

THE METAPHYSICAL BACKGROUND OF SITUATION ETHICS

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Presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
University of San Carlos

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Philosophy

by
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS IN PHILOSOPHY, this thesis entitled: "THE METAPHYSICAL BACKGROUND OF SITUATION ETHICS," has been prepared and submitted by Eliseo B. Cimafranca who is hereby recommended for Oral Examination.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED . . .	1
The Problem	3
Statement of the problem	3
Importance of the study	4
Scope and limitations of the study	4
Definitions of Terms Used	5
Situation	5
Authentic existence	7
Organization of Remainder of the Thesis	8
Review of Literature	11
II. SITUATION ETHICS IN MODERN LITERATURE	18
The Relativism of Situation Ethics	18
The Role of the "Situation"	20
The Role of Existentialism	22
Religion, Sex, and Situation Ethics	26
The Rise of Situation Ethics	31
Situation Ethics and the Moral Act	36
Situation Ethics and Conscience	40
Conclusion	46
III. THE FUNDAMENTALS OF ETHICS	47
A Brief History	47

CHAPTER	PAGE
	vi
The Universality of Ethics	50
Ethics a Practical Philosophy	53
The Method of Ethics	55
Christian Humanism	59
General principles	60
Dualism in man	60
The fact of original sin	60
Christ's redemptive work	60
Specific Principles	60
Man a rational being	60
The object of man's free choice	61
The concept of existential ends	62
The concept of natural law in man as nature	63
True morality is man's happiness	64
IV. THE TENETS OF SITUATION ETHICS	68
General Principles of Situation Ethics	68
Specific Principles	72
Atheistic situation ethics	73
The Protestant position	77
The Catholic position	81
The Background of Situation Ethics	85
Remote Philosophic Sources	85
Illuminism	86

CHAPTER	PAGE
	vii
Positivism	87
Kantianism	87
Pragmatism	88
Modernism	89
Personalism	89
Relativism	90
Immediate Philosophic Source	92
The Specific Characteristics of Existentialism	97
Theistic Existentialism	97
Kierkegaard	98
Gabriel Marcel	101
Karl Jaspers	107
Atheistic Existentialism	111
Jean-Paul Sartre	112
Martin Heidegger	120
Albert Camus	125
Non-Philosophical Sources	128
Sin mysticism	128
Scientific source	129
V. A RE-EVALUATION OF SITUATION ETHICS	132
The Phenomenal Method	136
General Evaluation of Situation Ethics	138

	viii
CHAPTER	PAGE
An Evaluation of Atheistic Situation Ethics . .	140
The Protestant Situation Ethics	141
The Catholic Situation Ethics	142
Conclusion	144
VI. CONCLUSION	146
BIBLIOGRAPHY	150

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

In 1956 the Holy Office condemned an ethical system which is generally known as "Situation Ethics."¹ This condemnation came in the footsteps of two discourses of Pope Pius XII in which he openly and specifically condemned Situation Ethics. The first discourse was a radio message delivered from his own apartment on the occasion of the "Family Day" celebrated on Sunday, March 23, 1952 in all parishes of Italy. In this radio discourse Pius XII referred to Situation Ethics as the "new morality."² The second discourse, made on Friday, April 18, 1952, was addressed to a large group of delegates to the International Congress of the World Federation of Catholic Young Women gathered in the Hall of Benediction. In this discourse Pius XII referred to Situation Ethics as a "new conception of moral life."³ In these two discourses, especially in the

¹Gerald W. Healy, S.J., "Situation Ethics: A Summary," Philippine Studies, VIII (April, 1966), 309.

²Pius XII, The Unwearied Advocate, Public Addresses (Vol. II, ed. Reverend Vincent A. Yzermans. 2 vols.; St. Cloud, Minnesota: St. Cloud Bookshop, 1956), p. 82.

³Ibid., p. 90.

second, the Pope discussed the principal tenets of this doctrine and outlined the reasons why he condemned them. Though sixteen years have passed since Pius XII spoke against this doctrine, it must not be supposed that it has died out. On the contrary, like all errors, it has a way of staying on and it is never pure error.⁴

Pius XII did not intend to condemn Situation Ethics just for condemnation's sake. Rather, he wanted to spark a lively interest in the re-study and re-shaping of traditional natural law ethics so as to attune it to the moral and ethical demands of our present times. In this manner he wanted to forestall the claim made by this ethical doctrine that it alone would fit the moral and ethical needs of today. Moralists who have taken sides with the Pope are not themselves completely agreed on how to interpret the Pope's stand; however, they can be classified into four categories: (1) those who take an extreme view on Situation Ethics, and, therefore, condemn it absolutely; (2) those who take a benevolent view of it because they discover in it certain good points that would serve to make the moral act more meaningful. There is a third group of writers who seem not to see eye to eye with the Pope's statement. They either dismiss

⁴Donald Dietz, O.M.I., "Conscience and Love," The American Ecclesiastical Review, CXLVI (April, 1962), 225.