

Commentary

Rethinking Categories within the Qualitative Dimension. Commentary on Heidegger's *Duns Scotus' Theory of Categories and of Meaning*

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1. Introduction

In *Duns Scotus' Theory of Categories and of Meaning (1915-16)*, Heidegger offers an original reading of the Scotist doctrine of categories and meaning. The significance of this book – a syncretic work influenced by the Neo-Kantian school, Lask and Husserl – lies in the fact that Scotus's categories, called *transcendentalia*, represent for Heidegger a fertile source of inspiration that leads him to a reformulation of the categories from an ontological perspective. This anticipates the explicit formulation of the question of Being that characterizes Heidegger's thought. The text is divided into two parts: the first one concerns the question of categories (“*The Theory of the Categories*”) and the second one regards the theory of meaning (“*The Theory of Meaning*”). The first part is composed by three chapters about, respectively, the *unum transcendens*, *verum transcendens* and the *form and content of the language*. In this commentary, I shall explore some passages of the chapter about the transcendental *unum*, which takes into account the issue of categories as entwined with that of the determination and individuation of reality; I will pinpoint how they suggest a reference to the qualitative dimension. I shall focus on some pivotal passages so as to shed a light on three intertwined issues: the nature, the role and the structure of the renewed categories; the inner articulation of reality and its principle of individuation; how both are connected with the horizon of the qualitative dimension.

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Before turning to the comment of the section on *unum transcendens*, I would like to mention one of the Scotus's theme that composes the Heideggerian theoretical frame in which we will move. Heidegger notices that, while medieval thought is distinguished by the absence of the modern conception of subject, the medieval man is characterized by the absolute devotion to the *material* that dominates over the values of the ego (subject) (Heidegger, 1978, 7- 8). This medieval "principle of *immersion*" into the material of the experience goes along with the tendency to mainly seek the universal norms and general principles "staying clear of individual peculiarities (*Besondersheit*)" (Heidegger, 1978, 9). By recalling the problematic of a philosophical negligence for *particulars*, Heidegger's text shows a specific concern for the qualitative sphere included, here, in the notion of "individual peculiarities": they represent the first hint toward the possibility to outline the structured material that identifies the individuals as such. Even if particularities and individualities subtract themselves from a generalizing formalization, as they are irreducibly connoted by their quantitative aspects, nevertheless the immersion into the concrete material of reality does not occur in a complete chaos without any kind of form or order. In this regard, in Heidegger's eyes, Scotus "has a more extensive and accurate nearness (*haecceitas*) to real life, to its manifoldness and possible tensions than the scholastics before him. At the same time, he knows how to turn, with the same ease, from the fullness of life to the abstract world of mathematics" (Heidegger, 1978, 9). Here, Heidegger is interested in contemplating two different, and apparently opposed, elements and their reciprocal tension: on the one hand the attention to the *haecceitas* of life, namely the deictic *facticity* of life, which seems to conflict with the schema of traditional logic, and on the other hand the conservation of the logic-theoretic side. Already in the *Introduction*, it is possible to observe Heidegger's appreciation of the attempt to combine the theory of categories and the respect of the "ineffable" character of individuality that constitutes the emergence of our experience in the world. The core of our issue is announced in the above passage: the research of those categories which are adequate to individuality. Heidegger's challenge is to elaborate a logic that mirrors the concrete need to have categories that do not entrap the stream of experience and, at the same time, the need not to dissolve it in some sort of irrationalistic vitalism.

2. The Structure of Categories. *Ens* and *Unum*

In the *Introduction*, Heidegger denounces the insufficiency of the ten Aristotelian categories: they represent only a determinate class in a determinate domain (Heidegger, 1978, 24), whose nature is *predicative* (Heidegger, 1978, 247) and whose role – I might add – is to circumscribe the events of reality by *attribution*. The category of *ens* and the other *transcendentalia* (*unum*, *verum* and *bonum*) exceed the Aristotelian doctrine, as they have a different nature, structure and hierarchy. Heidegger discovers in Scotus' transcendentals an alternative conception of categories with respect to the Aristotelian predicative categories and the subjectivist ones à la Kant.

Let us now consider the transcendental categories as Heidegger presents them. First of all, our experience is always, before any further type of determination, an experience of *something objective*, of a *being*, of an *ens*. The notion of *ens* is the permanent moment in the objective: *ens* is the category of categories, the condition for the possibility of knowing objects in general, the basis of the categorial framework of the *transcendentalia*. Schematically speaking, in Scholastic-Scotist terminology a *transcendens* is “that which has no genus beyond it in which it inheres” and “nothing more can be predicated of it” (Heidegger, 1978, 30). A *transcendens*, thus, does not respond to a hierarchy of genera and species (Kisiel, 1993, 36) and their relation of “*in-esse*” as in the Aristotelian doctrine of substance and accident. *Ens*, hence, is a not-predicative determination; it is related to reality out of the attributive-predicative logic. Given this general information, we need to analyse the sense of the *transcendentalia*, - taking into account the relation between *ens* and *unum*, trying to comprehend their meaning, their inter-relation and the implications of their inner content.

1) The *ens* tells us that our experience is an experience of a *being*, of *something* in general; the *unum transcendens* indicates that something is a something. In this shift of emphasis, I consider the “something” as a being and then as a determined unity. I sketch some minimal information without attaching to the being any predicative connotations: “*unum* (and *ens*) doesn't add a new object anymore to *ens* in the way that somehow being white adds to the substance. Every object is one object in itself and by itself. *Unum* is immediately given” (Heidegger, 1978, 36-37). *Ens* and *unum* do not impose an attribute but they illuminate something proper of any beings. 2) An *ens* is always an *unum transcendens*, and vice versa: this kind of mutual intercategoryal implication is

one of the main signs of the *transcendentalia*. Indeed, “Only that which is convertible with *ens* may be reckoned with the transcendentals in the strict sense”. *Convertibility* is the criterion for deciding what can be considered a *transcendens*. We might say that *transcendentalia* do not respond to a vertical hierarchy but they stand in a horizontal relation of mutual implication, they are equi-primordial categories, therefore none of them can be shown “without a circular argument” (Heidegger, 1978, 31). Transcendental categories create a logic chain that they exhibit, by the principle of convertibility, with no need of any metaphysical deduction. Thus far we know that categories as *transcendentalia* have no predicative dispositions but rather as I will show – we might say – a formal-indicative one, and that their criterion of individuation is convertibility, a sort of anti-hierarchical dispositive which entails an internal organization in terms of reciprocal connection. 3) At first, since *ens* and *unum* are such primitive notions, they are usually conceived as ultimate concepts with no content to communicate. “There is nothing apparently that can be done with *ens*(...) Everything stops at this as at the ultimate. Or have we still not exhausted the significant content of *ens*?” (Heidegger, 1978, 32). Behind the simplicity of *ens* and *unum* we shall, instead, discover their implicit onto-logic articulation. When I acknowledge something, this something is a something because it is not another. “It is something and in its being something it is not-other-being”. Within the category of *ens* there does not only lie a general positive affirmation of existence, but “yet there is in this sentence a productive moment, that of *relation*”. Thanks to the *ens*, the one and the other are given in their relation, more precisely “not the one or even the one in antithesis to two, but the one and the other: the *heterothesis*”¹. As soon as we investigate, the apparent tautology *ens est* (“a being is”) necessarily involves a heterology (Kisiel, 1993, 37). It conceals a relation between *something* and its negation, it identifies a being by setting a limit. This limit in turn is not fixed once and for all as a circumscribing predication would do, but is flexible, precisely because *ens* suggests a type of determination that does not prescribe any essential attributes or a strict cataloguing. *Ens* individuates something, providing an ontological determination by indicating a modal relation between two not yet specified members. As a convertible non-predicative category, the transcendental *unum* shows the same inner structure as the *ens*: it does not add to the concept of the object any positive-attributive factor. Given the distinctive relation of

¹These last three quotations are in Heidegger, 1978, 33.

convertibility, between *ens* and *unum*, even if they communicate different nuances of meaning, a sharp separation does not occur since they communicate “merely a different aspect and determination by which its content can be regarded”. Also the *unum* does not touch the what-ness of the object but it is “necessarily conjoined to it as an essentially fundamental determination”². Thanks to the *unum*, an object can be discerned in its being-one as already implied in its being. Furthermore, the fact of being-one is synchronized with the fact of not-being-another object. Like the *ens*, the *unum* hides the reference to an internal relation – in its case between *one* and *multiplicity*. In their minimalistic expression, the *ens* and the *unum* represent two different perspectives, two different modalities to consider the same object, as they have a slightly different meaning and role: the *ens* gives the first determination in terms of *relation*, the *unum* brings more clarity to the object for it donates an “order” to the manifold fullness of the objective, an order that is not permanently fixed, mono-directional or unchangeable.

3. Categories as Diagrammatic Structures

I would like, now, to sum up the features of categories we have an outline. The transcendentals have a non-predicative nature but a *modal* one as it implies a formal-indicative role³. Such a role does not entail the *what* of a circumscribed entity, but it concerns the *how* of phenomena since the various identified objects are considered not as fixed members but as singular something involved in mutual and plastic relation. The peculiarity of *transcendentalia* is the capacity to support a formal-indicative modality of determination that lets free the specific material content that qualifies different entities. These categories do not prescribe a static delimitation for demarcating substances, *as* essential, unrelated monads. On the contrary, they operate a modal-flexive distinction, always bound to a variable *respectus*: being one-something and not-another depends on the intrinsic relation between a singular identity and its alterity, whose reciprocal limit, even if ontologically clear, has always a dynamic character. The notion of limit (ascribable to both *ens* and *unum*) does not fence on an unmovable basis what a thing should be and what it should not be, but it allows an on-going-dialogue between the two opposite elements. It is precisely

²These last three quotations are in Heidegger, 1978, 37.

³Kisiel states that *unum transcendens* as an eminent indicative role, close to the formal indication (*Formale Anzeige*). Cfr Kisiel, 1993, 26.

through the limit which is reciprocally given from one to the other that beings in such relation can gain their own configuration as particularities and their proper qualitative difference. Even though categories do not involve a determination that directly penetrates the material content of reality, nevertheless they entail such material component indirectly. Their indicative instruction suggests a reference to the material which is what, in truth, individuates the concrete particularities and the differences of various objects. The determination and the order, communicated by *ens* and *unum*, “automatically” lead the ontological inquiry to take into account the material components of experience, discovering that the formal-indicative articulation of the transcendental categories is structurally linked with the facticity of reality, of worldly experience. Conjecturing on the proper formal-indicative function of categories, we might hold that it is the *material being* of objects that offers, in the end, the *ens* as *ens*, the *one* as *one*. In the domain of reality, in fact, the different *respectus*, from which *ens* and *unum* (and their connected negations) are given, take place thanks to the emergency of the qualities of *concreteness* presented by, as we will see, the notion of *haecceitas*. As already noticed in the *Introduction*, *theoresis* should remember what is often forgotten, namely those individual particularities that the search of universal generality would disregard. A theory of renewed categories needs to grasp a reality that reveals itself as a domain constituted by the emergency of qualitatively connoted and yet articulated individuals. In this regard, I would propose that transcendental categories show a “diagrammatic” structure. First of all, categories are circularly connected, without a strict taxonomy as they mutually recall themselves. To give an Heideggerian example, let us consider the implications that derive but are yet included in the notion of *Dasein*. *Dasein* means being-in-the-world that in turn means living in a *world* and being-with-others, which means being a *finite projectual* entity and so forth. More importantly, this diagrammatic structure shall be rediscovered with respect to the role of categories towards reality. We might think of them graphically as open and flexible structures that indicate and pinpoint, with no other predicative prescription, the domain of material whose qualities contribute to set a clear, but yet mobile limit. The diagram “waits” for the material to fulfil the functional meaning of transcendentals since the different qualities in material are what individuate the *ens* and ones and give sense to the categorial architecture. I would like to stress again the nature of this kind of categorial-diagramm. Let us imagine the categories as points that possess two levels of arrows: one concerns the intercategorial relation and mutual

implications among them; the second concerns the categories as schemas, directed to reality, that can be the starting point for those arrows that regards the entities and their qualitatively ordered material, which gives concreteness and meaning to the open schemas of these modal-indicative categories.

4. Haecceitas – Form and Matter of the Individuality

The reference to a qualitative dimension embedded in the theory of categories is not explicitly suggested by the text. However, Heidegger himself often states that *ens* and *unum* are nothing quantitative. *Unum* means a first sort of order, not the quantitative or numeric one, that organizes the material into changeable coordinates and with respect to the different particularities of reality. While the number belongs to the sphere of quantitative *continuum* of homogeneity, the *unum transcendens* – as category of reality – needs to be adequate to the heterogeneous *continuum* of individuals. Indeed, Heidegger-Scotus claims that “what really exists is an individual. There is not intended in the concept of the individual an undermined object of a determined species” (Heidegger, 1978, 69). Reality in its concreteness is a heterogeneous *continuum* constituted by individualities, as ruled by *haecceitas*. *Haecceitas* is the this-ness, it is being-this-one in a certain space and time. In Scotus’ theory, “everything which really exists is a such-here-and-now. The form of individuality (*haecceitas*) is to furnish a primal determination of the really actual. This reality constitutes an “insurveyable multiplicity”, a “heterogeneous” *continuum*” (Heidegger, 1978, 70). *Haecceitas* is the formality of individuality (McGrath, 2003, 352) which contracts itself in a specific point as a singular irrepitable existence in the contextual space/time horizon. In the concept of *haecceitas*, the traditional ontological-epistemic dichotomies as *essentia/existentia* – the Scotist expression for the binomial what/how – form and matter collapse since they are indissolubly synthesized in the deictic nature of the singularity. The essence of *haecceitas* is inscribed in its *how* since every *what* is always give in a *certain modality* (Todisco, 2001, 256). *Haecceitas* has a deictic nature and role: in vein with the indicative function of the *unum transcendens* it implies, with no predicative instruments, a structured matter that emerges from specific context. In individuals the material shows a form. But what does “form” mean here? Form is a “correlative term. Form is form for the material (...) the material is always in a form commensurate with it. Put in another way, form gets its meaning from the material. If we want to grasp then the unifying form in the sphere of the real

world, we will look to concerning ourselves with the material itself which is to be collected in the unit” (Heidegger, 1978, 67). Like in the diagram of categories, also at the level of concrete reality, the material of *haecceitas* has a crucial role. The matter is not synthesized or actualized by a *form*, but is the material itself that “decides” its proper form and form receives its meaning from matter. Here we assist to a subversion of the traditional doctrine since the qualities, the matter, the concreteness, namely everything that usually has second value in the categorization, acquires a *performative* role. This reversal has been called the *material determination of the form*: joining the Laskian theory of object and the Husserlian categorial intuition, Heidegger obtains the possibility to examine the categories not as subject functions or applied forms to a chaotic material, but as already given and embedded in the weave of reality and worldly experience, in which there is an order and it is not possible to have an absolute heterogeneity. This observation puts us on the path to understand how such specific *haecceitas* could be counted, or I would add, how it could be conceptualized.

Given this frame, I would like to highlight the fundamental notions that come out. *Categories* and concrete *reality* represent the two connected issues of our inquiry. *Diagrammatic articulation* and *indicative* implications represent the function of both transcendentals and *haecceitas*. In vein with the structure of *transcendentalia*, the *haecceitas*, even though on a different level, responds to a deictic-indicative role, which is also inscribed in its proper meaning. The modal function of *ens* and *unum* is linked to the material of reality in a peculiar way as is the deictic normativity of *haecceitas*: the formal flexibility of the limit and the context-dependency of being-*unum* and of being-this-one- of the *haecceitas*, without prescribing any material determination, are nonetheless necessarily referred to that specific matter that composes the dimension of reality. Categories and *haecceitas* implicitly lead our concern to the material and to its qualitative nature. It turns out that “implicitly” is a key word. The antipredicative categories as relational modalities of being *something* gain their meaning from their implicit reference to the qualitatively connoted differences of individualities. *Haecceitas* indicates those individualities that find their identification in the qualitative dimension of their formed matter, in their already categorized context and existential time.

The purpose of this paper is not obviously to propose the Scotist theory of categories to solve the problem of the relation between categories and empirical horizon, between universality and particularity, between *a priori* and *a posteriori*. The aim here is to pinpoint an attempt to elaborate specific categorial

instruments whose nature, function, and internal dynamic would be adequate to grasp the core elements of reality. The Heideggerian effort is addressed to a logic that should be able to follow the motion of time and the mutation of context, seeking to provide the instruments to identify the individuality as such. In other words, we might interpret Heidegger's proposal as an operative experiment to combine the formal element of categories with the qualitative dimension of particularities and individualities, as ontological synthesis of time, space, and formed-material differences.

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