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FINITUDE, HOPE, AND THE HUMAN
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Sobretiro de HUMANITAS, Número 16.

Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, 1975.

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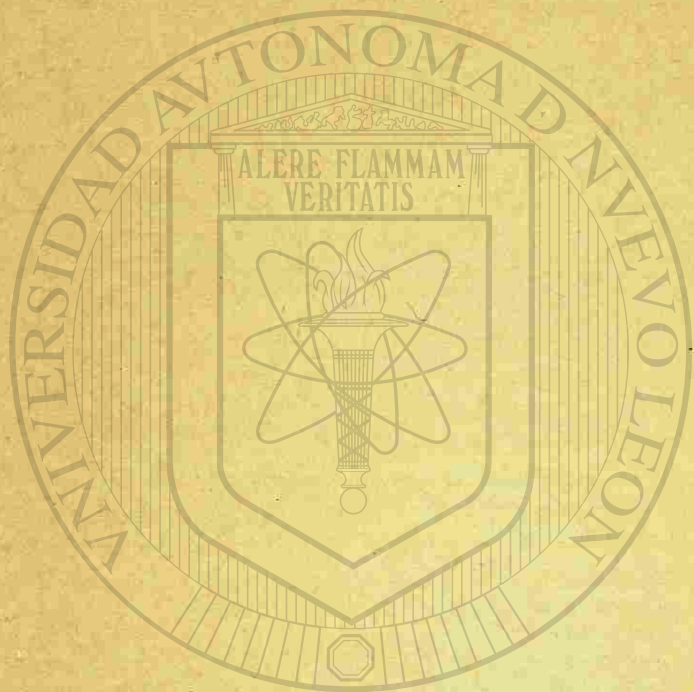
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FINITUDE, HOPE, AND THE HUMAN COMMUNITY

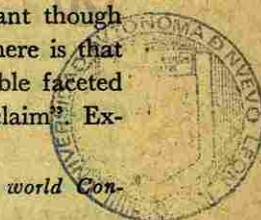
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I HAVE OFFERED reasons elsewhere for maintaining 1) that every expression of human finite-historical individuality ineluctably issues in both good and evil; 2) that every expression of finite-historical individuality is consented to in some mode, namely in hope, in presumption or in despair; and 3) that every expression of finite-historical individuality which is consented to *in hope* that it will contribute to establishing or maintaining the solidarity of the human community is, as so modalized, unequivocally good, i.e., is that to which unqualified rational approval can be given.¹ I should now like first to say something further about this hope and then to indicate a few of the ways in which this element of hope shapes the sense of the envisaged solitary human community and the sort of education called for to sustain such a community.

I take it for granted that there is no human community of any sort without some expression of finite-historical individuality. Now every expression of finite-historical individuality is addressed to some other finite-historical individual. A finite-historical individual may be a single person or some concrete group of persons. A single person may express his individuality to another single person or to a group of persons. Likewise a group may express its individuality to another group or to a single person.

But the differences between these various combinations, important though they are in other contexts, are not relevant here. What matters here is that every expression of finite-historical individuality, as address, is double faceted and can be appropriately interpreted in terms of "appeal" and "claim." Ex-

¹ See my "Good, Evil, and Human Finitude", *Proceedings of the xvth world Congress of philosophy*, Varna, Bulgaria, 1973, vol. I, pp. 143-145.



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pression as appeal is directed toward acceptance by others into community with them. Expression as claim insists that others acknowledge that he who expresses individuality is not definitively absorbed by them. In concrete experience these two facets of expression "infect" one another. Appeal makes a claim and claim appeals for acknowledgement.

Now if I am correct, every expression of finite-historical individuality ineluctably issues in both good and evil. That is, no concrete expression of finite-historical individuality, simply by virtue of the content expressed, unequivocally contributes to establishing or maintaining a genuinely solidary human community. What is, then, the character of that hope which I claim so modalizes an expression of individuality that the modalized expression as a totality is unqualifiedly good?

First, as Gabriel Marcel has clearly seen, in its fully developed character hope has no determinate object. Hope is without definitively specifiable content. To hope, then, is not to perform an act like seeing, choosing, or making. Hoping does not, at bottom, give expression to some well defined content. Though it does make sense to say "I hope that x", this must be understood, if genuine hope is in question, as only a conditional longing for x, a longing for x only insofar as x is indeed compatible with that ultimate state of affairs which defies definitive specification. Or, from another perspective, hope is radically unconditional. Its legitimacy does not depend upon the fulfillment of stipulable prerequisites.²

But even though Marcel has seen that hope establishes persons in a relationship which he calls "communion", he has not sufficiently clarified the character of this relationship. I propose that the relationship established by hope should be conceived along the lines of the relation holding between a class, in the logical sense, and its complement, rather than in terms of the relations of sameness or similarity. Even the point at which the analogy between the relation between individuals established by hope and the relation between a class and its complement breaks down is instructive.

For present purposes I will develop my proposal in terms of the relationship between two groups. Given 1) that each of the groups in question is indeed a finite-historical individual, 2) that an expression of that individuality is required for community between these individuals, and 3) that a necessary condition for the occurrence of concrete good is some expression of finite-historical individuality, then the only modalization of that expression which

² See Marcel Gabriel, *Homo Viator*, tr. by Emma Crawford (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1951), pp. 29-67.

can be unequivocally good is one which acknowledge finite-historical individuality and preserves the possibility of its continued expression. An expression so modalized that the relationship arising from it is appropriately conceived in terms of similarity or sameness cannot satisfy this condition.

A movement of two groups toward similarity or sameness could only win unqualified rational approval if at least one of the groups so moved does *not* have, at its *terminus a quo*, an inalienable, abiding, but not necessarily unmodifiable, contribution to make to the complex relationship as a whole. Thus, the movement toward similarity or sameness tends either to the subordination of one group to another or to the subordination of that which individualizes each group to that which is common to them. If this movement reaches its ultimate term, then some possibilities of expressions of finite-historical individuality are, by explicit design, eliminated. And along with them are eliminated those possible concrete goods for which they were necessary conditions.

An expression of finite-historical individuality so modalized that it is consented to with a view toward the reduction of the groups to sameness or similarity and the concomitant abrogation of the possibility of subsequent expressions of finite-historical individuality is one which is consented to not in hope, but rather in presumption or in despair.³

On the other hand, an expression so modalized that the relationship arising from it is appropriately conceived along the lines of the relation between a class and its complement is one which *does* preserve both finite-historical individuality and the possibility of its continued expression. Thus an expression so modalized is one to which unqualified rational approval can be given. I therefore contend that the relationship established by hope is appropriately conceived along the lines of the relation between a class and its complement.

This contention gains strength from the following considerations. First, a class and its complement mutually determine each other precisely by virtue of the fact that each of them maintains its own identity. Analogously, one group is able to help another in the latter's self-realization precisely by virtue of the fact that the former gives expression to its own individuality. Second, a class and its complement are mutually dependent on each other for their integral sense. Neither without the other makes complete sense. Analogously, no group can express its finite-historical individuality in the absence of some other individual, whether group or single person. Indeed, no group can be

³ For the sense of the notions of presumption and despair in this context, see my paper cited in footnote 1.

cognizant of its own finite-historical individuality in the absence of a complement. Third, a class and its complement constitute one unified universe of discourse analogously, the individual groups in question conjointly constitute what can be called the "circle of expression". This circle of expression can be described as a sating which is required for a hearing to be possible as a hearing, which hearing is required for a saying to be possible as a saying.

This third consideration brings into focus the fact that the modalization of the expression of individuality *by hope* is precisely that modalization which tends to preserve expression of finite-historical individuality in its fullness. Given the interpretation of this expression in terms of appeal and claim, then it can be seen that the relation among groups, or among individuals for that matter, which is established by a consent to the expression of finite-historical individuality *in hope* does, if the relation of hope is conceived in a manner analogous to the relation between a class and its complement, preserve the full force of both facets of such expression, namely appeal and claim. These two facets are not preserved in full force by modalizations of expression which I have called presumption or despair. Presumption slights the facet of appeal in trivializing the necessity of hearing for saying. Despair slights both facets in trivializing the entire circle of expression.

But the analogy between on the one hand, the relation between a class and its complement and on the other hand, the relation between groups established by a consent in hope to an expression of finite-historical individuality does not, as I have indicated, hold in all respects. For example, the composition of a class or its complement does not develop or change. Obviously the composition of a group of persons does develop and change. Likewise the example of the relation between a class and its complement is too simple to cover the complexity of the network of groups brought into contact with one another in some expressions of finite-historical individuality. Nonetheless even when the analogy collapses, it is instructive concerning the sense of hope. The consent *in hope* which modalizes expression of finite-historical individuality gives full weight to both the finitude and the historicity of the expression of individuality. Presumption denies the expression's finitude and despair trivializes its historicity.

On the basis of this elucidation of the character of that hope which can so modalize an expression of finite-historical individuality that the modalized expression taken as a whole is unequivocally good, I should like to sketch briefly some implications following from this elucidation concerning the sense of the envisaged solidary human community and the education called for to sustain such a community. Basically, the envisaged solidary human community

must be a variegated community. Variegation is not a sign of defective community. Rather it is an essential trait of community. Further, this variegation must extend throughout the entire range of areas in which expression of finite-historical individuality can occur.

Concretely, this means that the solidary human community must be marked by political, economic, artistic, and religious diversity. The specific shape and content of the diversity of course need not, and indeed should not, remain fixed. For example, there is no optimal quantity of diversity to be established or maintained. And fixity of the shape or content of the diversity is just as incompatible with the finitude and historicity of the expression of individuality as is uniformity.

Further, and paradoxically the variegation of the solidary human community requisite for continued expression of individuality will insure the continued presence of evil in the solidary human community. The modalization of expressions of individuality by consent in hope does not belong to a quest for the absolute abolition of evil in the human community. On the contrary, inasmuch as this modalization tends to insure further expressions of individuality, it likewise insures the continued presence of evil in the solidary human community. This is so because every expression of finite-historical individuality ineluctably issues in both good and evil.

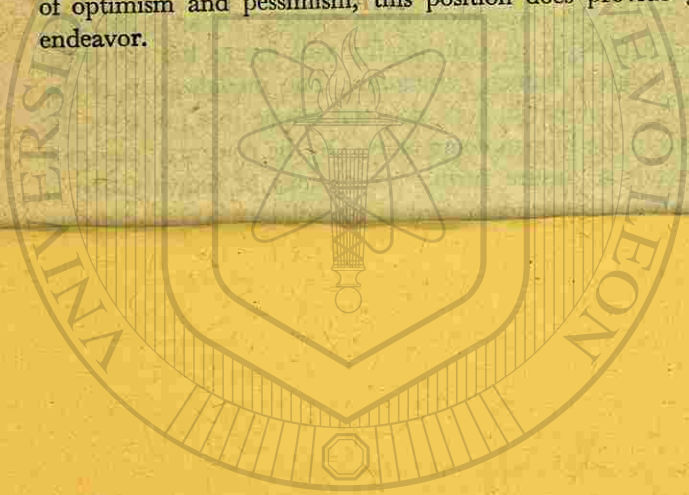
I should like to conclude this paper with some brief remarks concerning the sort of education called for to sustain a solidary human community of the kind described here. Primarily, the requisite education will explicitly distinguish between what is claimed or even sought in the natural sciences and what is claimed or sought in the humanities. Otto Friedrich Bollnow's work is instructive here. Without this distinction, calls for "planetary humanities" contain seeds of disaster.⁴

Requisite education in the humanities will seek an objective truth which makes no claim to generalized validity. Rather, as embodying accounts of the expression of finite-historical individuality, the humanities will be recognized as interpretations which are themselves expressions of individuality. Inasmuch as individuals and groups are definitively both finite and historical, these characteristics will be acknowledged and respected. Such respect is not skepticism. On the contrary, it is clear sighted recognition both of the kind of reality belonging to expressions of individuality and of the kind of sense which an interpretation of these expressions embodies.

⁴ For an example of a call for "planetary humanities" see Michel Novak, "Planetary Humanities", *Commonweal*, vol. C, No. 11, May 17, 1974, p. 254.

Only an education in the humanities which is rooted in these considerations provides the intellectual foundation for the single person or group to consent to expressions of individuality in hope. For only this sort of education cultivates the diversity necessary for a solidary human community in which continued expression of finite-historical individuality is possible and thus a community in which people, groups, and their deeds matter.

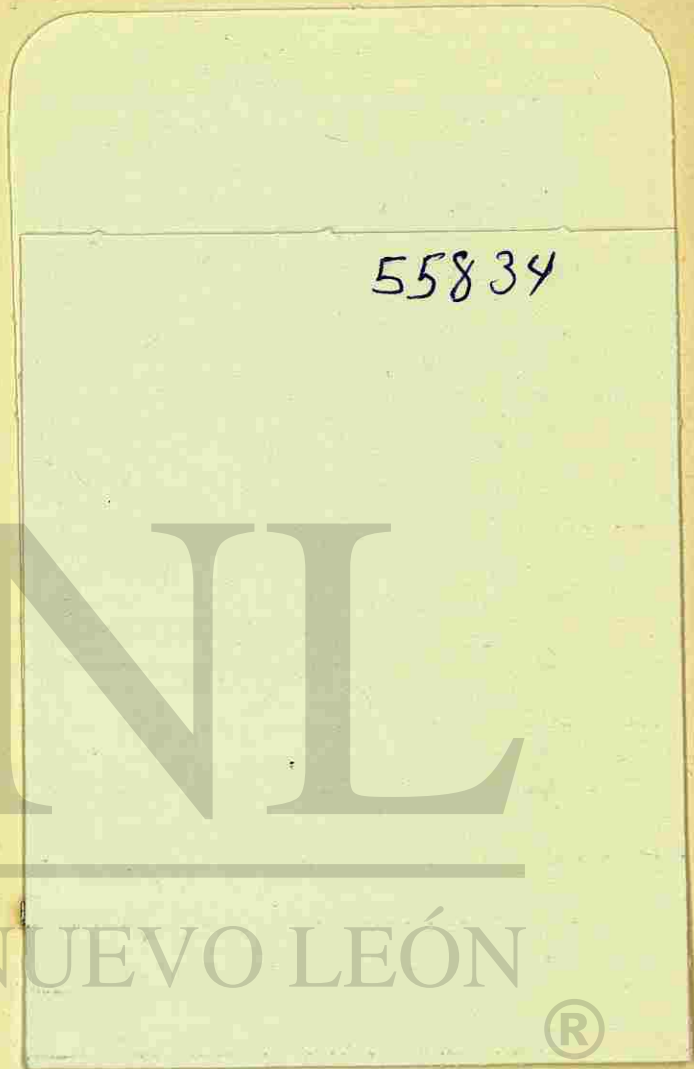
Admittedly, this position is far from utopian. Indeed, it is paradoxical and perplexing. But I believe that the proposals and interpretations from which this position and its consequences flow are well founded in human experience. Further, the history of human community formation and maintenance hardly disconfirms them. And in the final analysis, while eliminating the shallowness of optimism and pessimism, this position does provide grounds for steadfast endeavor.



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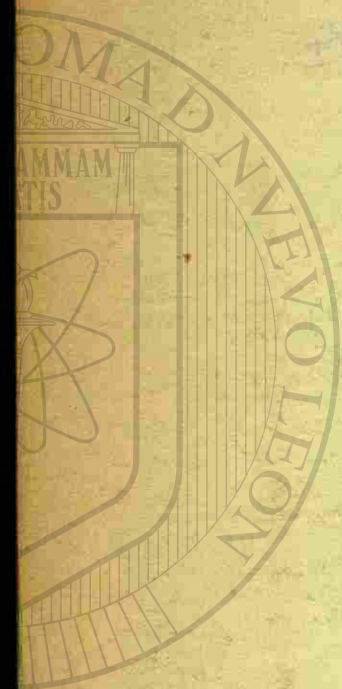


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