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**HUMAN NATURE:
HUMAN BEING AND BEING HUMAN**

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When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy
fingers, the moon and the stars which thou
hast established; what is man that thou art
mindful of him, and the son of man that thou
dost care for him?

--Psalms 8:3-4

In 1974 a writer named Leslie Stevenson published a small book that has been widely read by American undergraduates. Entitled Seven Theories of Human Nature, it discussed what Plato, Christianity, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Jean-Paul Sartre, B. F. Skinner, and Konrad Lorenz had to say about human being. As his book drew to a close, Stevenson concluded: "Although we have treated our seven theories rather as if they were rivals for the prize of truth, they are not necessarily all incompatible with each other. Unless one has an ideological commitment to a particular theory, one will probably see them as emphasizing different aspects of the total truth about man."¹

Compatibility could be found not only in fundamental facts but also in prescriptive claims. None of Stevenson's seven theories denies, for example, the fundamental fact that both female and male genders are part of human being. Implicitly if

6 Rev. 11

not explicitly, moreover, all of them include prescriptive claims about the proper use of human reason. Such compatibilities, however, do not advance easily toward "the total truth about man." On the contrary, that truth's elusiveness is accented whenever compatibilities break down. At least to some degree, such breakdowns happen sooner or later when theories about human nature encounter each other.

To illustrate, notice that all of Stevenson's theories about human nature are derived from men. Far from helping to buttress agreement about human nature, recent feminist criticism shows that understandings of human nature have been skewed by male perspectives. Indeed suspicion is cast on the very concept itself, for many traditional theories about "human nature" may encourage male domination.² Likewise, even if theories about human nature all stress prescriptive claims about the proper use of human reason, they differ considerably about what "proper use" involves and promises.

Nor does the complexity end there. The psychoanalytic approaches of Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung, to cite but two important cases, indicate that much of human being remains hidden to self-awareness. Even if the hidden can be disclosed, the disclosures puzzle as well as explain. Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and others who have explored the sociology of knowledge complicate matters even more. Theories about human nature may not be the detached, neutral, objective reports of universal truth that some authors take them to be. Disagreements

point to ways in which the various theories are all contextualized, rooted in particular times, places, and interests. Marx and Engels did not miss the target when they insisted that "life is not determined by consciousness but consciousness by life."³ Such connection does not eliminate the possibility that a theory's insight can transcend the particularity of its time and place. But that particularity does suggest limitation, partiality, and not, as the courtroom oath would have it, "the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

Differences among Stevenson's seven theories of human nature are enough to keep the world in turmoil. The influence of Marx's views about humankind testifies to that. But circumstances are complicated still further by the fact that views about human being are hardly restricted to seven. One could go on for some time adding chapter after chapter to Stevenson's book, and no two of them would agree completely. What do those differences mean? Do they add up only to quarrelsome confusion or do their number and variety suggest something more?

When William James, the American pragmatist, considered such questions, he was led to think that "the history of philosophy is to a great extent that of a certain clash of human temperament."⁴ James thought philosophy is intimately related to how people "see" the world. Much that they see is shared and apparently the same, and yet human seeing is not identical. Thinkers of all kinds--philosophical, religious, political, economic, scientific--belong to human communities, and they depend on others. Yet, in

the final analysis, they are not inclined to let anyone else do their seeing for them. They state their own views, believing that what needs to be said is different in some significant way from anything else that has been said before. What is characteristic of philosophers--no two of them ever agree on everything--probably exists in every other form of human inquiry, too. The investigators are different persons who see differently. One result is that, at least to some extent, they want their thought to be different as well. Otherwise their writings would make far less sense than they do.

Whenever questions about human being arise, variety and multiplicity will not be far behind. Yet that is not where the story ends. For this variety and multiplicity encourage other things. Notice, first, that they spark further inquiry. Theories emerge from people who make history, and theories have a history, too. On both counts, history reveals that criticism and correction of belief are not only possible but needed because experience keeps unfolding, often in unanticipated ways that catch even the most astute by surprise. More always needs to be said.

Second, variety and multiplicity do more than differentiate and divide. As the work of Alasdair MacIntyre shows, human thought and reflection occur within traditions as well as within individual minds.⁵ Traditions depend on shared assumptions, analyses, and outlooks, but traditions can be well sustained in a world of experience that surprises only if what is shared is also

flexible and capable of adjustment and adaptation. When that capacity itself seems to be breaking down in established theories, divergent paths are found. Forking from ways taken before, the new paths often lead nowhere lasting, but sometimes they clear a way that attracts others and results in a new tradition. Theories about human nature reflect something of this form.

Traditions can communicate with each other, but either they also persist in their own ways--subject to modification as they may be--or they eventually dwindle in significance. Attempts to develop some overarching view that encompasses the already existing diversity seem, moreover, never to accomplish quite what is promised. Such attempts become additions to the plurality. Specifically, every attempt to obtain what Stevenson calls "the whole truth about man" is like trying to reach a horizon that can only be scanned in the distance. Much ground can be covered, much insight obtained, but the horizon keeps receding as one moves toward it. Apparently human being lacks "the whole truth" about itself or anything else.

Being human, which may be contrasted with human being, encompasses every response that a man, woman, or child makes within that condition. More particularly, human being suggests existing in ways that neither claim nor act as if one possessed "the whole truth" that human being lacks. To do otherwise is to live in self-contradiction that will be destructive. So, what is human being? We try to answer that question, and yet we cannot

do so fully. That tension is part of being human, and within it are many histories, traditions, and theories. Human being produces a paradoxical situation: It requires being human in circumstances where human being remains a puzzle. Even if some deny it, human being is less than sure about itself. Being human acknowledges that realization and builds upon it. Being human leaves us to decide what to think and do, collectively as well as individually, in response to both knowledge and ignorance.

A perspective of this kind can, of course, be rejected in favor of one that claims to know human being thoroughly and precisely. Nevertheless it will be hard to make such a view immune to challenges that will expose areas of incompleteness and fallibility. Many theories may make valuable contributions to human understanding, but none of them, individually or collectively, seem likely to tell the whole story of human life. Being human we are left to understand and cope as best we can with human being.

Represented in this essay's epigraph, the vision of Psalm 8 shows one way to do so. It sees the world as God's glorious creation. In contrast to the heavens, the moon and the stars, humankind seems insignificant. Yet human being--crowned, as the Psalm puts it, with "glory and honor"--has the greatest significance of all, for its God-given dominion extends far and wide. The psalmist suggests that God entrusts creation, including human being itself, to those who will be human. Proper understanding of that relationship, however, entails living with

the Psalm's priorities: From beginning to end, human being is being human to the extent that it embodies and extends the thankful praise--"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth!"--that God deserves.

The psalmist's response to the question What is man? does not, however, put that question to rest. Being human has led, for example, to scientific exploration of the heavens and much more. Testimony to the extent of that searching and its implications can be found in A Brief History of Time, physicist Stephen Hawking's best-selling response to fundamental questions such as: "Where did the universe come from? How and why did it begin? Will it come to an end, and if so, how?"⁶ As his book describes not only the vastness of an expansive universe in which our galaxy is only one of millions but also the infinitesimally small and yet immensely powerful forces of quantum mechanics, what human being and being human mean can make one share the psalmist's questioning and then some.

Hawking hopes there is ultimately "only one possible unified theory" to describe the universe. While thinking optimistically that it may be found, he also notes that such a theory would still be "just a set of rules and equations" that do not answer the question "What is it that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe?"⁷ The universe may require a creating God. Yet Hawking also finds that the implications of contemporary science could reasonably make one conclude that the universe is "completely self-contained and not

affected by anything outside itself." In that case, he claims, the universe "would neither be created nor destroyed. It would just BE."⁸

Discovering such things, human being might find itself at the center of the universe in terms of awareness, but that same awareness would truly make one wonder what being human means and why human being exists at all. Related to and yet very different from Psalm 8, lines of Hawking's thought tending that way go as follows:

The present evidence therefore suggests that the universe will probably expand forever, but all we can really be sure of is that even if the universe is going to recollapse, it won't do so for at least another ten thousand million years, since it has already been expanding for at least that long. This should not unduly worry us: by that time, unless we have colonized beyond the Solar System, mankind will long since have died out, extinguished along with our sun!⁹

If the psalmist's wonder about human being is compounded by Stephen Hawking's cosmology, the thought generated by the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification movement appears undaunted in claiming to know that human being involves an "Original Human Nature," which "is the true nature held naturally by man, and it

does not change in any age or circumstance."¹⁰ What does this claim imply about human being and being human?

Basing its content on revelation and teaching communicated through Rev. Moon, Unification Thought states that "until now no other philosophy has taken up this issue [Original Human Nature] as an independent field."¹¹ Previous philosophies, maintains this account, have failed to distinguish sufficiently "the qualitative difference between human beings and other natural things." Nor has previous thought paid adequate attention to "the gap between our present selves or society and the Original Nature," a shortcoming that hinders understanding of the requirements to bring humankind "back to the state from which we fell."¹²

According to Unification Thought, prior to its self-deformation, human being has a God-created "true character." This character should not be confused by splitting essence from existence, a distinction typical of much reflection about human nature. Ordinarily that distinction entails that the true nature of a particular or kind of being, what distinguishes it from other things, may also be distinguished from its actual existence. For Unification thought, humanity's fallen condition involves such a bifurcation. But that division is not found in Original Human Nature, and humankind's chief need is to be restored to that original perfection.

Unification thought's perspective is that God originally created a unified human being whose essence and existence are

one. For this reason, much of Unification's view about human nature develops in opposition to the philosophical tradition of existentialism. Unification thought acknowledges that existentialism is diverse and at times insightful. Nevertheless, according to Unification thought, existentialism's varied and even conflicting emphases on individual subjectivity (Kierkegaard), the "death of God" (Nietzsche), "limit situations" that bring people close to God and yet frustrate communion with God (Jaspers), "being-in-the-world" (Heidegger), and the precedence of existence over essence (Sartre) add up to a perspective in which human being can never be fully human. The reason is that in existential philosophies, whether interpreted individually and collectively, clarity about restoration to humankind's Original Nature remains obscure.

Unification's vision of what needs to be restored emphasizes proper give-and-take relationships among "the polarities of Sung Sang and Hyung Sang which are similar to God's polarities."¹³ Sung Sang is the spiritual dimension in human being, Hyung Sang the physical one. In Original Human Nature these dimensions are perfectly intertwined in a functional wholeness where all the relationships are properly ordered. The love of God is the fundamentally governing divine principle, both in the sense that it is God's love that accounts for creation and salvation and in the sense that being human fully depends on loving one another as well as God.¹⁴

Unification Thought says that "Heart is the starting point of love."¹⁵ Moving in God's creation, love brings forth life and its emphases--in human form--on freedom, reason, and creativity. Love entails give-and-take, a relationship that Unification Thought often describes by a distinction between "positive" and "negative." For example, God has masculine (positive) and feminine (negative) natures, but in their unity these natures can exist only by coexisting. One implication for human being is that "no person can be a complete whole (one) as long as he or she is single because both man and woman are only parts of wholes. They are made such that they become complete only by the union which occurs through their mutual give-and-take."¹⁶

Relationships between man and woman are especially crucial in the Unification movement, for the proper union between them is "the completion of the creation of the cosmos."¹⁷ Indeed, God's loving purpose in creation is that it should achieve its completion through the perfection of human being "as the lord of the whole cosmos."¹⁸ In this way, human being is "different in value from nature."¹⁹ By being human as God intends, man and woman are indispensable for the family relationships that make the entire cosmos essentially an expression of God's parental love. Fulfillment of that indispensable role, however, depends on the maintenance of a proper relationship between God and human being, a key point in Unification thought that hearkens back to Psalm 8.

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As noted earlier, Unification's Original Human Nature is "the true nature held naturally by man, and it does not change in any age or circumstance."²⁰ Its unchanging quality, however, does not preclude change, because the Original Nature is dynamic and active, existing as it does in the freedom of give-and-take that right relationships involve. So much depends on giving-and-taking properly. Misused freedom can unbalance the balance, and it has. Fallen, human being is less than being human. One result is that "man suffers because he does not know what his Original Nature is seeking for, nor for whom he should live."²¹ The Unification movement offers its view of Original Human Nature as a step on the way toward the restoring fallen humanity to its original, perfect nature. More will be said shortly about Unification's teaching on restoration, a key element in Unification thought. For now suffice it to say in summary that the needed restoration would make whole again not only human being but the entire creation and its Creator as well.

As stated early on, Unification Thought makes strong claims about Original Human Nature. It seems to know that there is one, that it is unchanging and unchangeable, and that the Unification movement's view on these matters is correct. What should be said in response? To start, Unification's theory of Original Human Nature is less original in its basic form than some of its claims presume. Its emphasis on creation-fall-restoration is in many ways quite traditional, and the same is true of its insistence

that human being can be fully human only through a proper relationship with God.

Much more original is the analysis that stresses the give-and-take among polarities that Unification finds integral to its holistic view of reality. Its interpretation of these elements stresses that human life ought to be dynamic, loving, well-ordered, and even hierarchically structured, too. If many earlier theories have said similar things, although not in exactly the same way, Unification thought's persistence on family relationships in thinking about human being gives the outlook a distinctive and needed appeal in times when social dislocation, including disintegrating family life, characterizes human life so much. Despite charges that the Unification movement poses a threat to families, its emphasis on familial relationships has kept attracting adherents as well as others who do not choose to belong to the movement but find many of its aims laudable.

While Unification Thought may be largely convinced of its own correctness, among the Unification movement's strongest aims is a willingness, even an eagerness, to promote philosophical criticism and dialogue about itself. Thereby the movement's teaching can be clarified and the chances improved for doing its intended work of bringing closer together a world in which philosophies and religions continue to collide and clash. With those latter aims in mind, step away now from the details of Unification's views about human being and being human. Look instead at the larger picture from a perspective beyond the

CB Ruth

debate with existentialism that provides the context for discussion of human nature in Unification Thought.

The classical American pragmatists--Charles S. Peirce, William James, and John Dewey--never had the chance to appraise Unification Thought. What they would have made of such an opportunity is neither simple nor clear. Making some inferences along those lines and following out their implications are worthwhile things to do, however, for Unification thought is at times remarkably similar to American pragmatism and in other instances far removed from it. To discern reasons for the latter quality is of especially fundamental importance because of their significance for the prospect of unification itself.

Classical American pragmatism accented the pluralism and variety of existence. Doing so, that tradition also stressed the need for unification. But the consequences of the latter effort, unintended as well as intended, suggest that every form of "unification thought" will achieve less than it hopes to accomplish. If that suggestion points in the right direction, then Unification thought is destined to be what James called an "over-belief." James thought that over-beliefs, subjective convictions about the ultimate nature of reality, were often the most intriguing and valuable features of human lives. But here and now, he also recognized, none of them stands publicly confirmed as demonstrated truth.

Anyone who reads Unification Thought will be struck by the importance attached to criticizing the giants of Western

philosophy. As in the case of existentialism noted above, these thinkers and their traditions are credited with important insights. Unfortunately, the critiques go on to say, none is adequate. There is nothing new about such ploys; every philosopher knows them all too well. For centuries, philosophy thrived on the conviction that earlier theories were insufficient but that some new one would overcome that problem. Pragmatism emerged out of such assumptions. Unification Thought has, too. By this time, however, there is good reason to be skeptical about any philosophical or religious enterprise that claims to have all the pieces of reality's puzzle before us, let alone to have worked the puzzle so that its form and content are crystal clear.

The critiques of Western philosophy in Unification Thought try to show how Unification's outlook stands superior over what has gone before. If the reach exceeds the grasp in those cases, the critiques are still provocative. Even in the instance of pragmatism that claim is sound and for two ironic reasons. First, in comparison to its treatment of other major philosophical movements, Unification Thought pays relatively little attention is to pragmatism. Second, the attention it does pay tends to beg many of the most important questions.

Unification Thought mentions pragmatism, I believe, but twice and only briefly both times. The first context involves current concepts of ontology. Beyond asserting that pragmatism holds "the standard or truth should be whether or not a thing is useful in daily life," it is noted that "pragmatism also rejects

the problems of essential nature because they are transcendental."²² Several chapters later, a slightly longer discussion of pragmatism appears, this time in the context of ethics. There it is alleged that pragmatism's understanding of the relations between means and ends is inadequate. The remedy, it is argued, can be found in Unification's outlook, which solves the problems of essential nature by utilizing the requisite transcendental insights it possesses. In sum, pragmatism receives a facile dismissal. However well-intentioned, it is portrayed as little more than another misguided attempt to provide significance and direction for human life in a world riddled by the dissonance of clashing scientific, religious, and political beliefs.

Owing to the importance that Rev. Moon has placed on the United States, it may be surprising that pragmatism, long acknowledged as a characteristically American outlook, is not discussed more perceptively or at least at greater length. But the point is not to protest that Unification thought slights this American philosophy. Brief commentary on pragmatism is not out of place, for that philosophical position is far from dominant in the world today. Nevertheless, it remains noteworthy that many of the insights advanced by Peirce, James, and Dewey permeate the thinking of twentieth-century persons very deeply. Much more than they may realize, contemporary men and women share pragmatism's tenets. Moreover, insofar as pragmatism's insights are based on a well-founded skepticism concerning what we can

know about the transcendental, the issues posed by pragmatism represent a much more severe challenge to Unification thought than Unification Thought admits. To illustrate, consider three central Unification themes--each is broadly connected to issues about human nature--in relation to American pragmatism as represented respectively by Peirce, then by James, and finally by John Dewey.

Charles Peirce sought methods of inquiry that would lead people, especially scientists, to agree. Acting on that motive in his special ways, a quest that made him a unificationist of sorts, he understood that the origins of human beliefs constitute a substantial problem. To come straight to the point, Peirce doubted that revelation could provide an adequate base for unification. Many of his reasons for that doubt exist in an essay called "The Fixation of Belief." If his analysis there is sound, the place of Unification thought in the scheme of things may need rethinking. For the unifying hope of that religious philosophy does rest on an underpinning of revelation, a factor that leaves Unification thought on a footing no worse than that of other religious faiths but no better either.

Consider Peirce's outlook in more detail. To believe something, he contended, is to be prepared to act in some specifiable way and to expect some specifiable set of experiences to result. Beliefs are reinforced as long as one gets expected results. When there is a breakdown, we have to stop and reconsider. Inquiry begins when beliefs break down. The opposite

of belief, then, is not disbelief, which actually is a form of belief, but doubt. Doubt is the state of uneasiness in which we find ourselves when beliefs have broken down. In such a state, we do not possess either a firm course of action or a clear set of expectations. We have to find our way anew. Doubt, therefore, leads to inquiry, whose object is the settlement of opinion.

Peirce next assayed four main ways of settling opinion. At least insofar as they have operated by themselves, three of them--Peirce referred to these as the methods of tenacity, authority, and a priori appeals to reason--tend to govern opinion badly because they start with the supposition that the truth is already known instead of being something to be discovered. Such a supposition is a poor governor of opinion, in Peirce's view, because it does not provide an adequate base for coping with a frequent reality and a permanent possibility in experience, namely, our being in error.

Now Peirce was himself a religious man. He also vied against philosophies that claimed either the necessity or the possibility of starting inquiry from some base that is assumption-free. Inquiry must start somewhere, and we do start it with some convictions. Revelation, he could agree, might even be the point of departure. But, he suggested, in addition to revelation's relatively private character, which makes it a problematic base for public agreement right from the beginning, revelation always entails interpretation. Religious or otherwise, interpretation remains fallible. According to Peirce, we are

warranted in holding any given interpretation so long as critically sifted, empirically and publicly grounded evidence bears it out. But even fulfillment of these conditions, which Peirce saw to be seriously lacking in human experience where religious claims are concerned, would not guarantee us knowledge and truth.

Religions have tremendous unifying potential--up to a point. The qualification has to be added largely because religions tend to depend on revelation that comes primarily to a select individual or group. Others may find--pragmatically, we might say--that the beliefs proclaimed by those who are specially illuminated do turn out to work. But the problem is that such results always seem too partial. Over the course of history, probably only a minority of the world's people have ever been persuaded by any one religious tradition, a fact that is entrenched because original revelations are shared by even fewer. Peirce saw these things and put the point succinctly: all attempts to unify belief through revelation are hindered by their being too subjective. Religion in general and Unification thought in particular extol the ideal that humankind is a family. But the irony is that the revealed basis of religious faith also keeps undermining that ideal because revelation is so far removed from public awareness.

If revelation, however inadvertently, blocks the very ideals it proclaims, consider next some serious problems that attend the central Unification theme of restoration, which signifies the

belief that a process is under way to bring us "back to the state from which we fell."²³ Of our three American pragmatists, none would have greater sympathy for this aspect of Unification thought than William James. Yet even James would be puzzled by the restorationist motif. His puzzlement would be aroused by the tendency of Unification thought to bank on laws of history and therefore to anticipate a future more utopian than James thought likely.

Instead of restorationism, James advocated meliorism, the view that it is neither necessary nor impossible that things may get better in the future and that human actions are vital in determining the outcomes. James's meliorism both reflects and extends some of his most basic convictions. For example, James held that process, change, and open-endedness characterize all existence. His Principles of Psychology suggests that human experience is like a stream. It is forever new and changing, never duplicating itself exactly. Moreover, the world that we feel and know is not something fixed and finished. It is the moving, growing result of give-and-take between persons and their environments. Both are shaped and shaping. Such views share a good deal with--and even anticipate--Unification thought. But James extended his ideas to truth itself in ways that would be less than congenial to Unification's advocates of restoration. In place of the traditional doctrine, which Unification thought repeats by calling truth "eternal, unchanging and absolute, regardless of time or circumstances,"²⁴ James took truth to be a

property that our claims come to have as they are tested and verified in experience. To say that a claim is true is to say that it gives us specifiable expectations that critical testing fulfills. Claims, then, become true as successful testing occurs.

The testing advocated by James suggests that the truth of restorationist propositions hangs, at best, in suspense. Yet Unification thought propounds restoration more as a truth than as a hope. Hence, the aim of unification is again likely to be inadvertently subverted by the very agents promoting it, since human experience overall is unlikely to corroborate what Unification thought holds concerning restoration. James would understand that dilemma by underscoring the significance of human freedom. If we are free, and James thought we were, then we inhabit a world of freedom that entails ambiguity and risk. No fortunes, he often said, can be told in advance. True, we may have faith about what lies ahead. Indeed, we should because belief may help to decide what does occur. But faith is not knowledge, and, at least in their details, the faiths that men and women develop probably display more variety than agreement. Faith, then, is hardly better than revelation as a basis for unification in a world of freedom, especially where conviction about restoration is offered as a rallying point.

James's meliorism, it must be underscored, took hope to be at the heart of human life and identified religious faith as

hope's most potent expression. No star-eyed optimist, James sensed profoundly how negativity and evil haunt existence. He knew that life smells of death. Still, pessimism was not his choice. In world of freedom, he contended, hope can spring eternal. Hope is a quality peculiar to human life. It entails the feeling that the past and present are not good enough, and that the future can be better. As James understood it, hope is best embodied in what he dubbed the "strenuous mood." That lifestyle involves a deep desire to find lasting meaning, a passionate concern to relieve suffering and to humanize existence, and a sense of urgency about developing and using human talents to the utmost.

William James did not give high marks to every form of religious life, but The Varieties of Religious Experience shows his conviction that religious faith is instrumental in releasing human energy toward the moral ends of the strenuous mood. Probably he would have applauded the Unification movement for its considerable accomplishments in that regard. Yet his emphases on freedom, open-endedness, change, and the real struggle with evil that goes on in life would leave him cautious about restoration even as a hope, let alone as a truth. He would not, however, be likely to urge that Unificationists should change their views on that matter. For variety, he affirmed, lends vitality to religious life overall.

Loving variety, James may have been too romantic about it. He hoped that, as people pursue their own ways, they would also

realize that they are fundamentally on the same path or at least on the same quest. In this sense, James as well as Peirce might qualify as a unificationist. The dilemma is that when James's own pragmatic tests are applied to this notion of unity-amidst-diversity, the degree of confirmation in its favor is anything but clear. Philosophical and religious variety appears to yield just that--variety--more than anything else. Unification Thought seems to recognize that fact by virtue of its attempt to document the inadequacies of so many human theories, ancient and contemporary. But the problem for Unification thought is that variety's relativizing impact, once felt, is a very difficult thing to control, let alone to quell. So a critical question that looms large for Unification thought is this: Pragmatically, what is the notion of "unification" to mean as far as human belief is concerned? The significance of that question, including some inconvenient facts hidden in it, can be explicated by turning to the contributions of a third American pragmatist, John Dewey.

If Charles Peirce and William James were both unificationists insofar as they hoped people might inquire their way to shared understanding, John Dewey deserves a place within unification thought even more. There is, however, considerable irony in tagging Dewey that way. Religiously speaking, his most obvious statement on unification is the small volume entitled A Common Faith, which emerged from the Terry Lectures that Dewey delivered at Yale University in 1934. There Dewey argued that the

concept of "religion" is too diffuse in its meaning to be helpful. Nor was he interested in furthering the cause of any of the particular "religions" found in the world. He had nevertheless an intense concern for the "religious" aspect of experience, which he wanted to rescue from the confines of rationalistic metaphysics and revealed theology.

Human life, Dewey explained, is a process within a moving natural order. Persons are influenced by nature, but they also initiate change. In Dewey's view, our activities have a religious quality when they are motivated by and in the direction of "inclusive ideal ends, which imagination presents to us and to which the human will responds as worthy of controlling our desires and choices."²⁵ The pursuit and extension of justice, freedom, and knowledge are primary examples of these ideal ends. They are especially effective in drawing out human energy, Dewey contended, since striving for their achievement makes life worth living. But religious life must not be restricted to them alone. "Any activity," said Dewey, "pursued in behalf of an ideal end against obstacles and in spite of threats of personal loss because of conviction of its general and enduring value is religious in quality."²⁶

"Imagination" is Dewey's term to designate the creative function of human intelligence as it appears in the communal and individual dimensions of life. His surrogate for revelation, imagination--creative thinking--identifies ideal ends. They present themselves as worthy of fulfillment and as capable of

giving meaning that lasts. Even more importantly, Dewey stressed that these unifying ideals are not essentially related to forces, powers, or gods that are in any sense supernatural. Their source--imagination--is an organ of nature; their actualization is a task and a process within nature. Experience of and dedication to them, however, are rightfully called "religious" because these ideals present themselves as being of ultimate worth.

Far less enthusiastic about religious variety than was William James, Dewey urged people to set aside their spiritual differences by accepting his "common faith." To encourage that process, he retained the concept of God as a collective term that could grasp all the inclusive ideal ends of life and the natural powers that work to implement them. Significantly, however, Dewey deployed his God-concept in a severe critical attack on theistically oriented religion, which he judged to go beyond sound empirical verification and to rely on a faith that, if not sectarian, is still too subjective. Instead, argued Dewey, his religious option centers on shared, unifying values indispensable for the establishment of a genuinely humane community. Freed from the sectarian concerns and intellectual hang-ups that traditional religions and theologies produce, Dewey's "common faith" claimed to give all people an empirically grounded estimate of their place in nature and an uplifting religious vision of their possibilities for growth and advancement.

John Dewey's appeal has not prevailed. People were less ready to abandon God than he supposed, and thus many were unpersuaded. But before we bury John Dewey instead of God, two points should be noted. First, Dewey's was an effort to provide a unifying perspective; second, versions of his essentially non-theistic naturalism have certainly not disappeared, nor are they likely to do so. Thus, if Dewey's attempt at religious unification failed partly because he left God out too much, the irony may be that the ideal of unification in Unification thought may go unrealized because this religious philosophy puts God in too much. At least some tough questions remain in this neighborhood, questions which make it important to specify pragmatically just what the unification in Unification thought does and does not mean, particularly in relation to human being and being human.

One way to get at those questions is for Unification thought to think more deeply than Unification Thought has done about what to do with Charles Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. Parts of their theories have been criticized from that perspective, but their views still point out areas where Unification thought is vulnerable. Peirce would contend, in sum, that revelation is at best a problematic base on which to pin unifying hopes. James would add that, if restoration is one of those hopes, there is precious little in experience to ground as true the claims that Unification thought is committed to making about it. Finally, John Dewey might well applaud the effort to create a unifying

human outlook, including vision about human nature, but he would also say that insofar as the effort depends upon affirming God, even the God of Unification, it is more likely to founder than to succeed.

Psalm 8, Leslie Stevenson and his seven theories about human nature, Stephen Hawking, American pragmatists, the Unification thought of Rev. Sun Myung Moon--all of these views and many more have parts to play in the history of human times, however brief that history may turn out to be. How far "the total truth about man" can be obtained, and how much unification there will be about it, remains to be seen. Responses to the question What are human being and being human? will continue to have much to do with that determination.

Notes

- 1. Leslie Stevenson, Seven Theories of Human Nature (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 121.
- 2. See, for example, Mary Field Belenky et al., Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind (New York: Basic Books, 1986) and Genevieve Lloyd, The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
- 3. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The German Ideology, ed. C. J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 1988), 47.

4. William James, Pragmatism, ed. Bruce Kuklick (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company 1981), 8. Pragmatism was originally published in 1907.

5. See, for example, Alasdair MacIntyre, Whose Justice? Which Rationality? (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

6. Stephen Hawking, A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), vi.

7. Ibid., 174.

8. Ibid., 136.

9. Ibid., 46.

10. Sang Hun Lee, Unification Thought (New York: Unification Thought Institute, 1973), 163. In this essay, I use the terms "Unification movement" and "Unification thought" to refer to the specific religious philosophy inspired by Rev. Moon. In addition to mentioning the book entitled Unification Thought, whose title will always be underscored in the text, on some occasions I also use variants of "unification" written in lower case. These usages point to unification as an ideal. Some of these usages direct attention to that ideal as an ingredient in Unification thought in particular. Others suggest a less specific meaning, which will

enable me later in the essay to speak of three American pragmatists--Charles S. Peirce, William James, and John Dewey--as sharing with Unification thought broadly similar concerns about human unification.

11. Ibid., 127.

12. Ibid., 128.

13. Ibid., 153.

14. Central to the Unification movement is a book entitled Divine Principle. It is a special interpretation of the Bible with additional revelations that Rev. Moon claims he received.

15. Unification Thought, 161.

16. Ibid., 155-56.

17. Ibid., 156.

18. Ibid., 156.

19. Ibid., 128.

20. Ibid., 163.

21. Ibid., 158.

22. Ibid., 5-6.

23. Ibid., 128.

24. Ibid., 210.

25. John Dewey, A Common Faith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 33.

26. Ibid., 27.