature, better access to the divine, and whether the religious problems that Mormonism solves, or promises to solve eventually,¹⁸⁰ are the

¹⁷⁸ Barbour, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms*, 55.

¹⁷⁹ Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 187–88.

¹⁸⁰ Doctrine and Covenants 1:25–28 emphasizes that Mormonism is incomplete, socially imperfect, and nonexclusive with respect to truth and virtue. Jerald and Sandra Tanner have made a career of neglecting these points and using background expectations for perfection, completeness, and exclusivity as a license to scorn, to “watch for iniquity,” and “to make a man an offender for a word . . . and turn aside the just for a thing of nought” (Isaiah 29:20–21).

most important ones to have solved. The questions raised in *New Approaches* usually have to do with the historicity of the Book of Mormon, and thereby relate most directly not to issues of faith, but to community. As Hutchinson puts it:

To the degree we disparage the holiness and value of the Book of Mormon, we alienate ourselves from the LDS tradition and define ourselves as outside of that tradition. (p. 4)

I regard investigation of the historicity of the Book of Mormon as essential toward developing contexts that unveil the messages in the text. But notice that Alma, far from offering an "all or nothing" gospel, invites his listeners to begin with "no more than [a] desire to believe," and to apply that desire to even "a portion of my words" (Alma 32:27). Alma even leaves it to his listeners to decide on that plantable portion for themselves, and of the whole of his words he freely acknowledges, "You cannot know of their surety at first." The important thing is that they plant something that can grow in their hearts. As long as that portion can take root and grow, we can hope for everything else over time.

I do not mind the diversity of thought in Mormonism. I approve of a distribution of risks. If someone prefers to invest his or her faith in the community, or in some personal experience, or in the strengths of "eternalism," that is fine with me. Chances are that someone who anchors his or her faith in community, or the philosophical strengths of Mormonism, or New Testament study, or whatever, will develop expertise that I do not have, and will offer gifts to the community that I cannot.

Likewise, Alma, whose discourse on faith is remarkably consistent with Kuhn's findings, champions freedom of belief and makes a contrast between those who simply and finally "know," whose beliefs are determined and closed, and those who have "cause to believe," whose beliefs are constrained by experience, but open-ended. Again, Joseph Smith opposed creeds, not because they are false teachings,¹⁸¹ but because "creeds set up stakes, and

¹⁸¹ "It dont [*sic*] prove that a man is not a good man, because he errs in doctrine"; see Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 183-84. Compare

say, 'Hitherto thou shalt come, and no further'; which I cannot subscribe to."

The most prominent difference in sentiment between the Latter-day Saints and sectarians was, that the latter were all circumscribed by some particular creed, which deprived its members [of] the privilege of believing anything not contained therein, whereas the Latter-day Saints have no creed, but are ready to believe all true principles that exist, as they are made manifest from time to time.¹⁸²

The issue is a question of orientation—of the wine or the wine-bottle, which has priority? You need both to enjoy either. But should theory, paradigm, or creed determine experience, or should experience constrain and determine theory? In Alma's terms, do you filter experience through what you simply and finally "know," or do you accept theories tentatively, and only to the extent that your ongoing experience gives "cause to believe?" Do you settle for the current academic or religious orthodoxy, or do you seek for ever greater light and knowledge?

Credo make for rigid background expectations which impede the growth of knowledge. In *New Approaches*, various authors set up stakes on particular readings with:

- Appeals to the "plain meaning of the text."
- Appeals to authority figures with regard to paradigms of translation, geography, and Book of Mormon cultures without regard for their grounds for belief in those paradigms.
- Appeals to the authority of preferred methods.
- Appeals to a current lack of verification on this or that issue, without considering the importance of other issues which currently have substantial support.

also how such passages as Doctrine and Covenants 88:41 and Mosiah 3:27 sound like what some Mormons might like to think of as creeds. The words don't make the creed; the setting up of stakes and bounds does. In effect, creeds place you beyond the reach of further light and knowledge—that is, beyond repentance. What could be more abominable? However, the absence of creeds does not imply the absence of constraints—that is, of important considerations.

¹⁸² *DHC* 5:215.

All too often, the message is "Hitherto thou shalt come, and no further." But as the parable of the wine bottles shows, the growth in light and knowledge often calls for a new container for the wine. Hence, when reading important studies by Nibley, or Rockwood, or England, or Welch, or Bush, or anyone who takes me to greater understanding, my paradigm sometimes shifts, and I feel as though scales have fallen from my eyes. But I experience such changes as expansion, as enlightenment, not as shattering and destructive.

Does a belief in "historicity" involve a creed, a setting up of stakes? A stake is a piece of dead wood that marks out a position. For me, a belief in historicity has been enlightening, mind expanding, soul enlarging, and fruitful. Such experience signifies not a fruitless piece of dead wood, but the flowering of a tree of life. I refuse to say "Hitherto thou shalt come, and no further," but I want to share what I've found because it tastes good and has great promise.

Hutchinson claims that "we should stop talking about the Book of Mormon's antiquity and begin reading its stories, considering how the early Mormons would have understood them and relating their context to our own" (pp. 16-17). If the editor really accepts Hutchinson's argument, then one might expect some articles that breathe life and relevance into the Book of Mormon narratives. Unfortunately, they provide nothing that gives joy, nothing that expands the mind, nothing that enlarges the soul.

How much attention should we give unsolved problems? In what forum? The social dynamic of Mormonism handles that issue by itself. Those inclined to make inquiries do so, and those not so inclined encourage us to keep to ourselves until we've got something to contribute. The scriptures do recognize four valid motives for managing access to information: (1) pedagogy—when the information cannot be understood without significant preparation or experience (3 Nephi 17:2-3; Hebrews 5:11-14), (2) confidentiality on personal matters (D&C 42:88, 92), (3) sacredness (3 Nephi 17:17; D&C 63:64), and (4) social danger¹⁸³—this restriction never applies to ideas, but only to spelling out methods.

¹⁸³ For example, the Gadianton oaths are suppressed, but not their existence, function, or goals. See Helaman 6:25-26 and the discussion of Mesoamerican secret societies in Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting*, 300-

Information management in these cases derives from genuine love on the part of the teacher and free consent on the part of the student. Full knowledge remains available to those who seek it.

Our scriptures caution all of us against limiting knowledge in order to cover sins, gratify pride and vain ambition, or to exercise control, dominion, or compulsion over people in any degree of unrighteousness (cf. D&C 121:37). Pure knowledge, we are told, greatly enlarges the soul, without hypocrisy and without guile (D&C 121:42). That is, if the knowledge is pure, we can expect to see an increase of love and empathy, as when Enos first prays for himself, then for his family, and then for his enemies. It follows then, that impure knowledge leads to hypocrisy, impatience, and intolerance, all of which signify a contracting of the soul (D&C 121:39). This does not mean, however, that pure knowledge, sharp criticism, and love are always strangers to each other.

Take note that those who send out the young unprepared, or who create faulty background expectations for them, have just as much to answer for as those who stand in the great and spacious building, zealously or morbidly pointing out problems. Whether they intend to or not, both camps can lead innocent individuals to feel shame at clinging to the iron rod, and to lose their way, and wander lost in the broad roads. The disillusioned got their illusions somewhere.¹⁸⁴

In the lead-off article in *New Approaches*, Anthony Hutchinson claims that “ultimately whether the Book of Mormon is ancient really does not matter” (p. 16). He is quite wrong here. It matters for the definition of the community, and it matters for what we see when we read the Book of Mormon. Whether a person chooses to adopt a religious or an irreligious view or a historicist or environmentalist view of the Book of Mormon “makes a difference not only in one’s attitudes and behavior but in the way

309. In contrast to the hesitancy to discuss the Gadianton oaths, notice the boldness in presenting Korihor’s atheistic arguments at length in Alma 30. In such cases, without open discussion there can be no refutation and no preparation. In the case of a recipe for kitchen explosives, you do well to talk about why such things are a bad idea, but you do not need to pass along the recipe.

¹⁸⁴ See the lovely story told about the Prince Buddha and the consequences of his having an overprotective father; Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 159–60. The Prince finds his first glimpses of age, sickness, and death to be utterly shattering precisely because he had been so protected from them.

one sees the world. One may notice and value features of individual and corporate life that otherwise might be overlooked.”¹⁸⁵

Back to my friend’s question: How can we know what we know, and believe what we believe? If we really comprehend the function of paradigms, and recognize their perpetual inability to provide perfect certainty and an exact fit to reality, and likewise the uncertain and imperfect relationship between the signs and symbols of language and the realities that we must use them to signify, we must admit the imperfection of our knowledge. Where does this inescapable uncertainty leave us when it comes time to make decisions about our life commitments? Exactly where Mormonism began, and with the example that ensures that Mormonism continues.

At length I came to the conclusion that I must either remain in darkness and confusion, or else I must do as James directs, that is, ask of God. (Joseph Smith-History 1:13)

¹⁸⁵ Barbour, *Myths, Model, and Paradigms*, 56.