

# philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

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## Uniqueness and Category

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*Philippine Studies* vol. 8, no. 2 (1960): 404—407

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Fri June 30 13:30:20 2008

and cleared ourselves for take-off. Then we shook hands, said a prayer, gunned the engines and began our take-off slowly. We were fully aware that the plane was 1,800 pounds overweight on account of the extra fuel we had on board, and the plane's center of gravity was far behind allowable limits.

But all went well. Soon we were over the coastline, where we gave San Francisco a last glance before setting our course westward. Our calls at Honolulu, Wake and Guam and our successful return to Manila have been fully reported elsewhere.

Thanks to Capt. Tomacruz's accurate navigation we kept very close to our itinerary and enjoyed pleasant flights although at times weather conditions were not particularly favorable. We also confess to spells of loneliness.

At the same time, both Capt. Tomacruz and I felt that the good Lord protected us, and was with us throughout the trip. After 43 hours' flying we touched ground at Manila, tired but happy. We embraced each other, shook hands, and said a prayer of thanks.

The trans-Pacific flight now behind us, Capt. Tomacruz and I were happy that it had fallen to our lot to make this humble contribution to our country and to the Philippine Air Force, to which full credit is due. By our flight from the United States we set records as the first P.A.F. pilots to fly the Pacific in a twin Beech Bonanza; it was the first flight on which the P.A.F. flag was flown across the Pacific; we made excellent time and actually cut down previous established records by a good three hours; and, what is more, Philippine aviation was made known worldwide.

Only a few events in a man's life are treasured deeply in his heart and arouse special sentiments of sincere and fervent gratitude to our Lord. Our Pacific flight is such an event in my life. I am grateful to Him, as I am to the many people who helped make the flight possible.

COL. HANS MENZI

## *Uniqueness and Category*

St. Augustine writes somewhere that a great heresy or error is basically little else than the exaggeration of a great truth. Thus Pelagianism was the exaggeration of the grand truth that human nature is, among all the levels of visible beings, the most perfect and contained within itself, naturally speaking, the source of its own salvation and perfection. Positivism would be little else than the exaggerated explanation of present-day man's beliefs, attitudes and feelings by his past historical traditions and social environment. Marx-

ism would be the impassioned exaggeration of the essential equality of men carried to the point of destroying all other rights and institutions, however ancient and natural, in order to bring about a completely equalized and classless society. Idealism would be an exaggeration of the truth that the object most worthy of study by the human mind (after God) is the mind itself; it is the reflective study of the knower, by which the subject knowing becomes the most important object known.

Among these great truths that have captivated philosophic minds even to the extent of exaggeration is that of the uniqueness of the individual person. Every individual in the extramental order is so concrete and singular that it is quite unique and cannot be duplicated, neither itself nor its acts. Nay more (and here is where the exaggeration lies), because of his uniqueness, no man can really be understood by another man, nor can his acts be subjected to any norm common to other men. Each human being has a set of personal qualities and an area of personal experiences that put him and his acts outside of all category.

This obsession with the uniqueness of the human person or individual we see in a philosophic idea like that of Existentialism. To the existentialists every human person is so different from all other persons that he has his own particular nature or essence entirely different from the nature of all others, something they cannot really quite understand. The reason for this, they say, lies in the fact that each man determines what his particular essence is to be. Once a man begins to exist he starts to develop his own particular essence by his own personal decisions and actuations. Thus, "existence precedes essence". You cannot therefore judge men according to any common norms, whether it be in the ontological, the psychological or the ethical sphere. An individual is entirely unique. He has to be evaluated according to his own peculiar set of circumstances and personal qualities. Norms have to be formed according to each individual and each individual case.

This exaggerated view of the uniqueness of the individual is likewise seen in a new morality, or rather, in an old morality with a new label. It is called "situation or circumstance ethics".<sup>1</sup> This theory stresses the fact that a man may at times find himself in such a peculiar and entirely novel situation or set of circumstances that what is ordinarily forbidden may be allowed to him here and now. It would be allowed by God himself who understands the extraordinary uniqueness and novelty of the circumstances. It would be allowed, so to speak, "just this once". There is, therefore, according to this new ethics, "a higher law of love" which transcends the ordinary laws of morality in these special cases of conflict or equi-

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<sup>1</sup> See Father Healy's article *supra*.

valent "compulsion" in which the individual finds himself. This basic idea of situation ethics underlies some of the characters in modern psychological novels (v.g. Graham Greene's), and is well described in Dietrich von Hildebrand's *True Morality and its Counterfeits*.

Again, though under a different dress, we see this uniqueness of the individual exaggerated in the theme of Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, the difference between intellection and intuition. For an adequate knowledge of an individual, Bergson would say, we cannot just use "intellection", which understands a man from the outside, creating an image of him in the mind like a camera, and classifying him according to pre-formed mental categories. To really know him, we have to "enter" into the personality of the man, to "intuit" his nature, see him from within by a kind of internal personal experience, understand him as this wholly unique individual human person, not as just another member of a class or category.

The answer to all this lies simply in the fact that perfect uniqueness or absolute unicity implies an *infinite* or perfect being; and anything less than infinite necessarily has something in *common* with some other thing.

This is shown thus: A being which is in every possible way unique has nothing, strictly speaking, in common with any other thing. It has *everything* which nothing else has, and is everything that nothing else is. It is, therefore, sheer being or "pure act", or *infinite*.

On the other hand, to be less than infinite is to have potentiality or limitation, or have something which others also have, some common thing, and to have something which others do not have. Because of the latter finite beings enjoy a certain uniqueness, the uniqueness necessary in all individuals actually existing concretely and extramentally. Because of the former, that is, the elements common with other finite things, every finite being necessarily belongs to some *categories* or falls under certain *universal* concepts.

A strange but inevitable conclusion from this is that the infinite, strictly speaking, is above all category or falls under no universal concept common to other things. It *transcends* all finite things in every way and all categories of finite beings. In philosophic terms the categories or universal concepts usually attributed to finite subject cannot be predicated of the infinite *univocally*. There can only be *analogy* between the infinite and the predicates of finite things. Thus when we say "God is just or merciful", the predicates "just, merciful" do not have the exact same meaning that they have when referred to men, i.e., a univocal meaning. They have partly that meaning, but when referred to God they also have a higher and richer meaning that makes justice and mercy proper to an infinite person. This is called analogical attribution.

Consequently, absolute unicity can provide no basis for categories or univocal universal concepts. It makes for a being that is wholly singular or individual. It is contradictory therefore for a finite being to be absolutely and in every way unique. For although a finite thing has to be singular and unique extramentally, it still has some elements univocally common with other things and thus provides the basis for universal ideas or categories.

This is one reason, incidentally, why the infinite cannot exist in time but has to exist in eternity: it cannot enjoy absolute or perfect unicity in time. For time implies *succession*. If an absolutely unique individual were to continue successively in existence, as men do, it would have to undergo change; otherwise, it would not go through successive states of existence. Thus, absolute unicity necessitates existence in a wholly unchanging eternity.

The existentialists, the proponents of situation ethics and Bergson hit upon a great attribute of the individual, his uniqueness and incommunicability; and this uniqueness becomes the more sublime the higher the individual is in the hierarchy of beings and the closer it is to the absolute unicity of infinite being. However, for finite individuals, we cannot extend this uniqueness beyond all limits, for by necessity of their finite nature they carry common elements by which they can be classified under categories and universal norms.

These categories may be on the ontological level, like the genera and species of substance, body, organism, animal, man. Or they may be in the ethical realm, e.g. the Ten Commandments. Or they may be in the psychological sphere, like the different types of characters, psychoses, neuroses, etc.

Instead then of "existence preceding essence", as the existentialists contend, it is rather "essence" that precedes existence, in the sense that the essential categories of being and the universal norms of choices and acts are independent of existent beings and are valid before beings begin to exist. Likewise, with respect to situation ethics, however unique the circumstances may be of some particular human act, the act simply cannot even be unless it contained some common elements with other acts. Thus it can be judged according to some universally valid moral norm. Lastly, although Bergson's "intuition" may be a valid means of knowledge, in our present condition of human knowing at least true "intellection" or knowledge according to universals does not distort or falsify but gives us a true understanding of an object, act or person.

The truth lies in that the finite individual shares in God's absolute unicity, especially by his higher faculties of intellect and will. The error lies in the exaggeration—in seeking to ignore the common elements that make individuals mere finite participations and not the source of uniqueness.