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Lehi on God's Law and an Opposition in All Things

A. D. Sorensen

One of the most puzzling and intriguing passages in the Book of Mormon is 2 Nephi 2:11, in which Lehi explains why there must be an opposition in all things. My purpose here is to explore the meaning and significance of this difficult but important passage. The central teaching of that passage concerns the role that God's law and the opposites affixed to it play in human and divine existence—e.g., righteousness and wickedness, good and evil. Unless one understands what that role is, I think, the whole passage defies interpretation. But in presenting his view of opposites connected to God's law, Lehi assumes of his readers considerable background knowledge concerning the law. Thus I must rely heavily on other scriptural texts to disclose his insights. But once the meaning of 2 Nephi 2:11 unfolds, it becomes apparent that Lehi offers in his teaching about things in opposition one of the most succinct and penetrating accounts of the role the law plays in human and divine existence found anywhere in scripture.

Analysis of 2 Nephi 2:11

Let me begin the analysis of 2 Nephi 2:11 by quoting the passage in full:

For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, my first-born in the wilderness, righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one; wherefore, if it should be one body it must needs remain as dead, having no life neither death, nor corruption nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility.

To explain this passage, I will first identify the separate sets of opposites found in it and the general picture of human existence which together they portray. Then I will examine the relations between the sets of opposites as Lehi lays them out in the text. Finally, I will turn to other scriptures for the explanation needed to understand adequately Lehi's teaching.

The view of opposing things Lehi presents in 2 Nephi 2:11 has a certain complexity to it due to the fact that running all through it are two levels of opposites. On one level he distinguishes three sets of opposites. But each set itself has two opposing possibilities, resulting in six sets of opposites in all. Accordingly, the first set Lehi mentions is "an opposition in all things." This set in turn may exist or not exist. When it does not exist, Lehi describes what remains as "all things" being "a compound in one." In other words, all things being a compound in one is the opposite of there being an opposition in all things. So precisely speaking, there are two sets of opposites here—the set of all things in opposition and the possibility of that set existing or not existing.

The second set Lehi mentions I will refer to, for lack of a more suitable term, as *ethical opposites*, i.e., righteousness and wickedness, holiness and misery, good and evil. By ethical opposites I will mean all ways in which God's law may be fulfilled or not fulfilled by what persons are (e.g., righteous or wicked), what they do (e.g., good or evil), and what they

undergo (e.g., happiness or misery). This set also has two opposing possibilities. It can either be “brought to pass” or not be “brought to pass.”

At the end of the passage Lehi brings in a third set of opposites that seems to represent the wide range of possibilities which characterize human existence—life and death, corruption and incorruption, happiness and misery, and sense and insensibility. The two opposing possibilities that mark this set of opposites are “having” or not “having” them. When that which exists does not “have” life or death, sense or insensibility, and so on, Lehi describes it as being “dead.” By implication the opposite of being “dead” is being “alive” and having the possibilities that go with human existence.

Notice that being “dead” does not mean here the same thing as suffering “death.” And being “alive” does not mean the same thing as enjoying “life.” “Life” and “death” refer, as they often do in scripture, to the fundamental as well as the overall possibilities of human existence. For instance, Jesus came that all persons might pass “from death unto life” (John 5:24-26). “Life” and “death” in this sense are sometimes referred to as spiritual life and spiritual death, in contrast to physical life and death. Both those who suffer death as well as those who enjoy life are alive in the sense opposite to being “dead.” Lehi indicates that being “dead” means “having neither life nor death.” Being alive involves having such possibilities. So it seems that all things being one body and “dead,” that is, having no life nor death, sense nor insensibility, and so on, means that persons as persons are nonexistent. I do not think Lehi has in mind here a person’s being alive or dead, existing or not existing in a purely physical sense. His concern is not with the presence or absence of such things as, for example, heart beats or brain waves.

When we stand back and observe these sets of opposites as a group, we notice that they form the purposive structure of human existence, and its total negation, which underlie the gospel in all its aspects. Within this structure all humankind

collectively and individually face the grand possibilities of their existence, that is, they face life and death, happiness and misery, as the caretakers of their own lives. This is their fundamental position in the world. In the present world, because of the fall of Adam and Eve, this position is marked by mortal and spiritual death. The purpose of human existence, which this structure reveals, is for persons to move out of mortality into immortality and away from death and misery toward life and happiness. In opposition to the purposive structure of human existence stands its overall negation, i.e., existence that is a compound in one (without things in opposition) and dead.

Now that I have identified the six sets of opposites in 2 Nephi 2:11, I will describe the relations between them as Lehi sets them forth. The first level sets of opposites—an opposition in all things, all ethical opposites, and opposites that characterize human existence—are related to each other by their negative possibilities. These relations compose the logical form that Lehi's reasoning takes in 2 Nephi 2:11. He reasons that there must be an opposition in all things, for if there were not, then ethical opposites—good and bad, righteousness and wickedness and so on—would not be possible. If ethical opposites were not possible, then all things would be a compound in one. And if everything were one body, then it would be dead and must remain so. In other words, there would be no higher living existence—no existence having the possibilities of life and death, corruption and incorruption, happiness and misery, sense and insensibility.

These are the relations that form Lehi's reasoning and that need to be analyzed if we want to understand 2 Nephi 2:11.

Let me define how I will proceed to explain Lehi's reasoning in 2 Nephi 2:11, using other scripture as I go, and why I choose that procedure. I will focus first on the relationships between ethical opposites affixed to God's law (e.g., righteousness and wickedness, good and evil), on the one hand, and opposites that characterize being alive as persons (life and death,

happiness and misery, and so on), on the other. For easy reference I will call these relations Proposition One.

Proposition One:

If ethical opposites affixed to God's law (righteousness and wickedness, good and evil and so on) cannot be brought to pass, then that which exists will be dead, having no life neither death, no corruption nor incorruption, no happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility.

In examining Proposition One, I will focus first on the relations between ethical opposites and life and death. After considering these relations, I will turn to the other relations between opposites in Proposition One and then to the remaining relations in 2 Nephi 2:11 itself.

Why proceed in this manner? There are two reasons. First, I see the relations between ethical opposites and spiritual life and death to be the key ones in Proposition One. If we understand them, we can more readily understand the others. Second, they are the key ones in Lehi's reasoning as a whole. Once understood, the remaining relations involving other opposites seem to fall into place and can be more readily clarified.

Bear in mind that the first step in the analysis—explaining the key relations between ethical opposites and life and death—must be the most detailed and in-depth. Then what follows will unfold more rapidly in light of the conclusions reached.

Relations Between Ethical Opposites

What kind of relations exist between ethical opposites connected to God's law and life and death? At first sight they might appear to be causal. Obeying God's law—being righteous and good—causes life; disobeying his law—being wicked and evil—causes death. But a closer look shows that they are not causal. Rather, ethical opposites constitute life and death. In other words, "life" consists in being good and righteous; "death"

consists in being wicked and evil. According to scripture, “death” *means* perishing “from that which is good” (2 Nephi 2:5), dying “as to things pertaining unto righteousness” (Alma 12:16; 5:42). Likewise, “life” *signifies* the human flourishing that righteousness and goodness comprise, as they enlarge the soul and expand the mind (Alma 32:27-43). So they are not different things, as they would have to be if they were causally related, but they are the same thing.

This being so, we can see why it must be true, according to Proposition One, that if ethical opposites cannot be brought to pass, then there could be no life nor death. It also must be true that if ethical opposites can be brought to pass, then life and death can be realized. Furthermore, it follows that life and death will be brought to pass if ethical opposites are realized. Some have called this last proposition “the law of the harvest.” It tells us that persons reap spiritual life as they become righteous and good. And they suffer spiritual death as they become wicked and evil. How ethical opposites linked to God’s law can be and are brought to pass—what conditions make them possible—need not concern us here. Suffice it to say that these conditions include the gifts of God, the atonement of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the agency of persons.

But let us examine more deeply how it is that ethical opposites, on the one hand, and life and death, on the other, are the same thing, and, by doing this, consider how life and death are related to being alive or existing as persons. In his unsurpassed description of how we come to have (spiritual) life in accord with what has been called the law of the harvest, Alma shows that (spiritual) life—life never ending and full—is literally constituted by what he calls “the word” (Alma 32:28-43). What Alma refers to as “the word” Paul calls the “word of life” (Philip. 2:16). This is the very word of life that Jesus, whom John called the “Word of life” (1 John 1:1), perfectly embodies. Alma describes how the word of life gives life by comparing it to the

“seed” (Alma 32:28) that grows into the tree of life, which tree represents life full and everlasting (vv. 28, 41).

He tells us that the word of life produces life in us if we allow it to be planted in our hearts through faith and then properly nourish it. It then literally grows in us and transforms us. Alma says that it “swells” or “enlarges” the “soul” and “expands” the mind and “enlightens” the “understanding” (v. 34). In other words, life, in the sense symbolized by the tree of life, actually enlarges and expands in us because of the word’s growth in us. Indeed, the growth of the word of life in us and the growth of life in us are the same thing. The word of life, when incorporated in us, *is* life. When the word has fully developed in us—when the tree of life is fully grown in us and produces its fruit—we possess “everlasting life” which is God’s greatest gift to humankind (Alma 32:41; D&C 14:7).

Life full and everlasting refers to the highest possibility of humankind, their ultimate good, both individually and collectively, and it also describes the content of salvation. Life in this sense, Alma says, is “most precious, . . . sweet above all that is sweet, . . . white above all that is white, . . . pure above all that is pure” (Alma 32:42). He promises to everyone who will partake of this life that “ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst” (v. 42; John 4:13-14). The human appetite for “life” is completely and endlessly satisfied by the word of life, if and when it becomes fully developed in us.

Yet, knowing that the word of life constitutes life does not tell us very much about what we want to know concerning the relations between ethical opposites and life and death as long as we do not understand what the word of life signifies, and how it is related to the ethical opposites attached to God’s law. To discover this, we must compare what Nephi learned about the meaning of the tree of life his father Lehi had seen in a dream:

And the angel said unto me: . . . Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw? And I answered him, saying: Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the

children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things. And he spake unto me, saying: Yea, and the most joyous to the soul (1 Nephi 11:21-23).

The tree of life symbolizes two things. In Alma, as we have observed, it symbolizes everlasting fullness of life. But it also symbolizes, as Nephi tells us, the love of God. Notice the almost precise parallels between the characteristics of the tree of life when it represents the love of God and when it stands for fullness of life everlasting. When it represents the love of God, the tree of life satisfies fully the desire for life: its fruit is “most sweet,” “most desirable above all things,” and “most joyous to the soul” (1 Nephi 8:11; 11:22- 23). In purity, it is “white, to exceed all whiteness” (8:11). In value, it is “precious above all” (11:9). It transforms lives as it “sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men” (11:22). And the tree of life, like the love of God, is, in Nephi’s words, “the greatest of all the gifts of God” (15:36).

Likewise, when the tree of life symbolizes fullness of everlasting life, it is “sweet above all that is sweet” and satisfies finally and completely one’s “hunger” and “thirst” for life, and its purity is “white above all that is white” (Alma 32:42). It transforms each person, beginning as a seed “planted” in the “heart” that enlarges the soul, and expands the mind, until life full and without end is reached (Alma 32:28, 41). Fully grown in us, the tree of life represents, as we know, the greatest gift of God—everlasting fullness of life (v. 41; D&C 14:7).

We may conclude, from what Nephi and Alma taught about the tree of life, that the word of life, in its fundamental meaning, is the perfect love of God. As Alma tells us, “every seed bringeth forth unto its own likeness” (32:31); and as we know, the seed—“the word”—develops into the tree of life that symbolizes divine love. So the word as a seed must signify the germ of divine love, just as the tree of life stands for divine love perfectly formed. It is, then, the growth of divine love in us that enlarges the soul and expands the mind until we reach that

fullness of life that will never end. Fullness of life itself must consist of life constituted by divine love.

Reflecting on the point just completed, it becomes apparent that ethical opposites and life and death are constitutively related as two dimensions of divine love in its role as fundamental law. Divine love is the fundamental law. Jesus says that “all the law and the prophets” hang on divine love (Matt. 22:37-40). Paul tells us that divine love “comprehends” and “fulfills” the whole law (Gal. 5:14; Romans 13:8-10). Divine love as fundamental law has two dimensions—a life-governing one and a life-giving one (D&C 88:13). On the one hand, the ethical opposites which Lehi mentions in 2 Nephi 2:11 are affixed to the life-governing dimension of divine love as law. By obeying that law—by being and behaving as persons of divine love—we are righteous and good. By disobeying that law, we are wicked and do evil. On the other hand, life and death, as opposites that distinguish our being alive as persons, are affixed to the life-giving dimension of the law of divine love. Those who fulfill the conditions of this dimension enjoy life. But those who do not fulfill them suffer death.

The life-governing and life-giving dimensions of divine love, understood as law, do not involve two separate parts of that law but one part viewed in two different ways. Accordingly, the two pairs of opposites—ethical opposites and life and death—are not separate opposites but the same ones seen from two different angles. That is what it means to say that the ethical opposites affixed to God’s law constitute (not cause) life and death connected to the law. As Nephi and Alma teach, fullness of life consists in being righteous and good—in realizing the life-governing word of life or divine love.

The constitutive relations between ethical opposites and spiritual life and death reside in the scripture, “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:39). We lose and find our lives when divine

love governs us. And they who seek their own life lose it because they live in opposition to the requirements of divine love.

The relations between ethical opposites and life and death cannot be adequately understood until we have taken into account the multiple levels of law to which those opposites are connected. In the Doctrine and Covenants, we learn that God's law and fullness of life are divided into levels of law and degrees or modes of life. There is a "law of a celestial kingdom," a "law of a terrestrial kingdom," and a "law of a telestial kingdom" (88:22-24). And each kingdom makes possible a "fullness" of existence. Those who are willing to "abide a celestial law" receive of its "fullness," those who "abide a terrestrial law" receive of its "fullness," and the same is true of those who "abide a telestial law" (vv. 29-31). The highest degree of fullness comes from abiding by the highest or celestial law; the lowest degree results from abiding by the telestial law. Within these three levels of law and degrees of life are further subdivisions. In the telestial kingdom the numbers of possible ways to live are typified by the stars in the heaven, and "as one star differs from another star in glory, even so differs one from another in glory in the telestial world" (D&C 76:98). These degrees of glory represent numerous possibilities of "fullness" of existence. Furthermore, in the celestial glory "there are three heavens or degrees" (D&C 131:1). Those who receive this highest "heaven"—the fullness of the Father—within the celestial kingdom enjoy fullness of life in its highest degree or mode (D&C 76:70).

What was said earlier about the relations between the life-governing and life-giving dimensions of God's law can be applied to every level of law and degree of life. All law governs life in a way that constitutes fullness of life characteristic of that law. A principle of love underlies the whole law that governs and gives life in any degree. These principles of love in turn are comprehended by divine love (or the love of light) which comprehends the law on all its levels.

The whole law itself has its opposite. That opposite consists of human existence without law, one that “seeketh to become a law unto itself,” one in which the persons “abideth not by law,” but “willeth to abide in sin, and altogether abideth in sin” (D&C 88:35). When persons live in opposition to the whole law, then they reap fullness of death. In its fullness, (spiritual) death refers to existence devoid or empty of (spiritual) life—human existence that is spiritless, dark and miserable. The principle that underlies all ways of being wicked and evil—all ways that corrupt and destroy life—the scriptures call “the love of darkness” (D&C 10:21; 29:45; John 3:19). Just as divine love (or love of light) comprehends the whole law and constitutes life in all its degrees, so the love of darkness encompasses all opposition to law and constitutes death. Together the love of light and the love of darkness encompass all animating principles at work in all modes of human existence.

So we see that human existence can be divided into two mutually exclusive and exhaustive modes: existence governed by God’s law, and existence that abides not by God’s law. Human existence in accordance with law includes all possible modes of life, each with a promise of “fullness.” Typified by the sun, moon, and numerous stars of heaven, each mode of life differs in its promise of fullness from other modes as the heavenly bodies differ from one another in light. Human existence outside law includes all ways that corrupt and destroy life. There is no mode of human existence that is not either existence with law or existence contrary to law.

It seems clear, then, that ethical opposites connected to God’s law on its many levels constitute life and death in their numerous degrees. This explains the proposition in Lehi’s reasoning which says that if ethical opposites attached to the law were impossible, then that which exists would be dead (persons as such would be nonexistent), having neither life nor death. For life and death in their many degrees—degrees as numerous and

various as the stars of the heavens—exhaust all possible modes of being alive.

Clarification of Proposition One

The relations between opposites set out in Proposition One that remain to be examined are between ethical opposites, on the one hand, and corruption and incorruption, happiness and misery, sense and insensibility, on the other. Earlier I noted that these last mentioned opposites are dimensions of life and death as the overall possibilities of human existence. This means that now that we understand somewhat the relations between ethical opposites and life and death, we can better understand the relations between ethical opposites and the other opposites that characterize being alive as a person.

Lehi seems to mean by corruption and incorruption the physical condition of mortal and immortal beings, respectively. Incorruption means the perfect physical condition that immortal beings enjoy. And corruption refers to the imperfect physical condition of mortal beings (2 Nephi 9:7; Mosiah 16:10). Lehi's reasoning appears to be that if ethical opposites could not be brought to pass, resulting in all things being dead, then there could be no corruption or incorruption in the sense indicated. This all seems to follow. For corruption and incorruption themselves appear to be ethical categories. In other words, corruption and incorruption is a distinction whose existence has no place and makes no sense in a universe that is a compound in one and without living beings. According to Lehi, even God could not be if there were no law and therefore no ethical opposites. By the way, he then goes on to say that if there is no God, there could have been "no creation of things" and "all things must have vanished away" (2 Nephi 2:13), including bodies corrupt and incorrupt.

Happiness and misery, like life and death, characterize, respectively, the existence of the righteous and the wicked. In Alma's words, "wickedness never was happiness" (Alma 41:10). Likewise, we must say, I think, that righteousness never was misery. Misery is contrary to the nature of righteousness and therefore opposite of God's nature (Alma 41:3-11). So happiness and misery are not like joy and sorrow or pleasure and pain. The wicked, too, may rejoice or experience sorrow (Mormon 4:11; 2:13). The righteous can have both joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain. But only the wicked suffer misery and only the righteous enjoy happiness.

Thus, it appears that happiness and misery describe, respectively, the overall and long-run experience of those who enjoy fullness of life and those who suffer death. So Lehi's reasoning makes sense when he tells us that if ethical opposites could not be brought to pass, then all things would be dead, having neither happiness nor misery. For if ethical opposites were not possible, as we observed in detail earlier, then there could be no life and death in any degree (all things would be dead). It follows that there could be no happiness nor misery. Furthermore, righteousness is a necessary constituent part of happiness and not a separate thing that causes it. This is how, I think, Alma and Helaman understood matters when they taught that wickedness is contrary to the "nature of happiness" (Alma 41:10-12; Helaman 13:38). In other words, righteousness is not a separate thing from happiness any more than painting is a separate thing from the pleasure of painting. Painting is a component part of the pleasure of painting. Likewise, righteousness is a component part of happiness. It is part of its very "nature." The same may be said of misery and wickedness. The latter is a constituent part of the former. So if, as Lehi says, all ethical opposites and therefore righteousness and wickedness were not possible, then happiness and misery would not be possible.

The scriptures give little explicit indication of what sense and insensibility might mean, so my analysis of them will be

speculative and incomplete. We should assume that they signify a basic dimension of human existence, like the other opposites Lehi uses to indicate the meaning of being alive and dead. It would seem that “sense” refers to the person’s overall capacity as a person to distinguish, respond to, and be affected by positive and negative stimuli (excluding, I think, *sense* in the purely physiological meaning of the word). If so, then sense, or sensibility, would form the person’s power to perceive, to think, to act and forbear, and to undergo positive and negative experience. Understood as having this extensive meaning, sensibilities would be the elements—the building blocks—that compose life and death in any degree. If so, then if ethical opposites cannot be brought to pass, and thus life and death in all their degrees become impossible, then all sensibilities (except purely physiological ones) also become impossible.

How ethical opposites linked to God’s law might make possible particular sensibilities cannot be worked out at length here, because the task is too large. But consider as an example the capacity to respond to emotional stimuli. For instance, gratitude, admiration and gladness each necessarily involve a positive evaluation of their object. So do joy and many forms of pleasure. If persons were incapable of positive evaluations, they would be unable to experience these emotions. And according to 2 Nephi 2:11, without some notion of good or bad related to God’s law, we would not be capable of the evaluations that make such emotions possible. Much the same is true of negative emotions, such as hate, malice, and taking pleasure in sin. Hate toward others includes a negative evaluation of them based on a precept of evil. Taking pleasure in the failure of another, or in one’s being corrupted, arises from the same source. It seems that many—perhaps all—emotions may be constituted by evaluations that ultimately stem from ethical opposites contained in God’s extensive system of law.

Lehi also says that persons could not have insensibilities if ethical opposites were not possible. To say this makes sense

if the world is created by ethical opposites. It implies that insensibilities exist in the face of ethical possibilities to which we could be sensible. Since the ethical possibilities oppose one another and we can be sensible in opposite ways, we can also be insensible in opposite ways as well. Thus, for example, the wicked can be insensible to good—they can “harden their hearts” (2 Nephi 33:2) and be “past feeling” (Moroni 9:20)—only if being sensible to good is or was possible for them. Likewise, the righteous can be insensible to evil because it is or was possible for them to be sensible to evil. For instance, the pure in heart “have no more disposition [an insensibility] to do evil” (Mosiah 5:2) in the face of evil as a possibility for them.

Remaining Relations Between Opposites

Now that I have clarified Proposition One, derived from Lehi’s reasoning in 2 Nephi 2:11, let us return to Lehi’s original argument, with that understanding in hand, and examine the still remaining relations between opposites. His original argument seems to go like this:

If there were no opposition in all things, then ethical opposites affixed to God’s law (e.g., righteousness and misery, wickedness, good and evil) could not be brought to pass. If ethical opposites could not be brought to pass, then all things would be a compound in one (an absence of opposition in all things). And if opposition in all things is absent, then that which would exist would be dead, having no life neither death, corruption nor incorruption, and so on.

The relations between opposites that remain to be examined all involve “an opposition in all things.” Many readers, I think, encounter an almost irresistible temptation to read into the term “an opposition in all things” a profound metaphysical theory about the building blocks of the whole universe. But let us see what meaning that phrase must have in order for it to occupy the place it does in Lehi’s reasoning.

All direct relations between an opposition in all things and other opposites in Lehi's reasoning are between it and ethical opposites connected to God's law. More exactly, the relations are between an opposition in all things existing and all ethical opposites being possible, on the one hand, and between all things being a compound in one (the total absence of an opposition among things) and all ethical opposites not being possible, on the other. Lehi says that if there were not an opposition in all things, then all ethical opposites affixed to the law would be impossible. But then he also tells us that if all ethical opposites were not possible, then all things would be a compound in one—the absence of opposition among all things. So we see that, according to Lehi's reasoning thus interpreted, an opposition in all things and all ethical opposites attached to God's law are necessary for each other. That is, if either is not possible or nonexistent, then the other is not possible or nonexistent.

Since each—opposition in all things and all ethical opposites being possible—is necessary for the other to exist, each is sufficient for the other. Thus, to say that if there were an absence of an opposition among all things, then all ethical opposites could not be brought to pass implies, by way of transposition, that if all ethical opposites could be brought to pass, then there would be an opposition among all things. Similarly, to say that if all ethical opposites were not possible, then everything would be compound in one (the absence of an opposition among all things), implies that if there were an opposition among all things, then all ethical opposites could be brought to pass.

What does seeing the place that the phrase “an opposition in all things” has in Lehi's reasoning—seeing that the existence of an opposition in all things and the possibility of all ethical opposites are necessary and sufficient for each other—tell us about what that phrase means given my interpretation of Proposition One? To begin with, we see that an opposition in all things, as Lehi uses the term, does not comprise the building

blocks of the universe as the universe exists separate from all ethical opposites. As Lehi indicates, if all ethical opposites tied to God's law were impossible, then all things would be a compound in one. Furthermore, we see that an opposition in all things must be affixed to God's law, since all ethical opposites are attached to it, and they make possible (are necessary and sufficient for) an opposition in all things. This, by the way, is in accord with the fact that Lehi leads into his discussion of an opposition in all things in order to further expound his message concerning the connection between "the ends of the atonement" and certain opposites "affixed" to "the law" (2 Nephi 2:5-10).

Earlier we examined the life-giving and life-governing roles which God's law performs in making possible human existence in all its modes. Since an opposition in all things is attached to the law, this suggests that the law governs life and creates life in all its degrees through that opposition in all things. Now the two basic roles played by God's law are formed from a single fundamental opposition—the opposition of (spiritual) life and death in their many degrees. The law *governs* human existence by directing persons to bring to pass life as opposed to death. By their nature, life and death as opposites point persons away from death toward life in its fullest degree. God's law *gives life*, as well as governs life (D&C 88:13), through the comprehensive opposition of life and death. Indeed, it gives life by how it governs life. Those who abide the law by promoting life harvest life. Those who live contrary to it in the service of death reap death.

What "an opposition" in all things means seems to have surfaced through the interpretation being given. The term "*an* opposition" in all things seems to indicate a single opposition, no doubt a fundamental or comprehensive one, affixed to God's law and running through all things. This accords with the fact that the law's basic dimensions are formed, in ways just discussed, by the fundamental opposition of life and death. So it appears that the single opposition in all things which is tied to

the law is life and death—the fundamental opposition that organizes the life-governing and life-creating dimensions of the law.

This interpretation of what “an opposition” means accords with the only other time Lehi uses the word. He says that after God had created all things “it must needs be that there was an opposition; even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life” (2 Nephi 2:15). The “tree of life” represents, as we observed earlier, everlasting fullness of life. Death (spiritual) is the opposite of life. So the “forbidden fruit,” attached to the tree of knowledge of good and evil, represents that which produces death.

However, “an opposition in all things” might be interpreted to mean a singular opposition in each and every thing which is affixed to the law. This reading does not require us, as the first one does, to infer what opposition Lehi is talking about. He is saying what he is saying: there is a distinct opposition, whatever it happens to be in any particular case, in each and every thing. One problem with this interpretation is that it does not seem to set well with the use of the negation “not.” Lehi tells us there must be an opposition in all things. “If not so,” he says, then, by implication, all things would be a compound in one. There would be no opposition in any thing. But to say there is not an opposition particular to each and every thing does not imply that all things would be a compound in one. There could still be many opposites among things even if there were not an opposition in each and every thing. But if, as the first interpretation brings out, there is a fundamental opposition attached to God’s law which divides all things, then if that opposition were “not so,” all things would be a compound in one.

But let us assume that an opposition in all things means a singular opposition in each and every thing. Now, as we know, the law’s two basic roles are to govern life and to give life. This means, given the assumption we are making, that the law governs and creates life through the multiplicity of opposites connected

to it. But, as observed just a moment ago, these two roles the law plays are made possible by the fundamental opposition of life and death. The law governs and gives life by directing persons away from death toward life. This implies that the multitude of opposites affixed to the law themselves order and create life in opposition to death. In other words, life and death as fundamental opposites represent the basic dimensions of all opposites attached to the law.

So either interpretation of an opposition in all things comes down to the same thing. If an opposition in all things means a single fundamental opposition entailed by God's law, then that opposition is (spiritual) life and death. But if it means that each and every thing has its distinct opposite which is affixed to the law, then the basic dimensions of any such opposite are to help direct and give life in the face of the possibility of death. Still, as we proceed it will become apparent that the first interpretation is the most plausible.

Once we see that life and death comprise the comprehensive opposition in the phrase "an opposition in all things," the necessary and sufficient relations in Lehi's reasoning between the existence of an opposition in all things and the possibility of all ethical opposites make sense. Accordingly, it seems perfectly clear why all ethical opposites would not be possible if that opposition did not exist. For the opposition between life and death, with its numerous possibilities, forms the life-governing and life-giving dimensions of the law. Furthermore, as defined earlier, all ethical opposites consist of all ways that persons may fulfill, or fail to fulfill, the life-governing and life-creating dimensions of the law. So all ethical opposites would indeed be impossible, as Lehi says, if there were not an opposition in all things.

We can also see why there could be no opposition among things—why all things would be a compound in one—if all ethical opposites were not possible. Because, again, the ethical opposites connected to the law exhaust all possibilities for

realizing the life-directing and life-creating dimensions of the law which the opposites life and death, with their numerous possibilities, constitute. This is just another way of saying what we observed earlier in analyzing Proposition One: ethical opposites (righteousness and wickedness, good and not good), which are connected to the law with its many levels, constitute life and death with their numerous degrees. Death means perishing “from that which is good” (2 Nephi 2:5), dying “as to things pertaining to righteousness” (Alma 5:42; 12:16). Likewise, “life” signifies the human flourishing that righteousness and goodness comprise, as they enlarge the soul and expand the mind (Alma 32:27-43).

Lehi says there must be an opposition “in all things.” If there were not, “all things” would be a compound in one. Lehi means “all things which are created” by God, including, for example, “the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air” (2 Nephi 2:14-15). Somehow the opposition of life and death affixed to the law operates in all things, thus broadly conceived. What we now know, from the interpretation being offered here, about the opposition in all things affixed to the law indicates that life and death as opposites are connected to all things through all ethical opposites. This implies that all things created by God must manifest opposing possibilities which can be described using ethical categories. It means, in other words, that all things can be, entirely or in degrees, either good or bad.

This conclusion is borne out by the scriptural narrative describing the creation of all things. In the beginning, everything was “without form and void” (Moses 2:1-2). Out of this primary existence God made “all things.” At different stages of his work—for example, after he divided light from darkness, separated land from water, and caused seeds to produce after their kinds—he said: “I, God, saw that all things which I had made were good” (vv. 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). When he finished all his works of creation, he similarly concluded: “And I, God, saw everything that I had made, and, behold, all things which I had

made were very good” (v. 31). That all things God made were very good implies, according to Lehi’s teaching, that this or that thing, or everything created, *could* turn out not good. Indeed, after its creation the whole earth fell with the fall of man, resulting in all things being much less than very good (2 Nephi 2:22; D&C 77:6-7, 12). Everything entered the eon of death. But in time the earth, and all things of the earth, will enter their “sanctified, immortal, and eternal state” (D&C 77:1-2). Then the good in all things will be fully realized. This indicates that good and bad possibilities exist in all things from the viewpoint of God’s law.

How Lehi’s reasoning unfolds now seems more evident. If there were not a fundamental opposition of life and death connected to all things then, as explained a moment ago, all ethical opposites could not be brought to pass, then, as we can now see, all things would be a compound in one, meaning that the enormous multitude of good and bad possibilities in all things could not exist.

This reasoning, when transposed, is also illuminating. For it tells us that the multiplicity of ethical opposites in all things makes possible the fullness of life. In the first place, life means being fully alive to all good. Death signifies, as Lehi tells us, perishing to all that is good (2 Nephi 2:5). So the fullness of God’s life—the “fullness of the Father” (D&C 76:71)—must consist in the fact that he creatively and appreciatively brings to pass and apprehends the good in all things. In the second place, the aim of all life is life itself. God’s purpose in all he does—his work and his glory (Moses 1:39)—is that all living might partake of fullness of life with him. That all may be one with him in realizing and cherishing the good in all things. This is the love and righteousness of God. We partake of his fullness and do righteousness too, when we, creatively and appreciatively, participate with him in all that is good and thus love even as he loves. So the good in all things, grounded in ethical opposites attached to God’s law, makes fullness of life possible and forms its aim.

The implication seems to be that if life and death as opposites did not exist then all things would be without purpose and God would have no reasons for being. This represents Lehi's thinking and the conclusion he reaches. He reasons that if there were not an opposition in all things and all ethical opposites were impossible, then all things would be a compound in one and dead, having no life neither death, corruption nor incorruption, and so on. If this were so, then, Lehi continues, everything would "have been created for a thing of naught . . . there would have been no purpose in the end of its creation" (2 Nephi 2:12). All things would exist without purpose in a world without humanity and the possibility for fullness of life. This, says Lehi, would "destroy the wisdom of God and his eternal purposes, and also the power, and the mercy, and the justice of God" (v. 12).

Lehi does not stop here in pressing his reasoning about the role that the law, and the opposition affixed to it, play in making possible living existence and the purpose of all other things. He persists by saying that without the law and its ethical opposites, not only would God's reason for existing be destroyed, but God himself would not exist; therefore, not only would all things be without purpose, but all things would cease to be. "And if ye shall say there is no law," Lehi says, "ye shall also say" there are no ethical opposites—"no sin," "no righteousness," "no happiness," "no punishment," "[no] misery." "And if these things are not there is no God. And if there is no God we are not . . . [and] all things must have vanished away" (2 Nephi 2:13).

The Implications of Lehi's Teachings

Thus interpreted, the implications that Lehi's teaching concerning an opposition in all things has for understanding the role of God's law in making possible human (and divine) existence seem far reaching and profound. He reasons that if there were not an opposition in all things, if life and death as

comprehensive opposites did not exist in any degree, then all things would be dead—there could be no human or divine existence. In other words, the opposition of life and death is necessary for the existence of persons, whatever form it may take. Whatever the mode of existence, some level of life and death as opposites must operate in it or it would not be. This in turn means that in every way to live, life and death as opposites point persons away from death toward life in some degree of fullness. That directionality inherent in life and death represents the life-governing power of God’s law at work in every way of living. In every way to live, then, righteousness and good, wickedness and evil are possible on some level. Those who foster the things of life, whatever their mode of existence, are righteous and good in some degree, while those who pursue the things of death are to some extent wicked and evil.

So no mode of human existence can escape the framework of God’s law. Persons either abide the law on one of its many levels or live altogether contrary to it (D&C 88:35). But none can live or exist separate from it. That is why it can be said, as Lehi does as he begins his teaching in 2 Nephi 2, that “the law is given unto [all] men” (v. 5). God’s law is given unto all men by virtue of the fact that, on some level, life and death, as fundamental opposites, order and give direction to every possible way to live. Furthermore, Lehi can also say that “men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil” (v. 5), because the fundamental opposites life and death, built into every mode of living in some degree, inherently direct persons to eschew the things of death (evil) and to promote the things of life (good).

Imagine, for example, how God’s law would govern the pure in heart in a Zion society through the system of opposites connected to it. All activities would be governed “by the principles of the law of the celestial kingdom” (D&C 105:5). To this law certain ethical opposites—righteousness and wickedness, good and bad—would be fixed which would give that

society its overall purposive structure. The defining aim of that structure would be to help bring about, for others as well as members, fullness of life everlasting.

Furthermore, each kind of activity in a Zion society would have opposites peculiar to it which would help order it and give it direction. Take, for example, farming. Some opposites that might figure into producing a good crop would include good and bad seed, rich and depleted soil, well-broken and poorly broken draft animals, sound and unsound equipment, good and bad weather.

For people in a Zion society, such opposites have meaning within the larger purposive structure in which farming takes place. They help form the purposive structure of a Zion society because, in their detailed way, they help to give order and direction to farming and to make it an integral part of that larger structure. Indeed, opposites, such as good and bad seed, sound and unsound implements, represent the detailed manner in which the care which divine love has for the temporal welfare of people finds expression as the fundamental governing principle in the daily life of the farmer. Outside the larger purposive structure they help form, the opposites that organize farming in a Zion society would be without point. We should expect that the farmers in a Zion society would, whenever they could, pray for good weather and plant good seed in fertile soil using well-broken draft animals and sound equipment. We would expect that of them as part of their righteousness and goodness as God's stewards.

What is true of farming in a Zion society is true of all activities in that society. And what is true of a Zion society seems to be true of every way of living. Life is governed—given order and direction—by a system of opposites, some very detailed in nature, which are ultimately affixed to some level of God's law that governs that society. These opposites, by virtue of their roots in the fundamental opposition of life and death, direct persons to serve life in some degree of fullness and to forgo the ways of

death. Without this intrinsic directionality, all opposites which organize any mode of human existence would be without meaning and significance, and would vanish away.

God's law gives life as well as governs life. Lehi's teaching, as it has been interpreted, implies that the directionality that is inherent in any mode of human existence, by virtue of the opposites life and death, creates life in some degree of fullness for all who govern themselves by it. The universal principle is that those who promote life receive life in whatever degree their way of living makes possible. Everywhere those who serve the ways of death reap death. For instance, as we observed earlier, persons partake of the fullness of the Father when they incorporate the Father's love which reaches out creatively and appreciatively to all things through opposition in all things. Their minds and souls are completely filled by that animating love which comprehends and embraces all things. In the words of Paul to the Ephesians, they "comprehend . . . what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height" of the love of Christ. And "to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge," means to "be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:18-19).

What is true of the fullness of the Father seems to be true of every lesser degree of life made possible by God's law. Every degree of fullness is made possible by a principle of love as fundamental law and the opposites attached to it. In a Zion society, for example, the farmers' lives would be full in part, I should think, because they produced good crops by planting good seed in the right soils using well-broken horses and sound implements. Their lives would have fullness because they, as persons of love, did well a work that contributes to the welfare of others. But their fullness would stem also from the fact that the world of farming, and much of the larger world as well, ordered and directed by opposites such as those I have mentioned, would be experienced by them as good because of the divine love in them. The reason is that the love which animates their lives reaches out creatively and appreciatively to many

things around them, much as God's love does as he realizes and regards the good possibilities in all things.

Further Study Needed

Much more remains to be said in clarifying Lehi's teaching in 2 Nephi 2:11 on God's law and the need for an opposition in all things. For example, I omit any mention of divine justice, though it is an integral part of the law. This omission especially makes my analysis of 2 Nephi 2:11 incomplete. But a discussion of divine justice is a large subject that deserves a separate examination. In any case, what Lehi means in 2 Nephi 2:11 seems more understandable now. There indeed "must needs be an opposition in all things." For if there were not, if the fundamental opposition of life and death with its numerous degrees did not exist, then all modes of existence in time and eternity would not be possible. God himself would not be and all created things would vanish away.