



On The Nature of Abstractions

For the Philosophy of The Numen (that is, for The Numinous Way) an abstraction is a manifestation of the primary error of conventional causal thinking; that is, of assuming only a causal linearity - of using causal reductionism, that simple cause-and-effect that excludes the acausal knowing that empathy provides and which the numinous is a manifestation of. Implicit in abstractions is the notion of - the illusion of - the separateness of beings.[\[1\]](#)

Abstractions thus hide the true nature of Reality - which is both causal and acausal [\[2\]](#) - and which Reality can be apprehended by means of both causal and acausal thinking, which processes, or types of knowing, present to us both causal knowledge [\[3\]](#) and acausal knowledge [\[4\]](#). In essence, an abstraction is the manufacture, and use of, some idea, ideal, "image" or category, and thus some generalization, and/or some assignment of an individual or individuals - and/or some being, some "thing" - to some group or category with the implicit acceptance of the separateness, in causal Space-Time, of such being/things/individuals. The positing of some "perfect" or "ideal" form, category, or thing, is part of abstraction.

Thus, the nature of abstraction resides in causality, with causal knowing revealing only the causal aspect, the causal nature, of beings.

In contrast, acausal knowing reveals (uncovers) the connexions between beings

- the dependant nature of beings - and thus places beings in the context of Being, and thus uncovers the acausal nature of beings, with Being having both a causal and an acausal nature.

The error of abstractionism - of using existing abstractions and manufacturing other abstractions and using these as the source of ethics, of judgement, and so ascribing a value to them - is the error of *ὑβρις* (hubris). That is, the error of unbalance: of neglecting or being unaware of empathy, and of neglecting or being unaware of or profaning the numinous [5]. In the personal and social sense, *ὑβρις* is revealed in a lack of compassion, a lack of balanced reasoning, and not only ascribing to one's self (or some other abstraction, such as a nation-State) what is assumed to be the perfection of right and of good (or the best current approximation of it) but also acting on that presumption to the detriment, the harm, of others [6].

This is unethical - as all abstractions are inherently unethical - because what is ethical is determined by empathy, and thus cannot be abstracted out of that direct, immediate, and personal knowing which presences empathy in us, as human beings [7].

The Unethical Abstraction of The Civilizing Process

The error of abstractionism - of using existing abstractions and manufacturing other abstractions and using these as the source of ethics, of judgement, and so ascribing a value to them - is also the error of understanding *πόλεμος* (polemos) as a causal dialectic and as the abstraction of 'progression' that is, of some 'progress'/evolution resulting from such *πόλεμος-as-dialectic* being applied in a practical way (as a process of change), with the change inherent in this application of *πόλεμος* being regarded as necessary and as good.

This particular error - of *πόλεμος* mis-understood as a dialectic involving opposites [8] - is most manifest, philosophically and in that social construct often termed society, in what has been termed "the civilizing process", and which process (to wit, we mortals allegedly becoming civilized or more civilized) involves constant change and a continuing development. This is the acceptance of the idea that there is "something", in some future - near or distant - that can be and should be striven toward, and this "something" is always some ideal, or more perfect, form of something that either already exists or which, it is alleged, can be manufactured (brought into being) if certain things (within one's self, or within society, for instance) are changed in accord with some other manufactured idea or abstraction, or deriving from

some *-ism* or some *-ology* (be these deemed to be political, social or religious).

There is thus the instability of unbalance, of *ὑβρις* - a belief in a necessary and continuing causal (linear) progression toward something considered to be better than what exists now or has existed, and that nothing is immune or should be immune to this causal change. Why *of ὑβρις*? Because there is no balance of empathy; no balance arising from that acausal knowing which predisposes us toward compassion, the immediacy of personal interaction, and *wu-wei* [9]; instead, there is - in the illustrative (though not philosophically accurate) sense, the triumph - in that social construct often termed society - of the Jungian animus over the anima. That is, there is a distinct lack of natural balance both within the individual and within social constructs such as society.

In a more accurate philosophical way, this is the loss of *ψυχή* [10] (and thus a lack of knowing of and appreciation of the numinous) and the dominance of the error of *πόλεμος-as-dialectic*, and which *πόλεμος-as-dialectic* tends always, by its nature as an abstraction, towards *ὑβρις*.

In addition, this so-called "civilizing process" (involving change) is predicated on the assumption, the abstraction, of there existing something termed civilization, or of it being possible to manufacture (to progress toward) this something, this abstraction, termed civilization. For however civilization is or has been defined, it is always an abstraction because all such definitions by their very nature are impersonal, devoid of acausal knowing and the empathy of the immediacy of personal knowing. That is, they all ignore our nature as empathic beings (and thus our acausal nature and our connexion to other life) for all such definitions depend on (1) large supra-personal collocations such as "city" (urban living) or some State, and/or on (2) the large-scale centralization of resources, especially fiscal and military; and/or on (3) some definition of what is termed "civilized values" deriving from causal theories of ethics [11], and/or on (4) some definition of the importance (and sanctity, or whatever) of the individual, perceived as the individual is as some separate (that is, causal-only) being. Many definitions are based on all four categories.

In essence, therefore, the very notion of "civilization" is unethical, because it both classifies, and excludes, based on some abstract criteria, some abstract *non-empathic* judgement of others (that is, of who and what is deemed to be "civilized").

Similarly, the very notions of "progress" and of some "civilizing process" are unethical because they predispose individuals toward the unbalanced disruption of and the striving for some type of perfection or ideal, and which striving (because it is a causal striving) always entails placing that ideal or that

abstraction before the compassion born of empathy, and which always tends toward creating suffering, and always involves a loss of numinosity: of that delicate, reasoned, balance that an empathic awareness brings to we human beings.

For "civilization" assigns an abstract moral value to individuals, and judges them according to some abstract category or categories, and rather than decreasing *πόλεμος-as-dialectic*, this abstraction, such judgement, actually increases it and the *ὑβρις* inherent therein. For, according to this abstraction, one is or can become (by a causal, linear, striving - by *πόλεμος-as-dialectic*), "civilized", and, also according to this abstraction, being "civilized" is inherently better than, superior to, being a "barbarian" - and even more, according to this abstraction, being "civilized" is the state of human existence we should all strive to attain and we should encourage others to attain, for such encouragement of them, such a *changing* of them, is regarded, by the adherents of this abstraction, as their moral duty.

Thus, and for instance, there is the demand for some people, somewhere, to "become civilized" with some people, or more often these days, some nation-State held as as an example (an ideal) for others to emulate: to progress toward. In addition, those deemed uncivilized can be fought, and force used to "make them civilized" or at least alter their social structures so that they can be given the opportunity to "become civilized" or "progress toward" being so.

For once some abstract category is assigned some moral value - as in the case of "civilization" which is regarded as "good" and "necessary" if not superior to everything else - then there is a tendency toward suffering. Indeed, one could write with some justification that the abstractions of "civilization", and of a linear "progress" toward some form of perfection (and some *future* state of happiness or *future* peace are abstractions of an abstract perfection), have been and are the among the most disruptive in human history, as well as being the cause of great suffering for century upon century.

Thus, the abstraction termed civilization - however defined - usurps the empathy of the immediacy of the moment, and the compassion arising from it, just as the abstraction of a linear "progress" usurps *wu-wei*. Both lead to *ὑβρις* and thus to the loss of *ψυχή*, a loss of our natural balance, a loss of *ἀρμονίη* and *συμπάθεια* in respect of *Φύσις* [12]; a natural balance which enables us to feel, know, and appreciate, the numinous - and thus live in a numinous way.

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November 2010 CE
(Revised 2455670.731)

Footnotes:

[1] Refer to *An Introduction To The Ontology of Being*

[2] Refer to *An Introduction To The Ontology of Being* and also *Ontology, Ethics and The Numinous Way*.

[3] Causal knowledge derives from both the use of *λόγος* (and thus from the application of logic) and from experimental science, for which see *The Patheimathos of Experimental Science in The Classical Foundations of The Numinous Way*.

[4] Acausal knowing derives - currently - from the faculty of empathy: see, for example, *Acausality, Phainómenon, and The Appearance of Causality*.

[5] *ὑβρις* is the error of personal insolence, of going beyond the proper limits set by reasoned (balanced) judgement - *σωφρονεῖν* - and by an awareness, a personal knowing, of the numinous, and which knowing of the numinous is provided by empathy. For a discussion of *ὑβρις* in the context of *σωφρονεῖν* and of *Δίκη*, see my essay *Quid Est Veritas?*

[6] This lack of balanced reasoning, this lack of compassion (a lack of empathy) and this presumption of arrogantly assuming one knows what is justice and of having the right to apply it, to dispense it, to others are typical signs of the tyrant.

Classic personal examples are the characters of Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannus* by Sophocles, and Creon in *Antigone*, also by Sophocles. Both of these individuals commit the error of hubris due to their continuing unbalanced assertion - based on a neglect of both reasoned judgement and of the numen (re-presented in those dramas by the gods and their customs) - that they "know" and have a right (the ability) to decide what is good and what is wrong.

A classic impersonal example is the modern nation-State which ascribes to itself the presumption of judgement of other individuals and the presumption of knowing what it regards is "right" and "wrong". The presumption of judgement of other individuals is enshrined in the so-called Courts of Law/Justice of the State, and the presumption of knowing what it regards is "right" and "wrong" is enshrined in the laws which it makes, the transgression

of which the State deems is punishable by whatever measures it deems appropriate. All these make the modern nation-State an example of the impersonal tyrant.

[7] For empathy as the source of ethics, refer to *Ontology, Ethics and The Numinous Way* and also *An Introduction To The Ontology of Being*.

[8] For an overview of this error of *πόλεμος-as-dialectic*, see my *Some Notes on Πόλεμος and Δίκη in Heraclitus B80* and also my essay *The Abstraction of Change as Opposites and Dialectic*.

[9] *wu-wei* (a Taoist word) is letting-be, and results from empathy; from being sympathetically and compassionately aware of other life, other beings, and not desiring to interfere with such life. See my essay *Living The Numinous Way* contained in *Three Essays Regarding The Numinous Way*.

[10] Correctly understood, *ψυχή* is Life *qua* being. That is, it is the matrix of connexions - of connected beings - that empathy reveals, and expresses (or is a manifestation of, for us) the true (acausal and causal) nature of Being itself. See also footnote 11 in my essay *Quid Est Veritas?*

[11] For example, the definition of barbarism as opposed to moral ("civilized") values, with moral values being based on an abstract (non-numinous) morality, as posited, for example, by Aristotle, Plato, Hume or Kant. In Kant, for instance, one has the autonomous individual - that is, the separate individual of causality and of causal knowing. However, in respect of Kant, while his principle of morality - that a person should act on the presumption that his own individual action could become a universal law which others use - might vaguely suggest empathy, his assumption of there being an imperative universal good logically leads to the assumption of there being a supra-human entity (deity) behind such an imperative, and these assumptions militate against natural empathy.

According to *The Numinous Way*, empathy is a natural human faculty (or ability), which can be, but which often is not, used.

[12] For *συν-πάθος* see, for example, *An Introduction To The Ontology of Being*. For *Φύσις* see, for example, *Quid Est Veritas?*

In respect of *ἀρμονίη*:

"...the *numinous* is what predisposes us not to commit ὕβρις - that is, what continues or maintains or manifests ἀρμονίη and thus καλλός; the natural balance - *sans* abstractions - that enables us to know and appreciate, and which uncovers, Φύσις and λόγος, and τὸ καλόν."

Pre-Socratic Philosophy, The Numinous Way, Aesthetics, and Other Questions
