Committee VI
Unification Thought and the Global
Transformation of Consciousness

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DISCUSSANT RESPONSE

by

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to **John K. Roth's**

HUMAN NATURE: HUMAN BEING AND BEING HUMAN

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Response to John K. Roth's paper:
"Human Nature: Human Being and Being Human"

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A careful reading of John Roth's paper shows a unique presentation of issues related to the Unification view on human nature on three accounts. First, Roth examines the problematic of human nature as emerging from past philosophical treatments. Second, he attempts to locate Rev. Moon's teaching within this general survey. Third, the author offers a specific philosophical critique of basic tenets of *Unification Thought* by drawing on insights as presented by major exponents of pragmatism such as Peirce, James, and Dewey. Such a pragmatist evaluation of *Unification Thought* seems at first sight to be rather limited in scope and significance, since, as Roth observes, "that philosophical position is far from dominate in the world today.(16) However, Roth also argues that beyond common expectation "contemporary men and women share pragmatist's tenets" (16) so that, in his view, the pragmatist critique of *Unification Thought* warrants some merit.

Following the outline of the present paper, I will offer my reflections in three distinct parts, namely (I) the general problematic of human nature, (II) the theory of original human nature in *Unification Thought* and (III) the critique of *Unification Thought* from a pragmatist perspective.

(I) First, Roth has to be commended for directing our attention to a larger horizon of inquiry, by addressing problems of human nature which have vexed the minds of past thinkers. Among these problems is the issue of a considerable multiplicity of views on human

nature which is apparently rooted in the phenomenon of subjectivity. In his discussion of human subjectivity, Roth cites William James for whom the variety of philosophical views can be traced to a "certain clash of human temperament." For James the human condition then involves the tension between the differences among individual perceptions of reality and the apparent sameness of reality for all people. Such a tension implies a volitional element which, according to Roth, is shown through the fact that people want their thought to be different(4) not only as an expression of their individuality but even for the sake of finding an over-arching or unifying view on human nature.

However, human subjectivity and the emerging variety of views present themselves with their own dynamics by stimulating further inquiry and leading to the formation of new traditions. For Roth, such an ongoing correction and criticism of belief about human being seems to offer little chance of agreement among philosophers. Judging form past experience, attempts at uniting different traditions become themselves new traditions. Thus, the problematic of an ever increasing variety of views on human nature leads to the awareness that the whole truth about the human condition is missing.

According to Roth, there arises a paradoxical situation: we are required to be human, yet the answers to human being themselves remain shrouded.(6) This means, we are asked to live with the tension of seeking a clear understanding of human being but, at the same time, we seem to accept as our condition a perpetual ignorance about ourselves which manifests itself in an ever increasing variety of views on human nature.

Roth offers another aspect of the problematic of human nature by speaking of attempts which relate human discoveries about the universe back to the question of human identity. In presenting Stephen Hawking's reflections as one such attempt, Roth is left

with a rather pessimistic cosmology which only highlights the problematic surrounding the self-understanding of human being.

In my view, it is significant that Roth has framed his presentation of the problematic of human being with the vision about human purpose and value as expressed in Psalm 8 (1,6,7,8). As I see it, Roth seems to imply that much of the confusion related to the question of who human being really is has its roots in a purely man-centered approach. That is to say, if human being starts only with him or herself as the point of reference, chances are that insights remain limited and often contradictory. However, the man-centered approach of philosophical inquiry is contrasted by the Psalmist who emphasizes the crucial role of the God-man relationship for advancing human self-understanding.

At this point, we need to reexamine Roth's previous observation that being human includes a lack of truth, with the implication that to claim the whole truth means living in self-contradiction (5). It seems to me that the Psalmist hints at a possible solution to that contradictory state of human existence by redefining the quest for truth. For the Psalmist truth is not precise knowledge about who human being is in him or herself, but it focuses on the awareness of the proper relationship between God and man. In short, truth is no longer understood as the answer to the essence of being, but the emphasis lies now on the relational aspect of truth. Only in that sense of being rightly related to God and to other men and women, human being can hope to overcome ignorance. My reading of Roth's interpretation of the Psalmist seems to justify such an understanding of truth. Roth says that God entrusts creation to those who will be human (6) and the qualification of being human rests first of all on a disposition of gratitude towards God.

Admittedly, the problematic of human nature is not immediately solved by focusing on its theological aspect as the variety of religious views on man demonstrates. All what can be said relates

to a shift of the starting point of our inquiry about human nature. No exclusive reliance on the power of human intellect can lead man to a higher degree of self-understanding, but rather the awareness of human being to be created for an intimate relationship with God seems to open up new avenues for exploring human nature. In particular, the Unification view on human being intends to be such a new avenue of theistic inquiry.

(II) We turn now to Roth's presentation of the theory of Original Human Nature as developed in *Unification Thought*. According to my reading of Roth's paper, there seems to be an overall concern with three basic doctrinal themes of *Unification Thought*, namely, revelation, restoration, and theocentricity. Even if these three themes are only "broadly connected to issues about human nature" (17), still they are so fundamental that any reflection on the Unification Theory of Original Human Nature will depend on one's evaluation of these basic themes. We should also keep in mind that the above three themes will set the stage for Roth's critique of *Unification Thought* from a pragmatist viewpoint.

The affirmation of *Unification Thought* that being human involves an "Original Human Nature" (OHN) constitutes for Roth a claim which is based solely on the authority of revelation. Philosophers may ask "what is the original nature of human beings" and their answer will be relative according to subjective opinions. *Unification Thought*, however, employs a language of absolute claims as it is characteristic of revelation. Moreover, Roth observes that the Unification notion of Original Human Nature is contrasted with the present state of human beings in which one finds a deforming separation of essence from existence. That is to say, presently true human nature is disconnected from actual existence and relegated to mere possibility. Such a fallen state of human being calls for the concept of restoration identified as the process of bringing people back to their "God-created true character"(9) in

which essence and existence reach their formerly intended oneness. Here, restoration appears as a counterproposal to the tenets of existentialism (10). According to Roth, the theory of OHN in Unification thinking is less innovative than it appears to be because it rests on the traditional revelatory concepts of creation, fall, and restoration as it is found in major religious traditions.

In his further discussion of OHN, Roth presents a general summary of major doctrinal issues. For the sake of clarity, I will offer my comments by way of supplementing and systematizing Roth's account.

In my view, the Unification theory of OHN seeks to clarify the question what it means that we are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). Therefore, the theory of OHN follows the basic tenets of the theory of the Original Image. In particular, human being in his or her original state is defined in terms of three basic attributes, namely, as a being with divine image, a being with divine character, and a being with position. Moreover, the purpose, dynamic exchange, and structural relations of these basic attributes can be described with the fundamental principles of heart, referring to the heart of God as the primal principle of origin, followed by the principle of give and take action, and leading up to the structural principle of the four position foundation also identified as quadruple base. As I see it, this basic outline will help us better to understand the various doctrinal points of OHN.

Let us now turn to Roth's account of OHN. When he speaks of the proper give and take relationship in human being not only between the spiritual dimension (Sung Sang) and physical dimension (Hyung Sang), but also between the dual essentialities of masculinity (Yang) and femininity (Ying), he correctly presents OHN in terms of the divine image in human being. Stated differently, Roth affirms a functional wholeness in OHN that extends to both the

mind-body relationship within the individual and the man-woman relationship in marriage. Thus, the full realization of OHN through family relationships becomes "essentially an expression of God's parental love" and manifests "the completion of the creation of the cosmos"(11).

Roth's affirmation of a functional wholeness in OHN can be further explained through the concept of the four position foundation. Here, individual wholeness is described through the harmonious give and take relationship between the positions of God, mind, body, and the resultant position of the mature individual, while wholeness as a family is marked by the positions of God, husband, wife, and child. In addition, I think it is important to supplement Roth's presentation of the divine image of original human being by emphasizing that OHN affirms man as a being with individuality. Each individual human being is then understood as an absolutely unique expression of God and as such human being includes the preciousness and beauty of individuality.

Roth also addresses OHN in terms of human being having divine character by stating that being fully human depends on loving one another as well as God(10). In particular, human being is endowed with heart as the source of love, thus resembling God's heart and love. Roth makes it clear that the love of God is "the fundamentally governing divine principle."(10), an observation which is fully congruent with the concept of the heart of God understood as the primal principle of origin. Next to the attribute of heart, the theory of OHN affirms original human being as a being with logos and creativity. Even if Roth briefly mentions freedom, reason, and creativity as further characteristics of OHN, I think it is essential to offer further reflections on logos and creativity as aspects of the divine character in OHN. First, to understand human being as a being with logos is to say that God's logos as the harmonious interaction of reason and law, is reflected in men and women. According to *Unification Thought*, for human being

to be endowed with reason includes the gift of freedom, while the ordering concept of law is expressed in necessity and responsibility. In short, true freedom can only be affirmed in connection with responsibility, a concept which explains the possibility of misusing freedom. Second, OHN portrays human being as a being with creativity, a characteristic which resembles God's creativity. As theologian Herbert Richardson points out, God desires to find an image of His own purpose by creating human beings who like Him substantiate free creatorhood. Beyond being creatures the destiny of human beings is to become free creators.

As a further issue of importance, I offer a brief reflection on the self-understanding of human being as a being with position. Fundamentally, human being finds him- or herself in an object position towards God who is perceived in the position of ultimate subject, while in relation to creation human being assumes a subject position. This means that human being in the state of OHN is primarily endowed with object-consciousness towards God through which the formation of subject-consciousness towards creation is made possible. Thus, *Unification Thought* holds that only on the basis of object-consciousness emerges the proper subject-consciousness in relation to God's heart and purpose. However, without a living relationship with God object-consciousness is absent and a wrong kind of subject-consciousness is strived for by an excessive individualism.

Looking back at Roth's presentation of OHN, I think he offered a correct account of major Unification teachings. However, it strikes me that he bypassed further reflections on the issues of human individuality, freedom, creativity, and object-consciousness, all doctrinal points which, in my opinion, prevent the radical theocentricity of *Unification Thought* from becoming oppressive.

(III) In the final section of his paper Roth presents a general critique of *Unification Thought* from a pragmatist viewpoint. In the

spirit of promoting philosophical criticism for better self-understanding, Roth first objects that *Unification Thought* is too quick to emphasize its own superiority with the help of "criticizing the giants of Western philosophy" (14). In particular, pragmatism receives a "facile dismissal" (16) by *Unification Thought* after having undergone a rather scanty evaluation. As mentioned earlier, Roth thinks that pragmatism's insights are still relevant today and *Unification Thought* should consider more seriously "the well-founded skepticism [of pragmatism] concerning what we can know about the transcendental" (16,17). To make his point, Roth speaks of a severe challenge to *Unification Thought* by three exponents of pragmatism, namely, Peirce, James, and Dewey.

The thrust of Charles Peirce's argument, says Roth, concerns the insufficiency of revelation as a means for unification (17). Even if revelation might be the starting point for our inquiry, it is all together not adequate to bring unity of opinion because, for practical purposes, revelation needs interpretation. However, interpretation opens the door for subjective opinions which may vary according to the fulfillment of expected results or the lack thereof. In short, Roth sums up his critique of revelation by having Peirce say that the effort of unifying beliefs by means of revelation cannot succeed on account of the private subjective character of revelation, a property which removes it from public awareness or agreement.

In answering Roth's assessment of Peirce, I will limit myself to one observation. As Roth himself indicated, Peirce conceived his method of inquiry as a theory of meaning that would allow scientists to agree. For Peirce, any distinction of meaning can only be justified through a corresponding difference in practice. Thus, from the outset Peirce never claimed that his pragmatic method is a theory of truth or a philosophy, but he saw pragmatism as a technique for promoting conceptual clarity. In fact, Peirce limited his understanding of truth to a set of beliefs that would

pass the judgement of experimental verification. With such an epistemological method, truth would then become the absolute fixity of belief and henceforth it would qualify to be accepted by scientists. In my view, Peirce's notion of truth and his pragmatic method of inquiry my be useful for uniting the beliefs of scientists, but it does not address the problem of bringing unity among religious people who base their beliefs on revelation.

Roth's presentation of William James as a critic of *Unification Thought* focuses on the truth claim of the concept of restoration. Roth understands restoration primarily as an unchanging eternal truth that "banks on the laws of history" (20). However, according to James, the future is not shaped by absolutist truth claims but by meliorism, a view which emphasizes the involvement of free human action. Roth contrasts James' emphasis on hope with the truth claim of the restoration doctrine and encourages Unificationists to pay attention to James' insights about human freedom. On account of human freedom the world presents itself as a place of ambiguity and risk so that truth claims have to be subjected to a process of verification by experience. Roth argues that human experience will hardly support the restoration motif since its categorization as absolute truth bypasses the reality of human freedom. Subsequently, the restoration doctrine will turn out to be counterproductive to the goal of unification.

In my view, Roth's critique of the restoration motif through the views of William James if far from monolithic and convincing. First, consider Roth's own observation that James would not urge Unificationists to change their convictions about restoration because, for James, variety among religious beliefs is the fertile ground for a vital religious life (22). Second, Roth concedes that James' notion of unity amidst diversity does not measure up to the verification process by human experience, a fact which apparently weakens Roth's critique. Third, let me add a brief reflection on James' notion of truth. While Peirce's strict conception of

scientific truth emphasized the generality of meaning, thus making him a realist, it is James who consistently stressed the particular, the distinctively concrete and individually effective aspect of truth in opposition to its abstract and general dimension. Such a view point puts him in the camp of nominalists. Thus, James was only interested in discussing the immediate effectiveness of truth, in as much as it provided "vital benefits" for a particular individual. As I see it, such a perception of truth reduces theological and metaphysical inquiry to a level of subjective effectiveness and bypasses not only the task of gaining a clear understanding of reality, but, it also neglects the function of theological doctrine as a source of lasting convictions.

The final challenge to *Unification Thought* offered in Roth's paper is based on the pragmatism of John Dewey. It is Dewey's agenda to rescue the religious aspect of human experience from "the confines of revealed theology" (24). For Dewey, to be religious consists of pursuing ideal ends against any adverse conditions. These ideal ends are no longer supplied by revelation but by the individual's creative imagination. Thus, there is no need for relating religious experience to the supernatural realm in general, or to the traditional idea of God in particular. Dewey's version of unification then consists of the call to accept his "common faith" as it is set forth in an essentially non-theistic naturalism (26). Roth argues that Dewey took steps in the right direction but apparently went too far by "leaving God out too much" in his attempt to unify religious people. Thus, *Unification Thought* should be mindful, says Roth, not "to put God in too much" in its effort to bring about the ideals of unification. In fact, Roth's argument amounts to a critique of theocentrism in *Unification Thought*.

For one important reason, I do not agree with Roth's approach of applying Dewey's pragmatism to *Unification Thought*. Above all, it seems to me that Dewey misjudged the nature of religious

experience by employing a thoroughly impersonal God concept. Religious experience is not maintained by merely sharing common ideals, but a living faith requires an encounter with the personal God of history and providence. People are committed to the ideals of their faith because they realize that only a living relationship with God will provide the strength for actualizing ideal ends. In my view, the question is not whether *Unification Thought* "puts God in too much," but whether it accepts God as a living reality that can be the source of all human ideals and aspirations.

In conclusion, I thank professor Roth for a highly stimulating and thought provoking paper. He has presented an impressive variety of issues related to human nature and *Unification Thought*. Beyond any personal disagreement with some of Roth's criticism of *Unification Thought*, I think that his paper offers a valuable contribution by making Unificationists aware of the need to present Unification teachings more effectively to secular minded audiences. In my opinion, Roth's discussion of human nature has demonstrated the insufficiency of purely man-centered views. By referring to Psalm 8, Roth has drawn attention to the importance of understanding the intricacies of the God-man relationship for correctly perceiving human nature. This holds true especially for the Unification theory of Original Human Nature.