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DISCUSSANT RESPONSE

by

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to Betty R. Rubenstein's

AESTHETICS: UNIFICATION AESTHETICS

Response to Betty R. Rubenstein's
"Aesthetics: Unification Aesthetics"

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Let me first offer a preliminary comment on the topic of Rubenstein's paper. This topic, "Aesthetics: Unification Aesthetics", can be understood with reference to the central significance of aesthetics for Unificationism and in particular for Unification Thought. That viewpoint is confirmed by a pervasive emphasis on the heart of God as the source for motivation and purpose of created reality. In fact, for Unificationism, the purpose of creation, to realize joy through love by becoming an object of beauty for God, presents itself essentially as an aesthetic proposition. One can argue that Unification Thought implies a "cosmic aestheticism" on account of the quality of its theistic orientation. That quality is then perceived as the response of the created order to the heart of God. The aesthetic view of reality further implies for Unification Thought that the principal goal of human life consists of realizing the highest possible aesthetic experience through attaining the ideal of true love. In my view, our discussion of Rubenstein's essay will benefit if we keep in mind that Unification Thought is based on such an overarching aesthetic conception. Let us now turn to our commentary on the present paper.

In the introduction, Rubenstein presents a brief outline consisting of three major topics, namely, (I) the Unification theory of art (UTA), (II) its relatedness to earlier and contemporary theories, and (III) the practical implications of the UTA. In my view, these basic topics imply corresponding agendas, that is they relate to specific tasks. First, according to Rubenstein, the UTA, following the contemporary trend to present a "science of art", seeks to answer questions which were raised by traditional aesthetics, such as: "What characteristics make objects beautiful?", or "Are there any

commonly accepted aesthetical standards?" The second topic includes a comparative analysis between the UTA and other approaches to aesthetics, thus, offering an opportunity to highlight the innovative aspect of Unification ideas on aesthetics. The final part of Rubenstein's paper can be related to the understanding of art as "the essence of culture", a notion which supports our initial reflections on the aesthetic conception of Unification Thought. Here, we find not only the discussion of practical concerns for Unificationism, such as the development of "true art" as an indispensable step towards creating a new culture, but, in doing so, this section also offers constructive criticisms of the UTA.

(I) In her summary of the UTA, Rubenstein starts with the parallelism between God's creativity and the artist's creative action. As God manifests his invisible nature in creation, likewise a work of art becomes the visible expression of the artist's inner disposition. To explore further that correspondence between the personality of the artist and its external expression in a work of art, Rubenstein explains in more detail the kangi (Chinese characters) for the dual essentialities of Sung Sang (SS) and Hyung Sang (HS) as presented in the "Theory of the Original Image" in Unification Thought. She concludes that SS describes an emotive state of intuitive understanding, while HS is identified as potential active energy that carries the possibility of giving form and structure to matter. Thus, the harmonious give and take action between God's inner Sung Sang (ISS) and inner Hyung Sang (IHS) can be described as the interaction of emotive intuition with the potential of assuming form and structure. Rubenstein points out that the interaction of SS and HS is directed by the heart of God with its purpose "to seek joy through loving an object" (3). This understanding of God who seeks a qualified object for the realization of joy then serves as the foundation for the UTA. In fact, by way of an interpretive analogy, Rubenstein affirms that man now becomes the artist who "relates his creative powers purposefully to an object" (4). This train of thought then

leads to the Unification definition of art as "activity of creating joy through the creation and appreciation of beauty" (4). Rubenstein's discussion of this definition is based on the four position foundation, also called quadruple base, established by God or heart, the artist, the work of art and the appreciating person. Following the law of resemblance, the artist expresses the selfrelatedness of his or her own SS and HS through the work of art with an inner disposition of object consciousness towards God. Before creating the work of art, the artist must be clear about motif and purpose in order to develop a theme and plan for the execution of his or her creative activity. Once the SS/HS of the artist or the observer resembles the SS/HS of the artwork, beauty will be experienced. For Rubenstein it is important to analyse the Unification definition of beauty in terms of the value of an object. This value is determined as the emotional stimulation that the object gives to the subject. Thus, beauty depends, first, on the subject's judgement and, second, on the actual qualities of the object.

In my view, Rubenstein has presented a correct account of the major tenets of the UTA. In fact, I think that her analysis of the SS/HS concept offers further insight for the relationship between artist and the work of art. At this point, I will limit myself to two additional issues essential to the UTA, in an effort to complement Rubenstein's presentation. The first issue relates to the dual purpose of human being and the corresponding dual desires for value. That is to say, each human being lives for the purpose of the whole in which he or she desires to realize value, as well as for the purpose of the individual in which the desire to pursue value is fulfilled. In particular, the artist follows his desire to realise value, thus serving the whole purpose, by creating a work of art, while the individual person fulfills the desire of seeking and receiving value through appreciating art.

The second issue refers to the two stage structure of creative activity. Essentially, it describes an unfolding of

the SS/HS relation in the process of creating a work of art. In his mind the artist first establishes the inner quadruple base forming a plan based on motif (purpose), conception (ISS), and theme (IHS). Then, within the outer quadruple base, the artist realizes his plan (SS) through a medium (HS) by way of give and take action centered on the initial purpose. As mentioned above, the principal value of the resulting work of art is its beauty. In fact, the intensity of beauty depends on the degree of resemblance between the work of art and the plan in the mind of the artist. We will see that Rubenstein's discussion of the Unification concept of beauty functions as a connecting theme for the comparison with other theories of aesthetics and the critique of the UTA.

(II) Rubenstein observes that in Unification Thought beauty represents a value like truth or goodness. Such a value is only generated if the elements of an object are harmonized in accordance with the purpose of creation to bring joy to God. For Rubenstein, the concept of linking art with the life of the spirit goes back to Chinese art and applies to oriental aesthetics in general (6). Here, reference is made to the principle of Ch'i yun sheng tung (spirit harmony and life's motion) and the Confucian concept of Jen (human heartedness), both of which describe states of being and do not claim to represent any absolute standard. In fact, for Rubenstein, it is a unique feature of Unification Thought to offer a relational definition of beauty in connection with God's purpose, emphasising what beauty does rather than seeing it only as a state of being. Rubenstein continues to analyse Plato's and Plotinus' views on beauty and concludes that both thinkers treat beauty as a non-relational abstract idea not involving any purpose. Likewise, the brief examination of several modern aestheticians such as Croce, Langer, Dewey, and Judd confirms the uniqueness of the Unification position, namely, to relate art to the purpose of bringing joy to God. Rubenstein's survey shows that modern views on art are non-theological, they do not directly involve issues of morality, or support any reforming activities. On

the other hand, the major common feature between modern theories of aesthetics and the Unification view can be identified with their dialectical aspect. However, as modern aestheticians focus on the functional aspect of beauty in a predominantly secular setting, it is characteristic of the UTA to examine the effects of beauty on human life by consistently referring to transcendental forces. In my view, Rubenstein's comparative analysis between various theories of aesthetics and the UTA has shown the specific feature of the Unification position in terms of relating art to the purpose and process of creation. To illustrate further the uniqueness of the UTA over and against other theories, I will offer some reflections on the contemporary debate between the formalist theory and the expression theory of art. Both theories imply the discussion of beauty in terms of determining aesthetic value. On the one hand, the formalist theory holds that only characteristics related to form define the aesthetic value of a work of art. This means only "mediumistic" qualities are admitted such as the properties of colors, shapes, lines and surfaces. Thus, emotions, ideas and human interests are considered as not relevant for aesthetic judgement. Clive Bell, who holds a formalist view, speaks of formal excellence being "the one timeless feature of art".

The expression theory of art, on the other hand, states that "art is an expression of human feeling". In particular, attention is given to the experience of the artist when creating a work of art. Collingwood, for example, describes artistic experience as "being stimulated by an emotional excitement". Subsequently, the work of art is seen as capable of evoking human feelings, thus identifying emotional properties as decisive for aesthetic value judgements. In my opinion, the expression theory of art shows clear affinities with the Unification definition of art as "emotional activity of creating and appreciating beauty", while the formalist theory strikes me as "object centered" not taking into account the whole spectrum of aesthetic experience by the subject.

(III) The final part of Rubenstein's paper addresses some

practical implications of the UTA. In addition, I will also summarize the major criticisms of the Unification position as stated throughout this paper. Rubenstein affirms that the UTA offers an action oriented agenda in attempting to answer the contemporary crisis of values in modern art. That is to say, Unification Thought suggests to initiate a "quiet revolution of values" by means of educational programs that promote the Unification worldview. In particular, the UTA perceives itself as a synthesis of "idealism" and "realism" centered on heart. However, as Rubenstein points out, there arises a problem with the above terminology, since traditionally the terms "idealism" and "realism" relate to constantly changing stylistic characteristics depending on cultural influences and the ideology of the artist. In short, the Unification meaning of "idealism" and "realism" need to be further clarified. In my reading of Unification Thought, the terms "idealism" and "realism" are indeed used differently than in traditional art theories. Within a quadruple base diagram, the term "idealism" is placed in the SS position, thus describing in a general way the motivating forces in the artist's mind. The artist responds with his intellect, emotion, and will to ideals (hence "idealism") and virtues which form his motivation to express himself in works of art. Likewise, the term "realism" is placed in the HS position and relates to the manner how the artist goes about to design the work of art in such a way that it actually contributes to solve actual realistic (hence "realism") problems of society. Unificationism as artstyle then results from the give and take action between "idealism" and "realism" centered on the purpose of creation.

Another issue concerns the practical application of the UTA to existing works of art. Rubenstein recalls the basic tenet of Unification Thought that there exists a reciprocal, intuitive recognition between the artist, the art work and the appreciating person for the sake of giving joy to the human and divine level of existence. The critical issue in this aesthetic theory, however, concerns the process of how to decide

whether the artist's work fulfills the Unification criteria. In fact, that decision making process seems to lack any objective criteria since it becomes largely a matter of interpretation, not only with regard to the spiritual life of the artist, but also in accordance with his or her cultural background.

Earlier in her paper, Rubenstein addresses the problem of how to evaluate a particular work of art based on categories as explained in the UTA. Her critique of the UTA focuses on the doctrine of defining beauty as a relational concept, being descriptive of human relations and sensory perceptions, thus presenting beauty as a general virtue which is not necessarily related to art. For Rubenstein, such a relational definition of beauty as rooted in the purpose of heart is not helpful for evaluating the merits of actual works of art. To state it differently, Rubenstein points at the need for beauty to be defined based on objective standards that include abstract qualities such as harmony, symmetry, form, or proportion. Here, the UTA should engage in further discussion for clarifying the perception and interpretation of aesthetic experience.

In my opinion, Rubenstein's critique of the relational definition of beauty and her call for making aesthetic judgements based on objective standards has affinities with the earlier mentioned formalist theory of art. Indeed, if the subject's ideas, emotions, and value system have little significance for the process of aesthetic appreciation, a relational definition of beauty that involves the subject and the object seems not justified. However, in my view, the UTA affirms both the relational definition of beauty including subject and object, and beauty in terms of the value of an object as determined by object requisites. Stated differently, the UTA ascribes to the work of art "objective" elements of beauty, such as harmony among physical elements, with the understanding that these objective characteristics of the artwork provide only a "latent" beauty. However, through the relationship with the appreciating subject that latent beauty of the object is actualized in an aesthetic experience of actual beauty.

In addition, Rubenstein raises the question whether the Unification criteria for a good work of art are not too narrowly defined so as to be counterproductive for the creativity of the artist. A case in point is the exclusion of some developments in modern art from Unification sponsorship, because the highly secular outlook of modern aestheticians contradicts the tenets of UTA. Moreover, Rubenstein states that the notion to do "art for arts sake" is not accepted in Unification Thought since the UTA places great theological requirements on the artist. Such an explicit theological and moral agenda could be the source of complex problems for Unification artists who may experience an infringement on their creative individualistic imagination. On the other hand, Rubenstein admits that historical evidence has shown that some of the most beautiful works of art originated in an environment of strict spiritual discipline and uncompromising requirements for the artist. Thus, there is hope that Unification art can indeed fulfill its task of contributing to the establishment of a God-centered culture.

In conclusion, I thank Dr. Rubenstein for her excellent paper and look forward to a stimulating discussion.