The Inner Essence of David as Primary Selection Criteria to be selected King of Israel: A Symbolic Interactionist Analysis of 1 Samuel 16: 1-13

Jim Schnell, Ph.D.

a.   Department of Cultural Studies University of Montana USA

Corresponding email: james.schnell@fulbrightmail.org
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Abstract: This report offers an interpretation of the inner essence of David as being a primary selection criteria in his becoming King of Israel.   This topic is significant because it highlights how the subtle notion of essence can impact how we perceive others.   A symbolic interactionist sociological perspective is used to analyze 1 Samuel 16: 1-13.   This approach allows for creative analysis and clear statement of findings.   1 Samuel 16: 1-13 is rich with nuance and offers fertile text for interpretation.   My thesis statement stresses that the inner essence of David was a primary selection criterion when he was selected to be King of Israel and that this phenomenon can be interpreted using a symbolic interactionist perspective.
Key Words: David, King of Israel; Samuel 16: 1-13; symbolic interactionism; essence[11]

1.   Introduction

In this report I will be interpreting the inner essence of David as a primary selection criterion to be selected King of Israel.   In doing so, a symbolic interactionist sociological perspective will be used to analyze 1 Samuel 16: 1-13.   This perspective allows for creativity with analysis and it is via this framework that analysis will proceed.   1 Samuel 16: 1-13 is rich with nuance and offers fertile text for interpretation.   My thesis statement purports that the inner essence of David as a primary selection criterion to be selected King of Israel can be understood via the symbolic interactionist framework.   This topic is significant because it highlights how the subtle notion of essence can impact how we perceive others.

Symbolic interactionism offers a robust foundation to interpret from.   This theoretical orientation has evolved with a continual stream of commentaries regarding the relevance it portends.   In an effort to stress a fundamental understanding of symbolic interactionism I will be rooting it in original definitions and clarifications from the years it was initially conceptualized.   Hence, dates for the sources will be from a time period that extends back to the 1960-1970's.   It was a time rich with speculation about the relevance of symbolic interaction and related phenomena.

2.   Literature Review
2.1 David as Symbol

References to David are rich with nuance regarding who he was, what he represented and the meanings that were associated with his ascendency to the throne.   These and corresponding phenomena illustrate how emphasis should not be stressed with regard to who David was but, rather, the meanings assigned to him.   Focus centered on "David as the true king . . . designated to replace Saul who had been divinely chosen but then divinely rejected."   As such, his existence as a symbol can be more fully recognized.   It is through this lens that one can better employ symbolic interactionist foundations in the interpretation of David and his being anointed King of Israel.

2.2 symbolic Interactionism:

George Mead is known to be the father of symbolic interactionism. In Mind, Self, and Society Mead conveys that organisms are interpreted with reference to their background landscape and that background is determined by the interpretation of the person. There are four primary perspectives within symbolic interactionism: the Chicago, Iowa, Dramaturgical, and Ethnomethodological perspectives. The Chicago view, guided by the views of Herbert Blumer, is based on a qualitatively grounded and humanist position: the situation should be interpreted "through the eyes of the actor."

Blumer posited human behavior is not predictable and cannot be predicted. The self is governed by the orientations of the "I" and the "me." Within this perspective the "I" is impulsive and the "me" is a compilation of established attitudes. Perceptions are typically received through the "I" and then they proceed to being understood via the "me." Blumer's understanding of human behavior impacts his method.   In using such an approach Blumer's methodological view is more likely to experience modification as needed.

The Dramaturgical view, based on Goffman's theories, emphasizes that social interaction is grounded in the management of impressions that are received.   That is, we deliver presentations for each other. This view is exhibited in Goffman books such as The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959), Interaction Ritual (1967), and Encounters (1961). This Dramaturgical view is beneficial when interpreting the meanings linked to David.

2.3 The Perceived Essence of David

"God's spirit inspires David, i.e. makes him qualified to rule when the time comes."   This fulfillment of spirit in the form of David results in a supernatural understanding of David and what he represents.   "Samuel anointed, privately, an unsuspecting young man to kingly office."   This anointment, away from pubic view, added to the specter of David's placement into the role of King.   It perpetuated an air of mystery and divine intervention.

The emphasis on "heart" takes on key meaning in interpreting the significance of David. Samuel learns that Israel "will have a king with a rightly committed heart. . . . What is valued and sought is a right heart and not appearance and stature."   This conceptual emphasis on "heart" is in the abstract but the relevance of it regarding instruction to Samuel is clear. "Samuel receives the command to anoint him . . .So he (David) was anointed , and the Spirit of Yahweh came upon David from that day onwards"   One can ascertain that for the relevance of David's "heart" to take hold it must be recognized as uniquely meaningful and be interpreted in a similar manner across the varied constituencies.

It is in this interpretative process that one can understand how sociological framing is key to the unfolding events. David resonated meaning not so much by his inherent qualities but more so by the meanings that were ascribed to him by others.   The meanings assigned to him needed to be consistent, relevant and widely recognized with regard to being descriptive as well as understandable.   This is where the sociology of communication processes moves front and center for consideration.

3.   Methodology
3.1 Symbolic Interactionist Foundations for Interpreting the Essence of David

Herbert Blumer developed the symbolic interactionism conceptual framework. In Symbolic Interactionism (1969), he offered three tenants of symbolic interactionism which are widely accepted in the social sciences. The first tenant is that people respond to things based on the meanings that the things hold for them. The second tenant is that the meaning of such phenomena is concluded from, or flows from, social interactions that we have with others. The third tenant is that these meanings are derived, and adapted within, an interpretive process applied by each individual when addressing the things he/she encounters.   Meanings are interpreted to be social products: stimulation, interpretation, and reaction.

Symbolic interactionism presents a broad understanding of the role of communication in the social composition. It impacts many domains of communication theory including role perspectives, reference group orientations, social & personal perception, self-theory, interpersonal orientations, and language & culture.   Manis and Meltzer provide six fundamental positions regarding symbolic interaction. First, the mind, self, and society are dynamics stressing interpersonal interaction. Second, language is the main mode within the evolution of the mind and self. Third, the mind is the internalization of social processes maintained by the individual. Fourth, behaviors are developed by the person in the process of functioning. Fifth, definition of the situation by the person is a fundamental factor in human conduct. Sixth, the self is the result of societal definitions and correlated definitions.

Thus, we are positioned to understand the "heart" of David as an abstraction that reflects considerable degrees of interpretation by all concerned. Samuel was acting not so much in accord with his own observations but more in line with the instructions he received. My reading of relevant texts is that he came to interpret David's "heart" as being significant but that this significance began with the instructions he received in the form of divine guidance. This underscores how perception plays a key role in such a proclamation but it also reveals how tenuous the consistency of such perceptions can be. This consistency of perception cannot be assumed or prematurely embraced.

4. Results:
4.1 Contradiction in the Appeal of David

The proclamation of David as King is not without contradiction. Samuel is informed about the "heart" of David and how this strength should not be confused with physical attractiveness others possess. "Samuel is warned—not to trust in appearances since 'it is not as a man sees that God sees.'" However, with the anointing of David they find that he too possesses physical appeal in addition to his spiritual appeal.

Ralph Klein builds upon this when pointing out "People, Samuel is reminded, are impressed by what is on the surface; Yahweh perceives what the person is really like." This clarification makes sense insofar as Yahweh being omnipotent and able to see into the soul of a person. But then Klein goes on to highlight what almost seems to be a contradiction. "David was ushered in, his good looks—despite what had been said—confirmed that he was Yahweh's choice." This kind of contradiction creates the impression that our ability to comprehend such developments as the anointing of David are limited to our ability to conceptualize in ways that may very well be limited to the point in history within which we are functioning. That is, an event must be understood within the context of the time period that the event occurred.

The aforenoted scenarios are ripe for interpretation from the symbolic interactionist point of view. The varied characters do interact with phenomena in their environment based on the meanings they associate with those phenomena. These meanings are developed via their interactions with others. Furthermore, modifications to these meanings occur through additional developments and interpretations of those developments. Thus, we see how abstract the development of meaning can be and how uniform consensus regarding assignment of meaning is somewhat elusive.

For instance, the idea of David becoming king because of his "heart" very much rests with an understanding of what "heart" means. A symbolic interactionist framework allows for clarifying "heart" in terms that varied constituencies might embrace even when there are contradictions present regarding the relevance of physical beauty. That David is selected because of his inner beauty, as it aligns with "heart," and is concurrently blessed with physical beauty produces a context that is open to varied interpretations.

4.2 The Challenge of Biblical Interpretation

Interpretations of the Bible are used to justify a wide range of perspectives across the political spectrum. "If the society were to engage in a disciplined reflection on the public dimensions and ethical implications of scholarly work it would constitute a responsible scholarly citizenship that could be a significant participant in the global discourse seeking justice and well-being for all." Clarity of focus and fundamental tenants of discourse are essential if there is going to be a uniformly recognized benefit of such interpretation. Often times it is clear that if such attempts at interpretive explanation are to be embraced then they must be perceived to be objective both in form and content.

There are times when alignment with Biblical scriptures is associated with both ends of the political spectrum and can be interpreted as being against opposing positions on that political spectrum. "More frequent Bible reading is associated with shifts in political and moral views." When that happens the social order is left scrambling for an orientation they can embrace and feel reinforced by. A result of such a phenomenon is that all concerned can end up perpetuating the fallacy that God stands in solidarity with them and against their opposition even when it is fragmented into a variety of seemingly independent parts.

5. Discussion

Notions of fragmentation can be recognized with regard to the aforementioned content and also form as has happened in the digital age. "The Bible has become a fragmented book in its digital form that has profound

implications for perceptions of its authority, content and interpretation." When this happens we are left wrestling with questions that go far beyond content in that the means of message conveyance can carry contextual framing influences that are inherently more difficult to decipher than literal content analysis. The new communication technologies present an ongoing challenge with such subtle (but steady) obstacles to well-grounded interpretation.

6. Conclusion

In this report I have interpreted the inner essence of David as being a primary selection criteria for his being selected as King of Israel. In doing so, I have used a symbolic interactionist sociological perspective to analyze 1 Samuel 16: 1-13. The guidelines for this assignment encouraged students to exercise innovation and creativity with our analysis and use this as opportunity to venture forth in such directions. 1 Samuel 16: 1-13 is brimming with nuance and is composed of ample text for interpretation.

My path with such analysis has been grounded in use of symbolic interactionism as a seasoned framework to interpret from. This theoretical foundation is rich with possibilities that have allowed for insightful analysis. My emphasis on application of symbolic interactionism has been grounded in the original statements regarding definition and relevance of it and this has necessitated sourcing from publications in the 1960's-1970's when symbolic interactionism was initially established as a theoretical framework. I proceeded with awareness of the social context that served as landscape for spawning such an orientation.

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