



Not Communication

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Preface

This is primarily a philosophical self-help book that comes across as a work of ontology. It is partly a criticism of materialism and idealism, and especially a criticism of the concepts of communication and information as they arise in science and language. Not that I have any interest in proving these concepts false; I agree that each is useful in its domain. Rather, these criticisms may open one up to a less confined communication that is not bounded by science or language but perfuses each. This communication nourishes the paradoxical connection between separated things.

Long stood the walls of knowledge, holding a mountain of unknown weight. How easily we now peer through those cracked walls. How painfully we eat the fallen debris, hoping to feel satiated by what used to make us full. Light shines through, but it does not illuminate. Light shines through only to reveal a darkness that glairs back in laughter, in anger, in hate. Love is lost for now. Love went into hiding. Courage is lost for now. Courage stood its ground and crumbled.

A vortex of dark, undulating light is within me. It throws its tentacles against my tubular walls, supporting itself from my inside, fearful of falling into a greater abyss that is also part of me. Gray spikes protrude out of the tentacles and retract back in. They protrude in unison, swiftly, with a crack. Out and in. Out and in. The spikes grow bigger, too big to be contained by the tentacles, and they thrust out again and again. Crack. Crack. Crack. Each crack louder. The spikes grow larger with each protrusion. My tubular walls hold despite repetitious piercings.

The spikes calm and transform into the thorns of an ancient tree. The tentacles become wooden branches and limbs, leaves sprout, and the thorns become too small to be noticed. Fruit blossoms on the tree and falls down into the abyss of light. With gratitude the fruit enters. A God arises from the bright abyss and swallows the tree whole. A sacrifice is accepted.

Introduction

Suppose your insides were shrinking. Imagine that your heart began contracting in size—not just squeezing as it is supposed to, but actually shrinking in total size while still attached to your arteries and veins. Your heart is shrinking from the size of a fist to that of a golf ball and smaller. Soon your heart will no longer be able to circulate blood throughout your body, and all of the physiologic processes that depend upon this circulation will fail. Since the body lacks a contingency response for the gradual shrinkage of the heart, you will die without acute intervention.

Now let us imagine an even more fictitious situation in which everything within your body is shrinking except for your skeleton which holds its form and your external skin covering and eyes. Let us further imagine that this process is extremely slow, so slow that your body as a whole is able to partially compensate for your slowly contracting insides. Although you will not die from this process, at least not immediately, you will certainly be altered by it. You will lose many abilities and possibilities that you possessed as a person with non-contracting insides, and those things which previously had been easy and taken little effort will soon exhaust you. Even putting on clothing, which you once did without thought or effort, now becomes a chore that leaves you bedridden the rest of the day.

Your body will do its best to compensate for its shrinking insides—as it does for those of us without shrinking insides—but some of those compensations will cause other, more acutely dangerous situations that will put your life in immediate danger, a danger that may outweigh the danger due to slowly contracting insides. Today's medical science will often be able to intervene, offering surgical revisions and pharmacological interactions that will stave off the immediate danger. Medicine can potentially extend and improve the quality of your life, but as for the primary problem, the shrinking of your insides, it can do nothing about. The internal contraction is neither due to a genetic flaw nor an environmental contaminate. You can only be cured by transplanting your self into a new body that is not contracting, and hope that the new body will not be similarly affected.

Now suppose that it is not the insides of your body that are contracting, but you yourself are contracting from the inside. Whatever you are, whatever you take self-hood to be, that is what is shrinking. If you consider yourself a material body only, then this consideration will not

change what I have said above, and you can continue to take your internal organs as contracting. If you believe that you are your brain, then it is your brain that is slowly shrinking—which interestingly happens as we age anyway. For those of you who see more than material bodies, such as mind or soul or spiritual essence, then those things are contracting. The essence of yourself is closing in, contracting.

What would contraction of the self be like? This is a difficult question that requires us to specify what the self is, a specification that will depend upon your theoretical leanings as I noted above. I imagine that whatever self-contraction is, it will be experienced—if it is experienced at all—as though one were enclosed in a ten foot steel cube whose walls were slowly closing in on all sides. There is a dim light on within the cube so that you can feel and see the walls closing in, and for some reason you know that nothing exists outside of the shrinking cube. Or, self-contraction reflects your awareness of slowly losing your awareness, bit by bit, where you are constantly aware of everything that you are losing, until the only awareness you have left is that of pure loss.

If we realize that we are contracting on the inside and believe that we can do nothing about it, or if we deny and avoid the contraction of our internal organs because the truth is too much to bear, then how do you suppose the typical person would react? The person who avoids the truth of internal contraction would of course best be served by looking outward. Let him focus upon his skin and hair, and upon those things in the external world. Let him be distracted by political drama and focus more upon others than his self. Let him see the universe as externally expanding, for this is a necessary and true dual for one who turns away from his contracting insides. And what of the person who knows that she is contracting on the inside but believes she is impotent to slow or reverse the process? Won't she lose sanity, pray for salvation, or marshal whatever knowledge she can to at least patch up the devastation left behind by internal contraction? Or worse still, won't she perhaps gleefully accept her internal destruction and playfully devise means to hasten the process?

There is a connection between the internal contraction of the individual and the spatial expansion of the universe. These processes are duals of one another, and suggest that within a larger understanding could be unified if taken seriously. For example, the expansion of space is likely accompanied by the contraction of time, but it is not clear that a universal contraction of time could ever be noticed in the same way as the expansion of space. Does time contract at every point of time as

space expands at every point in space, and does time contract across space as space expands across time? The latter is not an appropriate comparison for the apparent ordering of time allows us to determine a meaning of acrossness, while space is not clearly ordered, or ordered in many equally compatible ways without natural preference. Expansion is fundamentally understood temporally—because it is a dynamic process—but contraction need not have anything to do with space. And if time contracted equally for everyone and everything, then it seems that we could not notice this through empirical methods, although one might infer such a thing from things measured and theories proffered.

To the extent that we are temporal things, it is conceivable that we are contracting in some way, and that this contraction binds us to the spatial expansion of the universe. On a common understanding of time, time contraction would be experienced as the speeding up of things, consistent with the experience that time goes by more quickly as we age. The personal age-related contraction of time cannot, of course, be found in the geometric spacetime metric tensor of relativity theory; at least not unless someone determines the individual's contribution to the metric. Still, the speeding up of time with age is an empirical phenomena, but it is a personal phenomena associated with keeping-track of the events around us. From an external perspective it would, in contrast, seem that people are 'maturing' at slower rates, by which I mean taking more time to develop intended, nuanced, and natural identities. Just as seeds follow paths to mature plants, and reproductive cells grow into adult bodies, the self goes from a near undifferentiated infant awareness to an adult identity. The fact that children are reaching puberty at earlier ages does not refute my claim, but rather demonstrates the body's physiologic compensation for the slowing development of self.

The development of the self—where self is some vague sense of identity as a self-object, a fusion of form and content within being—appears to be slowing down, and at times halting entirely, although it is unlikely that this slowing down is caused by a temporal disturbance as much as by other things surrounding the self. A plant does not reach maturity and fruit for many reasons, and it would be ridiculous to accuse time itself for not seeing the process to its end. Many things influence the rate of development and most of them are not likely law-like.

If the rate of development of one's identity were only slowing down, or static, then it is unlikely that we would experience this as much of a problem. Who shall rightly claim that there is proper or natural rate of the development of anything? Surely we should develop at our own

pace, dependent upon our environment and what have you. If the modern world is a place such that personal development is slowed, then so be it. Take whatever time you need to find yourself; our world is complicated. The problem arises, however, in that not only has development slowed and sometimes stopped, but now the self is regressing well before its time. While it is natural for the self to regress with age or injury or disease, now the self is devolving prematurely apart from these causes. Something else is acting upon us from within. We feel it closing in within us, contracting us. If you imagine the self or your identity as an eloquent space, then you may see this space contracting within you.

Kierkegaard spoke of this contraction as *inclosing reserve*, but whereas our sense of self-contraction is a physical process in which the fabric of the self contracts upon itself, Kierkegaard saw *inclosing reserve* as a state of un-freedom that makes itself a prisoner. I intend no opposition to Kierkegaard and see us as trying to talk about the same thing using similar metaphors in different ways. In the end, self-contraction and *inclosing reserve* are both attempts to understand suffering.

While I have suggested that something in the world is causing the contraction of self-space, it is not clear to me what that source might be. I cannot assume that it is a particular molecule or virus. I cannot assume that it is our culture, moral landscape, or philosophy; and it appears that a similar process was occurring in 1844 as it is today. More, the process appears to be acting directly upon self-space, whatever self-space might mean, and it seems that everyone is affected to one degree or another. In this sense it is process that extends across space and time that makes contact with our identities to differing degrees. I envision the cause of the process to be analogous to a black hole in that it contracts space and closes in upon itself, yet not a black hole in the sense of a geometric singularity of geometric space-time, but rather a singularity of self-time space that collapses each of us from the inside.

The primary means of combating internal contraction has typically been external expansion. By external expansion I imply many things. Nations try to expand their territory in war. Religions send missionaries to increase their numbers. Academics preach their theories to try to dominate intellectual space. Bullies threaten on the playground to extend their domain of fear. Companies seduce or frighten us to increase their market share. Spreading these words with fear is a type of expansion. Each of these methods of external expansion, of course, fails to counter internal contraction in the long run, for none address internal contraction in the first place. However, to the extent that we measure

ourselves according to external metrics, we may be able to, at least temporarily, quell the dread of internal contraction by looking outward and by believing that we are the measure of our external domain and not that which shrinks from the inside. I suspect that the practice of looking outward only accelerates internal collapse, and that as we contract more quickly, the more we attempt to compensate by measuring ourselves by external metrics, and so on. From this perspective, the scientific theory of an expanding universe appears to reflect the human opposition to self-contraction.

Through another method we have opposed internal contraction by reaching outward. When we honestly reach out for help and assistance we extend ourselves. When we attempt to do things outside of our comfort zones we extend ourselves. When we engage in communication with another person for the sake of communicating we extend ourselves. When we help other people in need we extend ourselves. Each of these processes opposes internal contraction, and more, the internal expansion can occur mutually between two people in the process of communication and offering assistance.

Honest communication has saved many people from internal collapse, and science, perhaps noticing this benefit, has sought to extend the range and efficiency of communication. We have since created technologies that facilitate communication, but we have done this without precisely understanding the nature of communication itself. Although some aspects of communication technology are helpful in opposing internal contraction, other aspects appear to be facilitating collapse. For example, to the extent that we conceive of communication as the movement of words or information across geometric space, we cannot be talking about something that is internally helpful. This sort of communication is measured in bits, and the growth of this communication is a form of external expansion, the very thing that often accelerates internal collapse. External communication of this sort will turn against itself. It would, for example, be undesirable for *every* cell in the body to begin communicating with every other cell *externally*. It is unproductive for every person in the world to communicate with every other person externally—less there be no actual communication at all. I am not advocating un-freedom of communication, or the silencing of speech, but I am pointing out that the expansion of external communication can be dangerous. Nor do I feel that forceful suppression of external communication can do any good, for this too is a form of external expansion by something else.

What I am advocating is the growth of communication, the type of communication that directly opposes internal contraction, and so makes some connection to one's insides and expands self-space. I cannot call it internal communication, for this communication connects inside and outside as all actual communication does. It is the only communication that is, which implies that external communication, when understood as the transfer or movement of information across space-time, is a misnomer; or rather, external communication is a non-physical process, metaphysics. In this work I try to say what physical communication might be with an eye upon a means of opposing internal contraction. We will not escape the metaphysical in the process.

Most readers will find my perspective confusing or downright contradictory in that I begin by assuming that attention, although personal, is not a mental phenomena. One might call this assumption a form of epoché in which we suspend judgment about the existence of mental phenomena in addition to external objects. It is an ontological skepticism that accepts first a concept of physical attention while being suspicious of physical and mental objects.

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