



fledge: to grow the plummage necessary for flight



Finding the Categories

Have you heard people complain, "People just don't know how to think anymore!"?

What do they mean? There are more college graduates today than ever before. Yet there is a big difference between WHAT we think and HOW we think. And we don't want to confuse the two.

WHAT we think has to do with true or false information. T. S. Eliot stated it in an ironic tone, "Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?" We

"Is yellow round or square?"

can be so bombarded by information (our text-messaging, songs on our iPOD, the next Chic look, headline news that is more sensational than helpful, the date of our hardest exam, what we want for Christmas) that the nuggets of truth we need for living, for sanity, and for real love get lost in the noise.

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We need good tools to think well. And these tools help us weed through mere information to get to the important stuff. We want to offer one tool in this issue:

Finding the Categories

Lesson 1

Here's an example to get us thinking:

"Is yellow round or square?"

If you have an answer, you haven't thought about the question. "Yellow" is a color category. "Round" or "square" is a shape category. Colors do not have shape. Colors take on the shape of objects they are on, but they are not shapes themselves. The sun is yellow and round. Does that mean that yellow is round? No, I can just as easily point out a yellow flag and say, "Ha! Yellow is also square!"

The problem is the categories. You must keep objects and concepts within their categories. When you mix them, you get confused.



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Let's look at another easy one:

"What does green taste like?"

Do you see the categories? One is color and the other is flavor. Since when does 'green' have 'taste'? Tasty things may be green, but it isn't green itself that gives the flavor. Candy can be artificially flavored to taste many different flavors, like a green Skittle, a green Jolly Rancher, a green Jelly Belly, or a green sour taffy.

Now you're understanding categories and the confusion they can make. But let's move onto something a little more complicated.

Lesson 2:

Here is a popular Christian bumper sticker:

"The next time you think you are perfect, try walking on water."

The phrase is good in that it helps people think about Jesus and their own lives. Yet, the phrase makes a mistake with categories. Do you see the two categories in the phrase?



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The first category is morality. It uses the word 'perfect' to mean moral behavior or moral character. When we say, "Why do you think you're so perfect!?" we mean "Why are you acting morally superior?"

The other category is supernatural, in this case, power over water so that you can walk on it. You have to be supernatural—over and beyond natural—to walk on water.

The statement that seemed straightforward is actually confusing the categories of morality and supernatural power.

Supernatural power over nature is not always a friend of morality.

Here are the questions to think about: 1) Can I think of any

situation where someone has been moral but not supernatural? 2) Can I think of any situation where someone has been supernatural but not moral?

What examples did you come up with?

Here are mine:

- 1) Think of Mother Teresa. No matter how moral and giving she was, as she got older



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she actually became weaker. Yet her supernatural power did not grow. Or think of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. There is no indication at all that they had power to walk on water, even though they were morally perfect. So morality does not mean more power over nature.

- 2) I instantly think of angels gone bad. They are usually called 'demons,' and they are very powerful. In fact, we know they do have power to make nature do all sorts of things. There is indication in the New Testament that demons have power to create storms and cause illness. Yet demons are not moral? Supernatural power over nature is not always a friend of morality.

So let's look back at the Christian bumper sticker:

The next time you think you are perfect, try walking on water.

Here is a conflict of categories. Even if someone were perfect, they might never walk on water. And it is possible for an immoral person to walk on water with the help of demonic powers.



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So the bumper sticker doesn't make any sense, unless morality and supernatural ability went hand in hand. It could just as easily be rephrased, "The next time you think you're perfect, try eating bananas." Morality and banana-eating are not required to go together.

And all it does is make the Christian using the bumper sticker look unaware and a bit confused. Only Jesus has true perfection and true supernatural power wrapped up in one person. A better way to say what I think this bumper sticker is getting at is this:

The next time you think you're Jesus, try walking on water.

Lesson 3:

Let's move into a more intense situation. A professor in one of Jonalyn's first classes in college made an argument against Christianity. He said, "I can prove to you that the Bible is false. In the Bible it says people are created in God's image. So does that mean God has

Do you know how tall Abraham Lincoln is sitting in that chair?



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armpit hair?" The class erupted with laughter. And nobody raised a hand in objection. What could be a good reply?

What would you say?

The first thing you need to be asking yourself is, "What categories are we talking about?" That's plain enough: 1) God and 2) the image of God.

Now, God could have armpit hair. It's possible. But people have the general idea (except Mormons) that God is a Spirit and that Spirit does not have physical qualities like armpit hair.

Then what about 'image of God'? What is an 'image' of something?

Examples of images:

Have you ever visited the Lincoln Memorial? Do you know how tall Abraham Lincoln is sitting in that chair? 19 feet. And that's sitting down! Yet, Abraham Lincoln's statue is an 'image of Abraham Lincoln.' There are some clear similarities, but they aren't identical. We see things are true about Lincoln's statue (made in his image) that are not true



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of Lincoln himself. For starters, size and material. The real Lincoln isn't that big nor made of marble.

Nobody finds it strange to say Lincoln's statue is an image of the real Lincoln.

If you have a quarter in your pocket, you can do the same experiment. Quarters have an 'image' of George Washington. What qualities does the quarter have that Washington did not? The quarter is made of metal; Washington himself was made of flesh and bone and soul.

So 'image' cannot mean what the professor was trying to make it mean.

Images 'represent something else in some fashion.'

Images aren't an 'exact reproduction' of something else. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that humans are exact reproductions of God.

Here's something you could say to that professor, "Sir, you've made a category mistake. There is a difference between God and an image of God, just as there is a difference between Washington and the American quarter."



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Now you have a tool to answer anyone who makes such a confusing category mistake.

Lesson 4:

Here is where finding categories becomes personal. Mixing categories can be very subtle just as they were with us during a conversation at the paint store.

We pondered this as we left the store swinging our two gallons of paint. Why did he apologize?

The assistant manager mixed our paint as we joked back and forth. He shared with us his time in a Colorado mountain town and how he served Nicole

Kidman. Then he paused and looked at Jonalyn, "I'm sorry, but," then continued to us both, "Nicole Kidman is the most incredible woman I've ever seen. When I saw her red pigtails and white, powder blue jacket, I just forgot my name."

We pondered this as we left the store swinging our two gallons of paint. Why did he apologize? Did he think Jonalyn thought herself the most attractive woman in the world? Why would that offend her?



Let's look at the subtle categories we believe were at work: 1) Attraction and 2) personal value.

In our culture, if you are attractive you are valuable. If you are not attractive, you are deemed less valuable. This is why make-up counters at the mall are always slammed with customers. This is what we see from the sexy, glossy, magazine girls at the checkout counter. That is, in the O.C., one of the gifts of choice for high school graduation is plastic surgery. Do you see the deep and tragic category confusion?

Yet do attraction and value go together? Can we think of times when attraction did not mean value? Can we think of a time when valuable things were not attractive?

Betraying a friend could be attractive, if it meant being tempted to take a large amount of money from him. Yet there is no value, no matter how much is involved, in betraying a friend.

... look into the mirror and say, "It does not matter if I am attractive; I am valuable."



In the same way, dirty, skinny, stray dogs walking lonely down a dirt road may not be attractive at all, yet they are still valuable. They are creature of God and in need of help.

Attraction and value do not automatically go hand in hand. Jonalyn is not offended that Nicole Kidman is more attractive than her. She often points out attractive women and marvels at them too. Their attraction doesn't mean anything to Jonalyn's value! Jonalyn is still valuable and loved because she is an image bearer of the Most High. She has value in her very being, regardless of someone else's imposed rules of 'attraction'. By the way, different periods in history have different rules of 'attraction,' yet personal value is the same throughout. It doesn't depend on punk teenagers, fashion magazines, or unkind so-called friends. It is deeper than that. Way deeper. It is hinged in the creative masterwork of our souls, a gift from a passionate God.

The sooner we get beyond the confusing categories that attraction does not mean value, the better. And we know we are seeing things more clearly when we can look into the mirror and say, "It does not matter if I am attractive; I am valuable." (In fact, why not try saying that 10 times, as if you mean it, the next time you pass a mirror. See what happens.)



We confuse our categories when we equate our value with our attraction. Just as we do when we think Washington is a quarter, perfect people walk on water, or yellow has a shape.

This category confusion runs everywhere today. And yet we do not have to go along with it, despite everyone else going along with it. We can see through these Jedi-Mind tricks, and refuse to let the world squeeze us into its confusing mold (Romans 12:2).

We can bring clarity to the categories; and that will give life to our souls.

Conclusion:

You've now had some lessons in finding categories. This is one tool in HOW to think about the information you get and the beliefs you hold. A simple tool as this will take you a long way in learning, in your discussions, and in growing to be more *appropriately human*.



We'd love to hear some categories you have found in your textbooks, your conversations, and everyday life. **Send** them to us. If we get enough, we'll post them online!

Got questions/comments?

Feel free to **email us.**

or

Join us for Soulation Chat Wednesdays 6-9PM

Bring any question or puzzling life situation



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