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The Paradoxical Nature of Sin: Explorations on the Nature and Uses of Falling Short in Life

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Sin is an inevitable reality of mortal experience and represents a paradox: although sin should always be shunned, it nonetheless plays a necessary part in our spiritual growth and progress. This paper explores the nature of paradox, the relationship between good and evil, and the ways in which the reality of sin can ultimately be used for human learning, development, and evolution. Innocence and purity are virtues, but the humility and suffering which accompany sin can open the way, through the atonement of Christ, to far greater virtues: compassion, charity, tolerance, and understanding.

Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression, my eyes are opened... (Moses 5:10)

Joseph Smith offered a profound insight when he said, “By proving contraries, truth is made manifest” (1844 letter to Daniel Rupp; see Smith, 1976, vol. 6, p. 428). In other words, by examining paradoxes, we can discover truth. More recently, M. Scott Peck (1987) made a similar comment:

If a concept is paradoxical, that itself should suggest that it smacks of integrity, that it gives off the ring of truth. Conversely, if a concept is not in the least paradoxical, you should be suspicious of it and suspect that it has failed to integrate some aspect of the whole. (Peck, 1987, p. 238)

This, of course, doesn't mean that all paradoxical concepts are true, but rather, that if ideas have a paradoxical nature to them, they are more likely to be true than those without a contrary side. What then are paradoxes? Paradoxes are seemingly contradictory or incompatible

ideas which, when combined together, contain truth. Not surprisingly, the gospel contains numerous paradoxical statements and ideas:¹

Many who are first shall be last and the last first.
(Mark 10:31)

Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted. (Matt 23:12)

He that is the greatest among you shall be your servant.
(Matt. 23:11)

He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. (Matt. 10:39)

Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.
(Matt. 5:5)

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In spite of the seeming inconsistencies inherent in this small sample of gospel teachings, we still accept such statements as containing profound spiritual truths. We do this because we believe the big picture the gospel provides, which asserts a reality separate from the things of this world – a reality in which charity, faith, humility, and sacrifice are eternal, blessed virtues, and are rewarded. Because we accept a larger, paradoxical scheme of a universe which is both spiritual and temporal, these smaller paradoxes make sense: the meek of the earth really can inherit the glories of heaven, and the humble really can be the strongest of all. Paradoxes, then, are devices which can be used to help us see at a deeper level, to change our perceptions of reality. They encourage us to challenge traditional concepts, to explore new possibilities, to soften rigid boundaries and categories, and thus to undergo not just a change of mind but a change of heart, which is repentance in its most basic form (see Toscano & Toscano, 1983).

Sin represents such a paradox – although we are commanded to always avoid and shun sin, it nonetheless plays a necessary part in our spiritual growth and evolution. While not the only way to grow and develop, the processes of sin and atonement provide a significant portion of life's most powerful lessons. Sin is one of mortality's riskiest experiences, but this risk was foreseen and deemed necessary by an omniscient, benevolent God. This idea may strike many as unorthodox, speculative, or even dangerous. Yet, it may not be as radical as it seems. I have long recognized within myself that my own mistakes and sins have ultimately served a crucial role in furthering my development and learning. My professional and ecclesiastical experiences, as well as statements by church leaders, have reinforced these truths. President Joseph F. Smith said:

It is for the benefit of his sons and daughters that they become acquainted with evil as well as good, with darkness as well as light, with error as well as truth, and with the results of the infraction of eternal laws. Therefore, he has permitted the evils which have been brought about by the acts of his creatures, but will control their ultimate results for his own glory and the progress and exaltation of his sons and daughters, when they have learned obedience by the things they suffer. The contrasts experienced in this world of mingled sorrow and joy are educational in their nature, and will be the means of raising humanity to a full appreciation of all that is right, true and good. (Smith, 1998, p. 286)

Many scriptures encourage us to ponder the gospel, and to seek further light and knowledge regarding the mysteries of God (1 Nephi 2:16, 10:19; Mosiah 2:9; Alma 12:9-11; 3 Nephi 17:3; Moroni 10:3; D&C 6:7, 11:7, 42:61, 63:23). Pondering is, by its very nature, speculative. If done with a sensitivity to the Spirit of Truth, such "seeking" can be positive and beneficial in various ways. It can help our faith to remain vibrant and alive. It can be an antidote to dogmatism. It can shed new light on previously accepted truths. It can broach new categories of thought. Mormonism, perhaps more than any other Christian faith, provides rich and fertile ground for speculation because its theology is so open-ended; a faith which teaches that God has created "worlds without number" (Moses 1:33) and asserts "as man is God once was, and as God is man may become" (*Journal of Discourses*, 26:368) provides endless avenues for pondering. We may shy away from speculating for fear of being wrong, being deceived, or somehow discovering something new which would challenge our faith. These are real concerns. However, such concerns should not outweigh the opposing risk of being lulled into complacency by our comfortably accepted traditions and unofficial creeds (such as "faithful Latter-day Saints only vote Republican").

The proper role of speculation should not be to create new doctrine, a new gospel, or a new church; rather, it should be to move us further into our religion and deeper into our faith and convictions, ultimately serving to enhance our desires for Christian discipleship and the embracing of life.

The sections which follow briefly outline philosophical and spiritual principles relative to sin's paradoxical nature and discuss some of the potential "uses" of falling short in life. These ideas support the view that sin, along with its attending effects, provides an important component in the growth process. Although inherently destructive, sin can, with divine help, ultimately be transcended and play an essential part in the betterment of humanity.

THE NATURE OF GOOD AND EVIL: CONTINUAL vs. DICHOTOMOUS

Consider these three quotes:

We must beware thinking of good and evil as absolute opposites ... Recognition of the reality of evil necessarily relativizes the good and the evil likewise, converting both into halves of a paradoxical whole. (Jung, 1958, p. 329)

Dichotomizing pathologizes. Isolating two interrelated parts of a whole from each other, parts that need each other, parts that are truly “parts” and not wholes, distorts them both, sickens and contaminates them. (Maslow, 1970, pg. 13)

For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so... 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. (Lehi, 2 Nephi 2:11)

A common belief is that good and evil represent static, permanently affixed, dichotomous extremes which have no relation or connection with each other, as represented by these two figures:



According to this view, all goodness is a state of purity, all evil is a state of corruption, and never the twain shall meet. A more accurate view of these concepts depicts them as existing on a continuum, rather than as entirely separate and distinct:



When good and evil are understood in this way, we realize that they exist on a gradient, and that, while polarized, they are not dichotomous.² Such a view does not obliterate nor confuse either category (as warned against in Isaiah 5:20), but rather acknowledges the complexity of each, and the difficulty in clearly demarcating where one wholly begins and the other completely ends. Thus choices or actions might be evaluated as being “better” or “worse,” rather than as being entirely good or entirely evil. For example, is it a greater good to be present at church to give an assigned lesson, or to risk being late or absent in order to provide assistance to someone stranded on the roadside? Is it a greater good to give money to a beggar who asks, even if he might spend the money on alcohol or drugs, or to withhold in order to avoid contributing to his substance abuse? Or is it a greater evil to drop a nuclear weapon over a large civilian population in hopes of swiftly ending a war, or

to face the enemy’s military might on a soldier-to-soldier basis, and take the attending casualties? Questions such as these support the view that good and evil are entities-in-relation, inextricably intertwined with each other, both theoretically and practically. Goodness is meaningless without evil to oppose it, since neither good nor evil can be actualized without the presence or potential of the other (2 Nephi 2:11, 13, 23). No one can live utterly uncontaminated by evil: every good can go bad. An angel can become a devil, but by the same token, every evil can generate a good.

THE NATURE OF GOOD AND EVIL: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CONTEXT

Once good and evil are viewed as a continuum rather than as dichotomous extremes, context becomes vitally important in decision-making.³ An action taken in one context could be deemed as exalting or righteous, whereas the same action taken by the same person in a different context could be considered both damaging and unrighteous. Even with respect to such seemingly black-and-white alternatives as killing or not killing, stealing or not stealing, context can make a significant difference. Consider, for example, the classic case of Nephi and Laban (1 Nephi 4). Nephi was commanded by God to take possession of the plates, but Laban did not wish to part with his property. Nephi faced a difficult situation: either disobey God and fail to bring back the plates, or listen to the Spirit which encouraged him to break certain commandments in order to obey God – to behead the drunken and defenseless Laban, impersonate him, take his property, and flee with it into the desert. Another example involves a comparison between the Anti-Nephi-Lehis (Alma 24) and King Saul (1 Samuel 15). In one context, the Anti-Nephi-Lehis’ refusal to inflict harm on an enemy in any way, even in defense of their own lives, was deemed an example of great righteousness, while in another context, King Saul’s refusal to completely annihilate the Amalekites signaled his fall from grace.

Moses 6:60 further suggests a contextual, continual understanding of good and evil: “For by the water ye keep the commandment; by the Spirit ye are justified, and by the blood ye are sanctified.” As Robert Gleave (2000) has suggested, one approach to understanding this verse is that a hierarchy is depicted which involves differing paradigms of life in a gospel context. The foundational

paradigm addresses entering into the waters of baptism as a token of one's obedience to and acceptance of Christ and the new covenant. New church members come into the church from a variety of contexts. A potential exists for much confusion and uncertainty. These fledgling members need a structure which places their feet firmly on the gospel path: rules, commandments, and guidelines provide this needed structure.

As new members increase in experience and maturity within the gospel, becoming more familiar with the rules, laws, and structures of the church, this beginning paradigm becomes insufficient in and of itself. They realize that the commandments can sometimes be in collision.⁴ In situations such as these, the second paradigm becomes important: "by the Spirit ye are justified" (Moses 6:60). The Spirit can prompt us toward which of two seemingly righteous or less righteous alternatives to choose – even which commandment to break – in a given situation. Paramount here is that it is not self-interest which reigns supreme, but rather the workings of the Spirit, guiding toward the right choice given the context involved.

Gleave (2000) goes on to suggest that this approach should not be confused with situational ethics. Real-life decision-making is complex because it so often includes multiple backgrounds, circumstances, and conditions. Subtle interactions between a loving, patient, tutoring God and a struggling son or daughter with mortal limitations offer a much richer reality than can be captured by the concept of situational ethics. Through sensitivity to the Spirit, a divinely appointed grounding exists upon which to base decisions. Choices are not, however, limited only to dichotomous deciding with either/or, right/wrong possibilities. Rather, life presents a "mixed bag" in which few choices are clearly flawed or clearly without flaw. Even righteous choices can contain shades of gray; conversely, even some of the worst decisions can be motivated by positive desires, intentions, and aspirations.⁵

THE NATURE OF GOOD AND EVIL: POTENTIAL VS. ACTUAL

Every person who ever lived has inevitably sinned (Romans 3:23). While it would be a logical fallacy to assume "inevitability presumes necessity," the ubiquity of sin is nonetheless an intriguing reality. As members of the same eternal species, gods, devils, and human beings

each possess the potential for doing good and evil. Having the potential for evil is not a tragic attribute. God has this potential. This is because he is a free and intelligent being. Ancient prophets have underscored this reality by declaring that God could cease to be God if he did or did not do certain things (2 Nephi 2:13; Alma 12:31; 42:13). In spite of this, God actualizes only the good. This is why the scriptures say that God is good and there is no darkness in him (1 John 1:5). Devils, on the other hand, have the capacity to do good, but actualize only evil, while human beings actualize both good and evil – and therefore have the capacity to ultimately become either gods or devils.

Ancient scripture and modern revelation declare that God's spirit sons and daughters had the potential for good and evil premortally, just as they do now (D&C 29:36; Moses 4:6; Abr. 3:19, 22, 23; Jude 1:6; Rev. 12:4, 9). One-third of his offspring ultimately made choices incompatible with either their remaining in the heavens with God or coming to earth mortally. Were all of these individuals entirely evil, totally devoid of any good or virtuous qualities? By the same token, does the fact that those who aligned themselves with Jehovah imply they only chose the good in their premortal state, or that they were entirely holy? Both seem unlikely, especially in light of D&C 93:38, which states that premortal spirits were *innocent*, not perfect, from the beginning. As Fischer (2001) has pointed out, this is an important distinction. Perfect spirits do nothing wrong, and thus have nothing held against them. Innocent spirits are, by contrast, not perfect, but they are not held responsible for failings or shortcomings. For reasons not fully understood, the one-third who chose to align themselves with Satan were cast down to Earth in disembodied form, actualizing only evil, while the remainder were given the privilege of experiencing mortality, to be allowed to actualize both good and evil – both to refine and to prove which each one would ultimately prize (Abr. 3:25).

Why do human beings actualize evil? Church members typically endorse one of two opposing views:

- + that human beings are *spiritually flawed* (this is *not* the same as saying humans are inherently evil) – that in spite of one's best efforts, no one cannot consistently avoid evil and choose good;
- + that human beings are *spiritually sound*, but lack the proper guidance and direction to be consistently good.

Knowing which perspective we endorse is significant, because these beliefs lay a foundation for how we approach our own and others' lives. If we are spiritually flawed, then spiritual empowerment (becoming "born again"), replenishment (renewal of covenants), and regeneration (progressive repentance) is called for. If we are spiritually sound but unenlightened, then the answer is knowing proper laws, receiving proper guidance and education, and then following these to the letter. The scriptures support the first alternative as the ultimate solution (1 Nephi 10:6; Mosiah 4:5). Because humanity is *fallen*, no matter how hard we might try to live by all the proper teachings, moral exhortations, directives, and commandments we are given, we will not always be able to choose good and will need a Savior's grace to be redeemed (2 Nephi 25:23; Mosiah 2:21). Rules, regulations, and exhortations are both helpful and necessary, but they are not sufficient in themselves to keep people from actualizing evil. The potential for sin can be clarified by the law, but not eliminated by it. That is why the law can only be a schoolmaster to teach us of our plight and encourage us to look for the cure: Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:24).

THE NATURE OF GOOD AND EVIL: BRINGING GOOD OUT OF EVIL

For man must strive, and striving he must err.
(Goethe, 1998, *Faust: Part One*)

Because good and evil are so inextricably linked together, no one can live utterly uncontaminated by evil. As a result, God can either write off humanity completely, or he can work, over time and throughout eternity, to reclaim as many as possible. Fortunately, he chooses the second alternative (Moses 1:39). It is not enough for him to say, as did Milton's God (in *Paradise Lost*):

...Whose fault?
Whose but his own? Ingrate! He had of me
All he could have; I made him just and right,
Sufficient to have stood, but free to fall...
...they cannot justly accuse
Their maker, or their making, or their fate...
...they themselves decreed
Their own revolt, not I...
...they themselves ordained their fall.
(John Milton, 1998, Chapter 3, Book III)

Mere condemnation does not make a bad or painful situation better. More is required if good is to be brought out of evil, if paradise is ever to be regained – and God does much more. He does not obliterate us out of existence for our evil, but consistently extends himself to his creations, most often in subtle, quiet, gentle ways, offering us grace after grace, unworthy though we may be, that our evil may ultimately be transcended (2 Nephi 9:10). God is good not because he is utterly disassociated from evil, but because he is willing, through personal sacrifice, to bring good out of evil. Examples are many, but a few include the redemption of Saul/Paul (Acts 9), and the sin of David and Bathsheba giving rise to the lineage of the Messiah (Matt. 1:6). Through experiencing the transformation of evil into good, human beings grow and evolve spiritually. And as Moses 1:39 points out, human spiritual evolution is the process by which God continues to be glorified: "For behold, this is my work and my glory – to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."

THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST: VEHICLE OF PARADOX

The ideas presented thus far help explain the potential role of sin and its transcendable nature. However, the degeneracy and estrangement caused by sin would remain a permanent, ironclad reality without the one true source of syntropy in the universe: the atonement of Jesus Christ. Without the atonement, sin has no paradoxical nature. The atonement turns sin on its head – good is brought out of evil, light out of darkness, fullness out of emptiness, health out of sickness, and perfection out of imperfection. Through the atonement of Christ, evil does not remain a permanent fixture on the eternal landscape, shutting humanity out from God's presence forever. Christ's great and last sacrifice is the renewing life-source, the cleansing power extended to humans by which the pain, suffering, and damage done by sin can be eradicated and ultimately transcended.

Resisting sin as a primary "test" of mortality is a truism so widely accepted in the church that it hardly bears mentioning. Yet none but Christ has been able to live completely free of sin. Does this imply that he is the only one who has ever passed the test? The answer is "yes" only if we assume that "passing" means living a sinless life. Rather than living without sin, our objective, as the scriptures point out, is to "endure to the end" (1 Nephi 13:37; Alma

32:15; 3 Nephi 27:16). Dr. Hugh Nibley, in his regularly pithy style, has defined this small phrase as meaning “continuing to forgive, and continuing to repent” (Nibley, 1985). This suggests what is already known: everyone will be unsuccessful in the attempt to completely avoid impurity. Humanity’s primary objective therefore becomes to *progressively repent* while immersed in the manifold convolutions of a telestial world. If this is the case, how can the reality of sin in our lives be of any use to us?

FALLING SHORT IN LIFE: POTENTIAL USES

Sin and repentance are a natural process of growth initiated by Adam and Eve and made possible by the teachings, example, and atoning, unconditional love of our Savior. (England, 1997)

A well-known maxim states that one way or another, life gives us precisely what we need. Some have called this idea the “school of hard knocks.” Perhaps another way of stating this is to say that we play out in life core vulnerabilities and issues until they are learned or mastered. This is not to say that life doesn’t often just “happen,” but rather, it is to say that everyone has certain strengths and weaknesses; the multifaceted conditions of life provide stimulus for all to project and act out the capacities for good and evil (Fischer, 2000). This idea is similar to what is known in psychology as the “projective hypothesis,” which asserts that when confronted with an ambiguous stimulus, human beings will project upon that stimulus their own individual modes of perceiving the world and behaving in it. Such “projections” will be both for the good and the bad; strengths and weaknesses will be played out. In other words, along the way, everyone will make poor choices and commit sins. But this need not be tragic. To the extent that many sins spring from core vulnerabilities, these sins can be of use if recognized as arising from areas of deficiency or specific weakness. Sins inevitably have consequences, and consequences can be instructive. They enhance learning, and with learning, resolution often follows. Weaknesses and vulnerabilities need to be addressed and accessed if they are to be ultimately worked through. Sometimes, making specific errors and mistakes allows for learning and resolution at the deepest level.

This brings up the issue of vicarious learning versus real-life experience. Without question, human beings do

learn a great deal through vicarious channels, such as through observing others,⁶ reading books, and hearing stories. We may be much better off learning certain lessons vicariously (i.e., “the easy way”) rather than “the hard way.” Yet, if vicarious channels were sufficient for all the types of learning upon which eternal life is based, then why even come to earth? Why not simply observe from the safety of the heavens the foibles of a few mortals on earth and resolve not to repeat their mistakes? Anyone looking sincerely within will likely concur with Theodore Reik (1948), a brilliant student of Freud’s, when he said,

... [I seem to have had] an inability to learn from other people’s mistakes. All the wisdom of proverbs and all exhortations and warnings seem useless to me. If I am to learn from the mistakes of others, I must make them on my own ... [What’s more], I am almost incapable of learning from my own mistakes unless I have repeated them several times. (Reik, 1948, p. xii)

Vicarious channels of learning, significant though they may be, are insufficient in and of themselves to learn certain lessons. Take, for example, the experience of pain, whether it be the physical pain of an injury, or the emotional pain accompanying the loss of a loved one. The film *Shadowlands* (Attenborough, 1994) portrays these realities quite well: C.S. Lewis (portrayed by Anthony Hopkins) discourses time and again in a very heady, intellectual way upon the meaning and nature of suffering. It is not until his own beloved suffers from and ultimately succumbs to a ravaging cancer that he realizes truths about suffering he never could have learned, no matter the number of books read or lectures given on the subject. This is not only true of such morally neutral experiences as physical pain and relational loss, but also of the morally charged, personal vulnerabilities everyone possesses.

I do not believe we are placed on earth to see if we can somehow manage to learn everything the easy way. If so, humanity has failed miserably, as no one has been able to do that. Rather than the purpose of life being the successful avoidance of all things impure, life’s purpose seems to include accessing both strengths and weaknesses, ultimately coming to prize the good through experiences of both obedience and disobedience. Real experience is a vital component in this process (2 Nephi 2:11-15).

Conventional wisdom asserts that people are never

better off for having sinned, that people are always better off for avoiding sin. While these ideas may have a certain face validity to them, they are also problematic on various levels.

First, such ideas are inherently pessimistic. They do not inspire hope. They tend to encourage despair over ground lost in the lifetime battle with sin. Everyone has sinned and will continue to sin. If the conventional wisdom is true, no one can never really be “better off” – the situation is ultimately hopeless because lost ground can never be regained.

Perhaps more than being merely pessimistic, such ideas seem to fly in the face of personal experience with what the prophet Amulek called the “infinite and eternal atonement” of Christ (Alma 34:14). One way the atonement is indeed infinite is that it is limitless in its ability to heal, to mend – and more than this, to enhance – what one was previously, so long as one stands before the Lord as a truly penitent soul. Everyone who has ever sinned and gone on to experience the full measure of the atonement can attest to this.

Finally, conventional wisdom asserts purity as the hallmark of God and the primary ethic for living a god-like life, whereas the revolutionary vision Jesus brought emphasized *compassion* as the truly godlike quality (Borg, 1994). While these two ideas need not be incompatible, they often come into conflict in life, just as they did in the time of Jesus. A striving for purity encourages separation and distance from everything deemed to be unclean. Compassion, on the other hand, encourages a striving for inclusiveness, tolerance, acceptance, and understanding. Compassion, in its literal sense, means “to feel with.” To experience compassion is to feel the feelings of another person in a deep visceral way, and to be compassionate is to be moved to do something for another person because of those feelings. Compassion becomes possible only by developing the ability to relate others’ difficulty, suffering, and pain to our own.⁷ If we feel threatened by or disconnected from the reality of our own “shadow”—our dark and often troublesome inner self—if we do not allow ourselves to acknowledge the reality of our own inner complexity and sinful tendencies (Jung & Jaffe, 1989), we are much more likely to project upon others a spirit of rejection and intolerance. We tend to be repulsed by or to hate in others what is hated or unacceptable in ourselves (Matt. 7:1-5).

On a related note, what if it *were* somehow possible to avoid sin and impurity entirely through sheer act of will? If human beings striving to achieve personal purity have difficulty being humble and compassionate now, how much worse would it be then? Innocence and purity are virtues, but the humility and suffering which accompany sin open the way, through the atonement of Christ, to far greater virtues: compassion, charity, tolerance, and understanding. These are the virtues Christ championed in his most memorable parables (Matt. 25:31-46; Luke 15:11-32), particularly in *The Good Samaritan* (Luke 10:30-37). Conventional wisdom asserts this parable is a story about being a helpful neighbor. But in the first century Jewish social world, this parable had a much more pointed meaning: it was a story about two men (the priest and the Levite) who according to Jewish law were to keep themselves pure so they “passed by” a man who had been assaulted and left for dead. By contrast, the Samaritan, who was considered seriously unclean by that same system of purity laws, showed deep and practical compassion. Thus, the parable is not just about two unkind people and one nice guy, but it is about two pure men and one outcast – and which of the three was actually more godlike (Borg, 1994). It is practically impossible for innocents to attain true compassion and its cousin virtues, because an innocent has no way of understanding suffering or people’s weaknesses. An awareness of one’s own flaws and imperfections, and the suffering which results from this, encourages humility. And it is only when humble that people can see themselves as they truly are, and thus become teachable – soft, reliant, submissive, willing to surrender to God (Ether 12:27).

Through the atonement of Christ, sin can eventually be utilized for the spiritual learning and redemption of humankind; if this is true, then it is only Satan who truly has no hope in the end, because evil ultimately ceases to be evil. Adam and Eve’s fall gave humanity the opportunity to learn from direct experience (Moses 5:11). This gift, superseded only by the immeasurable grace of Christ’s atonement, makes possible a richer, fuller, more actualized life than Adam and Eve’s innocence, or our own, could ever have achieved.

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ENDNOTES

1. See Toscano & Toscano (1983) for further discussion of paradox and gospel speculation
2. I first became exposed to this idea by Dr. Lane Fischer of BYU when he taught, "Although good and evil may be polarized, they are not dichotomous."
3. I am indebted to Dr. Robert Gleave of BYU whose paper, *Sorrow, Suffering, and Evil: Is There Reason to Hope?* was highly influential in my understanding of these ideas. I have borrowed much from his ideas on contextual-hierarchical decision making and how these differ from situational ethics.
4. Carl Jung put it well when he said, "It is just by following Christian morality that one gets into the worst collisions of duty" (Jung, 1958, p. 54).
5. Note that this is meant to disagree with the saying, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." Indeed, it would be much preferred to be surrounded by very unreliable people — those who have good intentions but never actually carry them out — than people who do not have good intentions to begin with. As a therapist, it is much easier to work with a positive impulse already present than to attempt to bring one into existence.
6. The psychologist Albert Bandura (1977,1986) conducted numerous watershed experiments during the 1960's and 70's which unequivocally showed that children learn a great deal simply by observing others and the consequences of their actions.
7. It should be pointed out that Christ was the epitome of compassion although we believe he never sinned; yet the connection between personal experience with suffering and the ability to be compassionate still remains: Christ "descended below all things that he might comprehend all things" (D&C 88:6). Because of the atoning miracle, we know Christ is able to not only have perfect compassion for the sinner, but to take upon himself the full weight of the repentant sinner's sins though he himself never sinned.