

Positions in love

Gerry Servito
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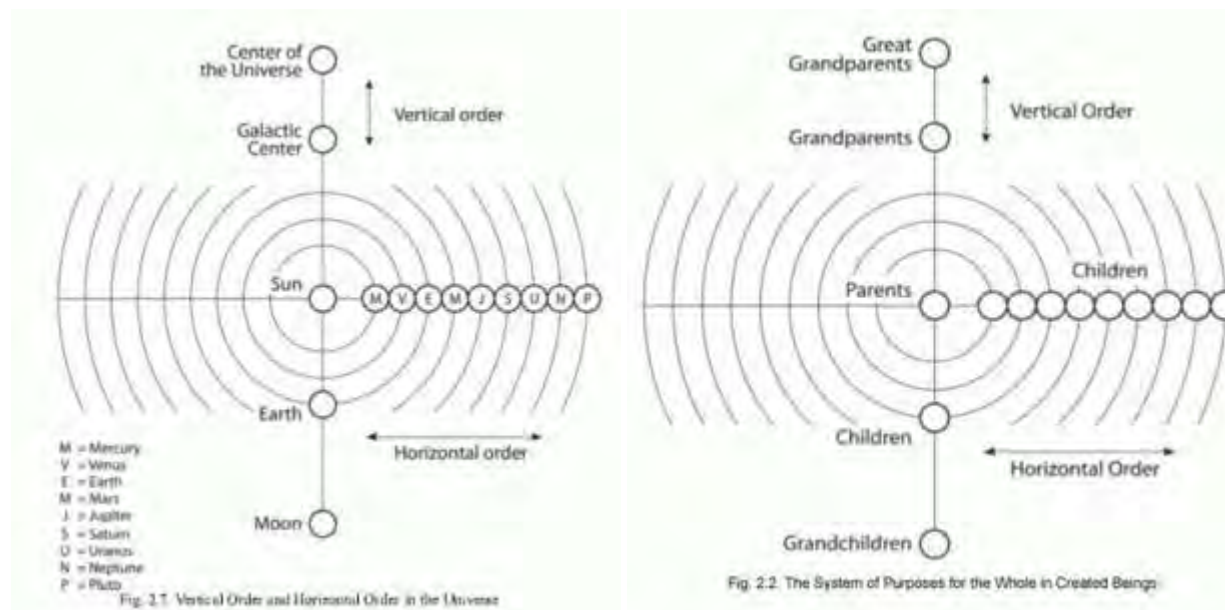
Up until this point, I've written mainly about ethics and morality within the family. But I'd like to step back and look at one basic, underlying assumption that's been implicit in everything I've thus far mentioned — and that is the notion of order and position. However, even as I write these words, I've a conditioned response to be cautious about them. And it's because of the potential to misunderstand and therefore abuse these concepts.

So let's try to go slowly and see what Unification Thought means when it presents these ideas. What it says is this:

“Ethics is the norm of behavior of a person occupying a certain position of the family four position foundation and directed toward...the three object partners. ...this norm of behavior is to be motivated by love. Therefore, ethics is established in the context of a specific position and according to the order of love. This means that ethics can not be established apart from order.” • New Essentials of UT, p. 283

Order and Position

So here we have a mention of positions in the family, and that there are norms of behavior that are appropriate to each position. (These norms of behavior are concretely expressed through the manners, customs, and duties which I wrote about last month.) But the keyword to note is the motivation behind these patterns of behavior: it is love which drives these ways we relate to our family members.

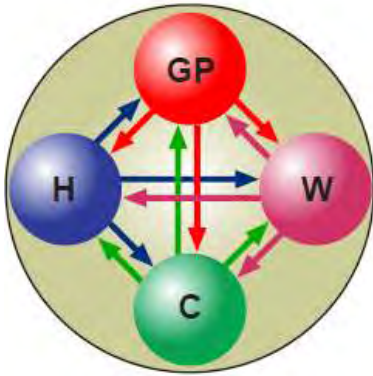


It is not duty, not obligation, not rules of etiquette, but genuine affection. Then, the ways we speak, the manners we practice are not empty, outward forms, but gestures of care, generosity, and heart-felt appreciation. An awareness of who we are in our family, our position, and who others are and their positions becomes a way to set up a kind of structure that allows the various kinds of love (children's, sibling, marital, and parental) to be expressed in their fullness.

In the words of Unification Thought:

“...love has twelve directions, because the person in each of the four positions has a different kind of love for each of the three object partners... Consequently, various kinds of love, with different nuances, come to appear. In order to realize these various kinds of love, various kinds of virtue are required... with each kind of love, there is a corresponding virtue... The aim of... ethics is to fully explain the virtues of love.”
New Essentials of UT, p. 282

Nuances of love



This way of looking at the 4 positions in a (3-generation) family draws my attention to the twelve directions of relationship that are depicted. These are not just visual shorthand for “giving and receiving” but each arrow becomes instead the representative of a specific kind of nuanced love, with its own emotion and expression, just different enough from the other directions that the difference is discernible and so the perception and experience is subtly — or sometimes not so subtly — different and uniquely enjoyable and precious. One difference that jumps to mind is the embrace of my Dad as contrasted with that of my wife. Both are to be treasured, but they’re incredibly, uniquely distinct (¡vive la difference!).

The idea of a “Way of Heaven”

Unification Thought then goes on to introduce the concept of The Way of Heaven (Cheon Do in the Korean). I am aware that the historical precedent of this notion was its mention in Confucianism. Confucius attributed the authority of his teachings to Heaven (Tien in the Chinese), which he discerned in the ancient books he studied. In them, he observed patterns of proper behavior in the department of legendary kings. These became the basis for the many rules of propriety in Confucianism. But other than their moral authority, no other basis for the Way of Heaven is offered. (I recall an exchange I had with a Chinese professor friend from Columbia University. When I mentioned the Way of Heaven with respect, he suggested that it was an outdated idea from antiquity with no commonly accepted definition.)

In contrast, Unification Thought bases the notion of the Way of Heaven in both natural science and also its own Ontology. One point that’s made is that the organization and the laws of nature are the same ones that should guide human society. Specifically, there is an observable order, position and structure embodied in things, from the microcosmic level to the macrocosmic level. In short, things are structured in a vertical order and a horizontal order; there is also a special order within things. For the sake of clarity, the example given is the order of our physical universe. The graphic expression in Unification Thought is this:

And verbally, Unification Thought expresses the same idea this way:

“The human being is a... microcosm miniaturizing the universe, and the family is a microcosmic system miniaturizing the system of the universe. The law that interpenetrates the entire universe is the “Way of Heaven” ... Accordingly, the norm for family life, or ethics, is the manifestation (in miniature) of the Way of Heaven.”
New Essentials of UT, p. 284

So then, rather than depending upon the moral authority of ancient writings, the ideas of order and position are based upon observable, natural law. My own opinion is that this somewhat validates the position of Taoism, that if the chaos of humanity is due to our violation of the laws of nature, the remedy is to understand and practice natural ways of living and relating.

The important thing then is that these ideas of order and position are not just outdated cultural artifacts or religious beliefs, but are grounded in the laws and structures underpinning nature. (To be continued next month)