

From Unification Thought to Unification Philosophy

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January 19, 2015



Unification Thought, as systematized by the late Dr. Sang Hun Lee, is currently the only major “philosophical” exposition of the Divine Principle in the Unification Movement. While some appreciate Unification Thought, others find its contents puzzling. I am both fascinated and perplexed by Unification Thought. In this article, I articulate some critical areas to be explored in transitioning from Unification Thought (UT) to Unification Philosophy.

Self-examination

What is the heart of philosophical discourse? It is self-examination. Many may recall from high school or college the Socratic method or the emphasis on self-examination. Self-examination is intrinsic to the discipline of philosophy. Philosophy examines its points of departure, presuppositions, approaches, and processes of reasoning. It questions and tries to justify its own discourse: why, how, and where it can start, proceed, and finally conclude.



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UT lacks in the area of self-examination. It is a reiteration of various truth-claims from the Divine Principle (DP) with some additional truth-claims. It presupposes various assumptions from the DP without critically examining them.

In philosophy, the reader does not necessarily share the same assumptions with the author. Yet, readers can learn from and gain irrefutable insight through the author’s rigorous process of reasoning. For this reason, non-believers can enjoy reading Augustine and gain invaluable insight and theists can learn from reading Nietzsche and Sartre, who were radical atheists. Readers learn more from honest and sharp critiques than mediocre apologetics.

The lack of critical self-examination is the most glaring deficiency of Unification Thought, which therefore makes it unattractive to some readers.

The lack of self-examination also denotes that there are three missing elements from UT: 1) An articulation of its philosophical methodology; 2) a comprehensive and well-developed account in each area of philosophy; and 3) an exploration of the philosophical contributions of the Divine Principle.

Philosophical Methodology

Methodology articulates how philosophy precedes its discourse. It is the way in which a thinker moves his or her argument; the articulation comes from how one identifies and defines philosophy and its tasks. Some examples are deconstruction, phenomenology and the logical analysis of language.

What then is the philosophical methodology in Unificationism? It cannot be chosen arbitrarily. It is derived from the aim, task, and identity of the discourse. What is the intellectual aim, task, and identity of a philosophical work based on the Principle?

The primary task of UT should be the integration of thoughts and ideas within a theistic framework. Therefore, the methodology must be that which makes integration possible.

Needless to say, philosophers have made various attempts to develop a methodology that can apply to all possible fields of knowledge. As I noted, deconstruction or a logical analysis of language are some methods that philosophers have attempted to apply to all types of knowledge. Can we apply those methodologies in UT? One can certainly do so, because philosophers define philosophy as an activity rather than a body of knowledge. The question is what is the appropriate method with which to realize the integration of ideas within a theistic framework as envisioned by UT and the DP?

Over the course of history, disciplines were defined according to the nature and type of knowledge, and philosophers identified methodologies to validate such knowledge. In scientific disciplines, the scientific community sets the standard procedures and methodologies with which to validate scientific knowledge. In religion, knowledge is often retained in the form of narratives, such as in the Bible or in the founder's revelations and practices.

In the DP, while truth-claims are made based on biblical narratives, their truth is defined as that which encompasses religion and science. In other words, the justification of truth-claims rests on biblical narratives, yet DP defines its truth as transcending the boundaries of religion. Neither in the UT nor the DP has this all-encompassing notion of truth been elaborated upon beyond this brief description.

Then, what is the philosophical methodology that will validate a type of knowledge claiming to unify diverse and distinct bodies of knowledge, when each discipline has its distinct methodology? A selective and convenient mixture of various methods for the sake of an apologetic is far from adequate. This issue raises the question of the nature of methodology in science (natural, social and human) and religion. Is it possible to integrate such distinct forms of knowledge and their methods?

The claim of the integration or unification of knowledge (conceptualized as the "unified truth" in DP) must have a much clearer exposition. It needs to answer at least three questions: 1) what integration or "unity" means; 2) why it is possible; and 3) how it is possible.

In order to answer these questions, we need to examine and clarify the nature of religious knowledge and its justification. It requires us to spell out the Unificationist position regarding standard questions in metaphysics and the philosophy of religion. Since Unificationism makes such bold claims, it carries the high burden of articulating its position and presenting the method with which to realize the stated claim.

I believe hermeneutics is the best method with which to integrate diverse disciplines and forms of knowledge and I will elaborate my position on another occasion.

Comprehensive Analysis

The approach used in UT is deductive reasoning. Although UT does not explicitly explain its method of reasoning, this is quite apparent. Each theory in UT is deductively constructed out of key ideas/concepts considered as "revelations" in the Principle (the question of "revelation" must be expanded upon, but is not discussed here). Deductive reasoning is good for preserving an internal coherence within a system. This approach, however, has the danger of making the theory too narrow and incomprehensive if it chooses limited assumptions; it runs the risk of leaving out key issues. By relying solely on deductive reasoning, each theory in UT leaves out key issues and cannot integrate dominant theories across various fields and disciplines.



A detail from the fresco "The School of Athens" by Raphael, that depicts Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, and other philosophers.

For example, consider UT ethics. UT developed ethics as Family Based Virtue Ethics, a theistic, Confucian-type of virtue ethics, which places an emphasis on character education. Virtue ethics certainly has its own merits, but it is hardly a comprehensive theory. It leaves out key perspectives used in the DP, which are elaborated on in competing theories such as Utilitarianism, Deontological Ethics and Social Contract theory.

For example, in the DP, a consequentialist argument is used to justify the resurrection of evil spirits; a motive-based argument is used to determine relative good and evil between the spiritual and physical Fall; the contract theory speaks directly to the concept of a covenant between God and humankind. The DP uses such diverse forms of moral reasoning, which have been formulated as standard theories in ethics. Nevertheless, UT ethics leaves out key issues such as the origin of moral obligation and the principles of moral judgment, even when such arguments are used in the DP. UT ethics must integrate these various fields and disciplines in order to integrate the various forms of moral reasoning found in the DP.

In order to rectify the problem, UT needs to be re-constructed by taking a synthetic or integral approach, which utilizes both deductive and inductive approaches.

Challenges in the Contemporary Intellectual Climate

Today we face a new intellectual climate bringing with it new challenges. Until the 1970s and 1980s, people sought a grand-narrative, one-size-fits-all grand theory such as Marxism or Unificationism. UT combined with Victory Over Communism (VOC) theory was presented as a counterproposal to Marxism. After the failure of communism and leading into the present, people have turned away from grand-narratives and sought diverse and localized truths that address specific issues and areas.

Grand theories tend to pay attention to internal coherence without demonstrating their validity through empirical evidence. UT must take the integral approach of examining key issues and theories, and demonstrating its own viability. The same point can be made for the DP. No matter how many cosmetic changes are made, the DP will not become an attractive theory until there is a systematic re-examination of the principles contained within it. UT will have a future if it takes a leading role in this endeavor, and in the process UT may have to be reconstructed as Unification Philosophy.

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Photo at top: *A casting of "The Thinker" by Auguste Rodin*