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Language, Conversation, Sanity and Reality

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The thesis of this paper is that human being consists of conversations, and that the ability of a person to converse with other beings to the advantage of the other beings is the measure of the person's sanity.

1. Human Being is here taken as a verb form, not a noun form.

While it is possible to understand human beings as entities, as essences with accidents, another way of understanding human beings is to see each of them as what each one does. This does two things. It changes the emphasis from the kind or type, the universal, to the individual. And it also puts the focus on accomplishment rather than on potential. A human being, taken as an essence, is a being of a certain material nature, seen as a standard anatomy with a standard physiology and as a being with special capacity to communicate and to reason. But a human being seen as a doer of deeds is individualized into just where and when the individual lives, with what environment that person must cope, and the particular effect that person has on his or her total environment. While both analyses are useful, the latter understanding is more pertinent for the purposes of this paper.

2. Communication is one being affecting another being.

The word communication etymologically means to be within the walls together. Beings which communicate are not walled off from each other. They are able to affect one another. The affect may be reciprocal or not. Communicative affect may be received as sensory effect, as kinetic effect or as chemical effect. Sensory effects are hearing, seeing, touching, tasting, etc. Kinetic effects are such as being moved, as when one person shoves another, or being shot by a bullet or an arrow, etc. Chemical effects are such as being burned by an acid or inhal-

ing carbon monoxide. One special case of sensory affect/effect is using symbols to communicate.

Everything which happens to a person is communication from some other being. Everything a person does communicates with other beings.

3. Language is patterned and normed affect/effect.

Pattern is configurations of affect and effect which are repeated. Normed patterns are patterns to which some receiver/reader of patterns reacts in some typical manner. To send communications in a patterned and normed manner is to use a language. To react to the patterned and normed affect of another being in a typical and understanding way is to "read" the other being.

There are natural languages and artificial languages. Natural languages are seen to operate when a candle flame exhibits a characteristic pattern; a moth reacts in a typical manner by veering into the flame as it flies. Or a pistil reacts chemically to one type of pollen while ignoring others. Or DNA recombines in various ways to form an organism. Artificial languages are human languages which use symbols, the combinations of which are patterned and normed to facilitate human sensory communication. The special case of language communication is a standard human language such as English.

4. Conversation is continuing language communication between two or more beings.

Bees converse when transmitting data about nectar sources by dancing. A bird converses with a nest using twigs and grass until the nest satisfies it for nesting. All deliberate human action is a form of conversation with something or someone. Growing a garden is a conversation with a plot of ground and living plants. Playing flute is a conversation with a musical instrument, and the music is a conversation with an audience if the audience responds. The special case of conversation is when two human

beings speak back and forth with each other in a language such as English.

5. There are four special kinds of conversations which human beings participate in, each being differentiated by the different kinds of partners in conversation.

The basic partner in human conversations is nature and physical objects. Learning to observe, read, and react in conversation with one's physical surroundings is the initial human task. This task is to develop a language ability to relate to other natural and physical objects so that one may converse with them. Such basic conversation is seen in a baby crying and being comforted, in the baby tasting everything, or in reaching for everything.

The second partner in human conversations is other humans now acting as symbolic communicators rather than as physical, natural beings. As the child begins to associate sounds and actions with each other, consciousness of spoken language is formed. Then other persons are no longer just physical objects, but physical objects with whom the child can converse, say in English.

The third partner in human conversations is God. Little children have an awareness of communicating with a spiritual being who teaches them of good. If they are taught to honor this opportunity, it grows and increases in importance in their lives as they mature. If they are taught to disavow this opportunity, they turn from it and the opportunity atrophies until it is no longer part of the person's conscious conversations.

The fourth partner in human conversations is Satan. Satan is the spiritual person of evil who promotes lies and selfishness. When humans do not acknowledge the existence of Satan they attribute his influence to themselves or as the residual effect of some other person upon them; this causes misinterpretation of the conversations with Satan. But if Satan is recognized as a conversational partner, his influence can be dealt with directly and more effectively.

Conversing with natural and physical objects and with human beings as symbolic communicators serves as a horizontal axis of human conversation, or communication within the physical realm.

Conversing with God and Satan serves as a vertical axis of conversation, or communication within the spiritual realm. It is popular to pretend that only horizontal communication exists or can exist. But to ignore the spiritual is to ignore the inner feelings and idea development which human beings experience. To attribute all of our inner experience to natural, horizontal sources is to deny the existence of the spiritual realm. Part of the thesis of this paper is that such denial is an important source of insanity in the human population. To be sane one must deal with all of one's experience and conversations, not with just a selective part of it.

6. Some regularities which pertain to human conversations:

Law 1. Conversations with all four partners, with natural/physical things, with other humans as symbolic communicators, with God, and with Satan, are necessary for normal human life. (Not to deal with one or more of these partners in a deliberate conscious way is to abdicate agency or stewardship in that area. To do so is to be less than fully human by not conversing with a potential partner, only receiving communication, not responding in deliberate conversation. That is like owning a piece of property but not paying any attention to it, letting it go wild and letting whoever and whatever to dwell and act thereon.)

Law 2. If human beings converse only with natural/physical things, they never develop normal human language capacity and are limited to conversations with natural/physical things. (They do not gain human language, nor agency. Having a developed human language is what makes it possible to converse normally with other humans, with God, and with Satan. Without a language we can receive influence, but cannot converse as an agent may.)

Law 3. God communicates with human beings in many ways (in God men live, move, have mentality, etc.), but he converses with them principally to enable them to advantage other humans and natural/physical things in their communications with other beings.

Law 4. The ability to advantage other beings has its ultimate source in God, and he is the sole ultimate source of such conversational ability. This is to say

that God is the sole source of good. But human beings also help each other and help natural beings through the influence which derives from God.

Law 5. Satan converses with human beings only to teach them to disadvantage other beings (other humans, natural/physical things, and God) in their conversations.

7. Conversational competence is being able to converse well enough with a partner in conversation to have the option either to advantage or to disadvantage that partner.

To advantage a partner is to give the partner more being (conversational attainment) by sharing with the partner truth, kindness, power, etc. To disadvantage a partner in conversation is to converse so as to disable the partner through lies, insults, wounds, etc. Thus conversational competence is the measure to which one is able to do both good and evil to a partner in conversation. One may be minimally competent to converse with one human partner, but be able to have a hundred times the competence to communicate with another human partner. To be a minimum normal human being is to have minimal conversational competence with all four kinds of partners, physical and spiritual. Which is to say that most human beings can and do converse with all four kinds of partners. Some are very good at such conversing, and some are not. Some have conversations with many kinds of natural things and many human beings, while others have few such conversational partners. To be a god is to have maximal conversational competence with every other being. Agency begins with minimal human conversational competence and maximizes in the power of a god.

8. Sanity is the use of human agency (conversational competence) to advantage natural, human and godly partners in conversation.

Since the power to advantage partners in conversation comes only in conversations with God, humans are sane only when they are able to converse with God and then use that conversation with God as a basis for advantaging natural and human partners in conversation. When one advantages natural or human partners in conversation one automatically advantages God. When one uses

conversation with Satan to disadvantage humans, or nature, or God, one is not sane.

The reason for the connection between sanity and advantaging partners in conversation has to do with the nature of reality. The reality of a being is not what it is but what it does. (What it is is an artificial attempt to capture the being apart from what it does, but this is always a caricature of the being.) What every being does is communicate. Most of the communications of every being are conversations. Most of what a being is, its reality, is its conversations with other beings. Thus every being has a career, which is the history of its conversations with other beings. Few beings are static entities, but are also being advantaged and disadvantaged (enlarged and diminished) in every conversation they have, and are advantaging and disadvantaging others in every conversation, each being using its agency. When humans converse with God, he only advantages them. When human beings converse with Satan, he only converses to disadvantage the human beings, thus to advantage himself at the expense of others as his kingdom and dominion increase. Human beings are agents, which means they may choose either to advantage those with whom they converse (deriving from their conversations with God) or to disadvantage them (deriving from their conversations with Satan).

When a being disadvantages another being, that disadvantaging of the other being results in reduced conversational competence for that other being. But if one being reduces the conversational competence of another being, the one being thus reduces the opportunity to converse with that disadvantaged being. Since the amount of being a being has is the sum of its conversations with others, when one reduces the conversational competence of another being one reduces the being of that being and also reduces the being of the self because one can no longer converse as much with that being. A classic case of this kind of disadvantaging is found in Cain killing Abel. Cain disadvantaged Abel in slaying him, hoping thereby to gain his brother's goods. But the goods soon perish, and Cain is diminished because he no longer has a brother Abel with whom he can converse and rejoice. To disadvantage another being results in the reduction of one's own being. Pursued far enough, disadvantaging others

results in the attainment of the narrowed being and diminished stature of Satan, as do the Sons of Perdition.

Sanity is wholeness. The ultimate of wholeness is God, who advantages all beings and thus enjoys greater being by conversing more and more with all those beings. Whenever a person learns from God how to advantage another being and does so, that person enlarges the being of the other person, also enlarges the being of God, and also enlarges his or her own being. This is sanity, or a reaching towards wholeness. To disadvantage another being is to diminish that being, to diminish God and to diminish self; which is insanity, that which detracts from wholeness.

Satan is the advocate of insanity or unwholeness. His basic ploy is: If you disadvantage your partner, that will advantage you. That lie is answered in the paragraph preceding. But Satan has another ploy: If you disadvantage others, I (Satan) will give you special advantages. And he sometimes does: short-run, physical advantages. To accept a short run advantage from Satan in order to disadvantage another being is selling that other being. The question every person should then ask is: Can a being who tempts you to disadvantage others and who pays you to disadvantage others in the short run be likely to give you any advantage in the long run? To accept a temporary advantage from one who promotes disadvantage is also insanity.

One of Satan's lies is that the amount of goods and happiness in the world is a finite sum. In such a zero-sum situation, the less my neighbor has, the more I can have. So part of the human reaction is based on whether one believes Satan's lie that this is a zero-sum game or whether one believes God's promise that his riches are infinite. Those who believe in advantaging others have little trouble believing in God, and those who truly believe in God have little trouble believing that it is good to advantage others. Those who don't mind disadvantaging others are fearful for their own welfare (selfish), do not believe in nor trust God, and are willing to believe the zero-sum idea. So they go on disadvantaging others. Eventually (the long run) they will understand that disadvantaging others also disadvantages themselves, and they will stop acting insanely.

9. The cure for insanity is conversing with God.

Those who will not learn to communicate competently with God are doomed to some measure of insanity until they learn to have such competent conversation with God. The more competent one becomes in conversing with God, the more one can advantage one's partners and the more sane one can be.

10. Happiness is being sane.

Happiness is increasing the being of one's partners in conversation by continually advantaging them. It is a rejoicing in helping others to grow in helping others to grow in helping others to grow . . . ad infinitum. Man was created by God to be happy. Satan was given to man by God to provide an opposition so that the choice to advantage one's neighbors or to disadvantage them would be a real and live option. Only when people converse competently with God can they chose to be like God in advantaging others. But only as they also converse competently with Satan by saying an explicit "No" to his influence does conversation with God and chosen obedience to God become meritorious. Thus one can freely choose advantaging others over disadvantaging others only if one is conversationally competent and makes a deliberate, explicit choice to favor the affect of God over the affect of Satan.

11. The conclusion of the matter.

The more competent one is to converse with nature, people, God and Satan, the more agency one has. If one uses that agency to serve God, one's ability to converse with nature, humans and God will increase to the maximum possible, because God advantages those who advantage others. This increase of agency and advantaging tends to maximize the agency and advantaging of the person who does so, which is the process of becoming as God is.

Conversing with nature is a key to this process of learning to be conversationally competent. Nature never lies. Nature is always regular, constant, dependable. Nature is always available and will always converse. Conversations with nature help us to be concerned about reverencing and advantaging natural things as we are influenced by God, or they

help us to harm and destroy as we are influenced by Satan. The help or the harm always has an immediate reaction (though some reactions may be delayed), and thus one learns to read the influence of God and Satan in nature as one pays attention. Learning to read nature is a better index to differentiating between God and Satan than learning to read humans, because humans listen to both God and Satan and thus the spiritual influence of persons varies from person to person and from time to time in the same person.

To have better conversations with nature is to order and beautify the earth and to respect and honor all natural things as God's handiwork. To have better conversations with humans is to see in each of them the face of Christ and to honor and advantage each one of them as God inspires one to do so. To have better conversations with God is to learn to love him with our heart, might, mind and strength. To have better conversations with Satan is to recognize him whenever he approaches, then firmly to say "No" to him. But conversation with Satan must not be engaged in to bring railing accusation against him, for he, too, is a son of God. The maximum of reality, which is conversing, and of sanity, which is advantaging in conversation, is found for human beings only in inheriting all good things from Father by learning to be conversationally competent with God, then to use that competence to advantage both him and our neighbor (nature and other human beings).

To learn better conversational competence with any partner is to be attentive and to learn from experience how to do better. God gives guidance, but that guidance must be sought in competent conversation with God. How better to converse with God? By trying. To converse with him is the most advantageous of all conversations, for he is the great advantager who advantages everyone as much as possible, teaching them how to be more competent in conversation with any partner including Satan.

12. The moral of the matter.

Humans who wish to be sane would do well especially to concentrate on improving their conversations with God, with natural/ physical things, with other people, and with Satan. From natural/physical

things we learn to be exact. From God one will learn to be true and to advantage others, as well as how to converse more competently. In conversing with Satan to deny his influence, one will learn to overcome selfishness, the insanity of disadvantaging others. Some humans serve God and some serve Satan and some serve both; thus conversing with humans in general does not promote exactness, or fidelity, or advantaging, nor does it quell selfishness. But a human who is greatly sane in conversing with nature, God and Satan is well prepared to converse sanely with other humans, and will become able to advantage each partner (except Satan) in a pure manner, which is charity, the pure love of Christ.

Biographical material: Born Salt Lake City, Utah; graduated from high school in Las Vegas, Nevada. Attended Brigham Young University majoring in mathematics and physics, graduating in 1947. Married Bertha Allred of Fountain Green, Utah and McGill, Nevada. Attended Columbia University in New York City, receiving the MA degree in 1951 and the PhD degree in 1958. Joined the BYU faculty in 1952. Served as department chairman (Graduate Religion), Dean of the Graduate School, Assistant Academic Vice President, and Professor of Philosophy.