



**DISCUSSANT RESPONSE**

by

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to **John Kelsay's**

**ETHICS IN UNIFICATION THOUGHT**

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A Response to Dr. John Kelsay's "Ethics in Unification Thought"  
Response presented by Dr. Thomas Walsh

Paper Summary:

Dr. Kelsay has written a thoughtful and constructive paper on Unification Thought's Ethics (UTE). Applying "comparative casuistry," Kelsay concludes that UTE is a teleological perspective with reciprocal love as its "regulative principle." The concept of love in UTE is characterized as having three aspects: 1) it serves as an Ideal or the goal of life and the perfection of character or virtue; 2) it serves as a principle or action guide; 3) it is a force by which agents are moved. Love is thus described as having a multidimensional function in UTE ethics, functioning as telos, norm and motive.

After offering a general analysis and classification of UTE, Kelsay asks some questions. The first has to do with the relationship between the general concept of love and particular actions. Is UTE situational or absolutist when it comes to actions; does the rightness or wrongness of a particular act such as murder or theft or lying depend in some sense on the situation or context, or are such actions always and everywhere intrinsically in violation of the norm, ideal and motive of love?

Kelsay recognizes that UTE does not affirm the principle of utility as the criterion of goodness, and suggests that UTE offers a relational or positional theory of ethics, evidenced in UTE's emphasis on various norms of proper attitude and action

within the family; norms that depend on one's relational position within in the family (wife, son, husband, grandparent, etc.). Kelsay says, "There are rules, then, that specify the meaning of love in given contexts. But one needs more information to determine the content of such rules, and how they function. In particular, one needs to know how Unification Thought approaches such practical problems as truth-telling..., friendship..., and the use of force...." (p. 7-10)

Kelsay asks that UTE offer some more substantive content or case studies (casuistry) which illustrate the application of the general principles and guidelines represented in UTE. At the same time, Kelsay also recognizes that UTE may not intend to focus on such conventional problems in ethics, preferring instead to remain fixed on the issue of character formation and training in the quality of moral discernment (also known as phronesis or good judgement).

In the second major inquiry of the paper, Kelsay considers how UTE approaches the question of the Foundations of Ethics. Contemporary philosophy is very much concerned with this question, evidenced for example in the writings of Richard Rorty and John Rawls. Both Rorty and Rawls are cited for defending democracy---pragmatism, tolerance and the free exchange of views---without appeal to any philosophical foundation. Kelsay also considers Max Weber's thesis about the de facto primacy of instrumental rationality in the modern industrial world. This rationality is described as consequentialist, procedural,

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polytheistic, impersonal and this-worldly. The positions of Weber and Rorty both indicate that ethics cannot be secured by philosophical foundations. Rorty takes this conclusion to be unavoidable and happy; Weber takes this conclusion as unavoidable and demoralizing.

Foundationalists have sought to provide alternatives to such anti-foundationalist and seemingly relativist perspectives. According to Kelsay, one alternative is to introduce some version of a natural law theory; another is to focus on the idea of human rights, grounded in intuitionism (H.A. Pritchard). Kelsay says, "the ethical theory envisioned by Unificationism does not engage either of these options. Nor does it, so far as I can tell, address the depths of either Rorty's or Weber's analysis of the situation of ethics in the modern world. What such writers are saying is that there is no theoretical---that is to say, rational---foundation for ethics which can serve to unite disparate groups and their interests. There can, of course, be pragmatic grounds for cooperation between such groups. There can also be relationships of power by which one group can compel others to cooperate with its will. The point is, these 'cooperative' endeavors rest on factors other than ethical theory." (p. 19)

Kelsay ends with a suggestion that UTE more forthrightly assert its charismatic and non-philosophical foundations, saying UTE "might make its best contributions to ethics by being less philosophical (that is, concerned with ethical theory per se) and

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more religious (that is, concerned with charisma, and how people come to recognize the "providential figure" of their age.)" (p. 20)

To sum up, Kelsay has asked UTE to get more specific in terms of the application of its general principles. He further asks that UTE relieve itself of the foundationalist burden it seems to want to carry, and identify itself more clearly as a particular kind of religious ethic, grounded in the charismatic leadership and inspiration of its religious leader.

This is a very useful discussion of UTE, and seeks to push UTE quite gently in a direction of fuller articulation of its insights, particularly in ways responsive to the interests and traditions of western philosophers. Kelsay wants more discussion of specific cases of implementation, and he wants the question of foundations more clearly addressed. I will make some attempt to respond to Kelsay's legitimate interests.

Response:

First, on cases and the situationalist or relativist question. In regard to these issues I must state that I speak speculatively and extrapolatively, for UTE does not specifically address itself to either cases or the relativism debate.

Kelsay is correct in viewing UTE as offering a relational and contextual view of ethics. Relationalism, however, need not imply relativism in the same way that say, Karl Barth's or H. Richard Niebuhr's relationalism might. Relationalism in UTE is a

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contextualism or situationalism wherein objective norms do apply. I do not treat my children in the same way that I treat my parents; but in both instances objective norms apply: filial piety toward parents and parental love toward children.

According to UTE there are absolute and invariable norms the violation of which can only subvert or harm relationality. The most striking example in UTE would be the violation of family order through the practice of adultery. The concept of absolute values is emphasized in **Explaining Unification Thought's** chapter on Axiology. Absolute value is understood as a telos which human beings are to embody by fulfilling God's Purpose of Creation. Jesus is mentioned as one who realized absolute value (p. 210). UT advocates a new view of value that will stimulate and unify traditional views of value. UT holds that the theological, philosophical and historical foundations for this new view of value are rooted in **Divine Principle**, especially the chapter on the Principle of Creation and the chapters on Restoration history, and in UT, especially the chapter on Ontology (EUT, p. 213-214) In effect, UTE's relationalism cannot fully be understood out of the context of **Divine Principle**, and all the chapters of **Unification Thought**.

On lying: Lying is a violation of relationality. However, the violation of the norm of honesty, while always serious, may be acceptable. In this sense, UTE relationalism is contextualist, and only relativist in a very restricted sense of the term. For example, if a Japanese soldier in 1937 in Korea

(then forcibly occupied by the Japanese army) were at your door asking if you were hiding any non-cooperative Koreans, lying might not only be morally permissible, but obligatory. In general, lying, even white-lying, to avoid discomfort or inconvenience or to advance one's self-interest, is always a violation of trust and a betrayal of the familial norm that is to be applied universally. By lying, I put the importance of the self before the importance of the family, society or world. Within community---family, society, nation, world---lying is morally wrong. Only when community has been radically violated by external forces fundamentally aggressive and hostile to your community would lying be morally permissible. The mere existence of political, economic, or cultural rivals does not provide a legitimation of lying. Lying to serve self-interest would always be wrong. Lying to protect innocent others from undeserved harm may be appropriate. That is, in a case where the appropriate norms of trust and justice have been grossly violated, the context may permit lying. This may be a slippery slope, but need not imply affirmation of an "ends always justifies the means" principle when it comes to truth telling. Still, there is room for contextualism in the case of lying; circumstances must be taken into account; here UTE departs from Kant's absolutism. Kant's claim about the universal normativity of honesty is not denied; however, human beings are understood as living in a historical world (not simply a noumenal world) where contexts are relevant to moral decision-making; also, moral judgement must

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take ends and consequences into account, even though these ends should not be evaluated according to some vulgar utilitarian standard.

As a final word on the question of lying, I would suggest that lying might be understood as a defeasible wrong, in the same way that a right, such as freedom of speech can be defeasible. That is, I cannot shout fire in a crowded theatre. Likewise the wrongness of lying may be either mitigated or eliminated due to circumstances, e.g., a knife at my throat. The bottom line, however, and the ruling principle is simply that lying violates the quality of love.

On friendship, I would say that UTE affirms the primacy of family over friendship. Family is viewed as the primary location of character formation, including all powers and dispositions of relationality. Still friendship is valued as a good to be pursued and cultivated, but just as Aristotle viewed friendship as best among the virtuous, UTE would view friendship best among those whose virtues had been shaped and formed in a loving and principled family.

Human beings universally are to be viewed as members of the same world family: all children of God. This is not to say that particular friendships violate the principle of a world family. Friendship is inevitable and natural between persons who come into frequent and close contact through their common work, school, hobbies or interests. The particularity of friendship, like the particularity of marriage, need not distract one from

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having a universal or world vision. Like marriage in UTE, friendship is to be measured not simply by the horizontal dimension of reciprocal love, but by the purpose upon which the give and take is based. A loving friendship between say two men who enjoy one another's company would not be a good if the purpose and general practice of their friendship was to rob homes or to roam bars in search of women for purposes of fornication. One famous Englishman whose famous name I cannot remember said in effect that he would rather betray his country than betray a friend. UTE would not affirm friendship that was in defiance of larger moral purposes.


Good friendship, again like marriage, should serve a purpose higher than mutual (horizontal) enjoyment alone; friends should collaborate in service to the society, nation and world. Thus friendship that was self-indulgent and merely particularistic would be undesirable. Like the reciprocity in the family, the mutuality of friendship should be directed toward a universal neighbor love. Friendship and neighbor love are not mutually exclusive. Likewise the family in UTE is to avoid particularism and selfishness, and is to serve higher institutions of more general and universal concern, e.g., the church and the nation.

On the use of force, as in the case of lying, I believe the UTE view is contextual. UTE is not pacifist. The use of force should be a last resort, after nonforceful means have been tried unsuccessfully. Forceful aggression should be resisted with force. Aggression threatens the possibility of a particular



community to practice the good life, and thus violates a value more sacred than life itself, namely the value of a life worth living. Protection of a way of life worth living does not permit aggression as a way to preempt predicted aggression from a hostile force. Protection of a way of life must remain defensive up to the point of actual aggression. Thus, UTE is compatible with traditional just war thought, and departs from modern law of war, as those differences were described by Kelsay. In addition, I believe UTE does affirm the right of a nation to rise in defense of the territory of an ally that has been attacked by an aggressor.

Clearly, UTE is mapping a general vision and the broad parameters of its ethical vision. Kelsay has rightly noticed that UTE does not concern itself with case studies or problem solving. However, as Kelsay rightly suggests, UTE is concerned primarily with "providing a view of the world which sets human actions in their true context." (p. 11) I think this is largely correct. Problem-centered approaches to ethics are conventional, and in a world desparate for moral guidance, such approaches are necessary. Various moral traditions---Kantian, Aristotelian, Roman Catholic, etc.---seek to provide moral guidance on these issues. UTE restricts itself, however, to the articulation of a general vision, a vision that revolves around the moral concept of an ideal family, rooted in a metaphysical vision of God and all reality. I will say more about this in my concluding remarks.



On the question of the foundations of UTE, we have to look at the early chapters of Unification Thought where there is discussed the Theory of the Original Image, Ontology, and the Theory of the Original Human Nature. One also needs to be well acquainted with **Divine Principle**. The foundations of the ethics are grounded in what I would call UT metaphysics, its characterization of God and the fundamental nature of reality. This metaphysical vision is itself grounded in Rev. Moon's vision or revelation about God's nature and God's purpose in creating man, woman and all things. For example, the four position foundation or quadruple base is a premise, or hypothesis, just as God in UT is put forth as a kind of hypothesis. The entire system of UT unfolds on the basis of these hypotheses; in fact no elaborate justification for the founding axioms and premises are attempted. One is invited, rather, to consider the plausibility of the premises, and to observe the unfolding of the entire system and the degree of internal coherence and the degree of insight. Of course, one can envision alternative systems grounded in alternative premises; this is not denied. UT does not begin with a theory of epistemology or a full theory of justification of the claims it makes. In this sense, UT does not attempt ordinary Cartesian, Kantian or logical positivist foundationalism. Its philosophical form is there to render a revelation, charismatic vision, in a way that addresses itself to various philosophical categories of inquiry.

Rev. Moon, certainly a charismatic leader, is not an anti-

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intellectual leader, just as he is not an anti-materialist leader. Seeking to formulate his charismatic vision in philosophical form, may be somewhat incongruous, but no less incongruous that seeking to institutionalize that vision in families, businesses and political practices. For UT, then, philosophy can be and should be religious, because it should be concerned with ultimate truth and ultimate reality; this is also true of science, namely that it should not ignore theological questions. UTE, then, would not accept the dichotomy between religion or charisma and philosophy that Kelsay implies exists. The concern with foundations among philosophers like Rorty, or many of Nietzsche's disciples today, is evidence of a crisis in philosophy. Rorty himself decided to leave the field of philosophy, and move into literary studies. The anti-foundationalist thrust of contemporary philosophy does open the way for the relegitimation of religious philosophy, e.g., Christian philosophy, Thomist philosophy (e.g., Alasdair MacIntyre). Contemporary philosophy of science, like much contemporary moral philosophy, indicates that all human knowledge rests on premises, hypotheses, theories that cannot themselves be proven. Much knowledge is indeed proven pragmatically, by the fruits. For example, Marxism was only falsified, finally, by examination of its fruits. Prior to the willingness to examine the evidence, it remained very difficult to disprove Marxism. This is due in part to the power which irrationality has in human affairs, epistemological ones included. To sum up, UTE is not

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foundationalist in the sense that it attempts to offer proofs for every axiom or postulate it builds from. Where such axioms or postulates or insights come from or how they come to anyone is a somewhat mysterious process, sometimes called imagination, sometimes called revelation, and sometimes called creativity.

On the questions which Kelsay raises concerning liberal democracy, pragmatism and instrumental rationality, I would say that UTE has some incompatibility with each. By this I mean to say, that UTE does not subscribe to moral relativism, which is at least a tendency, if not a requisite of the Weberian and Rortian worldviews. That is, UTE does not employ a pragmatic trial-and-error approach to ethics; neither does it view norms as legitimate which simply emerge out of the fray of competing interests groups in a radically pluralistic society. The UTE approach to norms is, I would suggest, a priori; they are not derived from a town meeting; neither from poll-taking. Weberian polytheism, coupled with his neo-Kantian fact-value gap, are equally incompatible with UTE's a priori claims.

Let me conclude by proposing that our discussion of UTE not overlook the claims made about the family. As currently rendered, UTE's real uniqueness does not lie in the moral guidance it gives in relation to particular moral problems. Neither does it's value lie in its having established a universally acceptable and secure epistemological foundation for ethics. UTE is an ethics rooted fundamentally in a vision of the family. The family is described as rooted in the very nature of

God; God being a harmonious unity of masculinity and femininity that produced children, humanity. In **Explaining Unification Thought** we read, "Ethics can be defined as a method of realizing love in a proper direction." (233) Ethics is concerned with the order of love, and that order is fundamentally related to the family: "Ethics is the standard of conduct for family life." (232)

The family is a natural order for human life, related to cosmic law, almost a karmic law the violation of which can only yield suffering. The family norm in human society is compared with the order of the solar system in the natural world . Moral and social problems are understood as directly related to the degeneration of the family ideal which occurred, according to Divine Principle and UT, at the outset of human history. We read, "The collapse of the order of sexual love necessarily leads to the collapse of order in the family, society, and world." (237) Further on, we read that the Fall of man, understood as the disordering of sexual love, "is the original cause of confusion in the world." (237)

The claims about the centrality of the family in UTE are very strong ones, and deserve serious consideration. For example, while UTE is a love-centered ethics, love is understood as having its strongest base of power and productivity in the family, where the strongest manifestation of horizontal love, between man and woman, and the strongest bond of vertical love, between parents and children, can be developed. The family,

moreover, is the base for both individual formation and for social ethics. We read that, "Harmonizing the relationship between husband and wife represents harmonizing and unifying the whole world. We can say, therefore, that the key to solving world, national, social and family problems lies in solving the relationship between you and your spouse. To see the relationship as something private, only concerning one another, is not what God wants." (102-103)

Individual character is shaped most profoundly and perhaps irreversibly in the intimacy of the family; the link between psychological health and one's family experience is undeniable; no individual has a life story that does not center itself, if it be truly told, around the family and one's successful or frustrated experience of love. UTE also claims that the relationality of the good family is the only way to move outward to the creation of a society characterized by good relationality, in both politics and economics. UTE does not seek to save the world by economic theory or political theory or by casuistry, but by establishing norms for family life, and by the creation of communities dedicated to practicing those norms of family life. The foundations for the legitimacy of UTE will ultimately be established by appeal to the fruits of its practice, in correlative relationship with theory.

I thank Mr. Kelsay for presenting a very clear and constructive analysis of UTE. He has targeted areas that lead to the most stimulating and substantive points for the discussion of

UTE.

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